

REVIEW PAPER

Library and Information Science Education in India: Some Government Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

Library and information science education in India is completing a century of its existence. A lot of progress has been made during this period. Many government initiatives taken by different agencies have been instrumental in this development. The larger initiatives like Radhakrishnan Commission; Kothari Commission; National Policy on Education-1968, 1986, 1992; National Knowledge Commission and functioning of institutions such as UGC, NAAC, DEC have influenced the entire higher education sector. The Government of India has also taken keen interest in library matters through Advisory Committee for Libraries; Working Group of Planning Commission; National Policy on Library and Information System, etc. UGC has shown keen interest in LIS education through its various committees and subject panels. The Library Committee; Review Committee and the two CDCs constituted in 1990 and 2000 have been largely responsible for the present state of LIS education in India. This paper reviews the various initiatives taken by Government of India in respect of LIS education in India.

Keywords: University Grants Commission, library and information science education, distance education, National Policy, Curriculum Development Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, government has been the single most influential player in higher education scenario. Despite erosion in government role in capitalist world, it has retained its prominent place particularly due to social relevance of education. Although, Indian higher education system got a boost in 1857 with the establishment of three universities, library education had to wait till the 20th century. The seeds of LIS education in India were sown when Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaikwad II of Baroda invited an American librarian W.A. Borden in 1911 to establish a network of libraries in his state. Borden started the first training programme for librarians in India. Since this small beginning, the library education has grown in breadth and width to supply the ever growing demand of the Indian democracy.

The philanthropic nature of Indian princes was more an exception than a norm. So, efforts like Baroda were not replicated frequently and it was only after the charismatic appearance of Dr Ranganathan in the Indian library scene, that LIS education could get a real boost. Madras Library Association started a Certificate Course,

which was later taken over by Madras University making it a Diploma in Library Science (DLiSc). This heralded the era of university education in LIS in true sense. This was the time, when the imperial government had little interest in libraries and library education.

2. HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

The independence brought a responsive government of our own people, who could feel for their country and its precious heritage. Immediately after independence, on the suggestion of Radhakrishnan Commission, University Grants Commission (UGC) was established in December 1953 (in November 1956 as a statutory body) to not only fund higher education but to maintain quality and regulate its all round growth. But UGC is not the sole agency in this context, many a time the Ministry of Human Resource Development (erstwhile Ministry of Education) appoints committees or commissions on issues pertaining to larger social context of education. Planning Commission is another agency that ponders on the issue of education. The University Education Commission (1948-49) and the Education Commission (1964-66) were appointed by the Government of India to

suggest future course of action on higher education and education in general, respectively. The report of the Education Commission was widely discussed among different sections of Indian society and the consensus that emerged on future direction of education in India was reflected in the National Policy on Education in 1968¹. This policy led to expansion of educational facilities, common structure of education at undergraduate level and setting up of Centres of Advanced Study for postgraduate education and research.

In May 1986, a new National Policy on Education (NPE) was adopted by the Parliament of India. It was revised in 1992 following the suggestions of Acharya Ramamurti Committee (1990) and N. Janardhana Reddy Committee (1992)². The NPE was instrumental in the setting up of Academic Staff Colleges in universities, establishment of autonomous colleges, and expansion of distance education institutions and courses. Although, these developments took place in higher education sector in general, LIS as a part of this sector has also been affected.

One important development during 1980s was the emergence of distance mode of education in a big way. In fact, establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 1985 proved a catalyst for open and distance learning. The Distance Education Council (DEC) as a part of IGNOU Act was entrusted with the task of maintaining quality of courses offered via distance mode. The 1990s saw a boom in distance education directorates or institutions fully devoted to open and distance learning. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) made 10 specific recommendations³ regarding streamlining and strengthening of Open and Distance Education (ODE) system particularly in view of the fact that more than every fifth student enrolled in any higher education course belongs to ODE system. NKC's recommendations have formed the basis of the recently prepared draft 'New Policy on Distance Learning in Higher Education'⁴ of the Government of India to promote and strengthen distance learning system in India.

The policy statement says that pending formation of the National Commission for Higher Education and Research as suggested by Prof. Yash Pal Committee and NKC, only programmes with less practical content shall be permissible through distance mode. Besides a lot of other conditions, it states that universities shall offer only those courses through distance mode that they offer through regular mode. And open universities shall offer courses only after having proper faculty in the concerned departments. Choice based credit system shall be promoted and it would be mandatory for all institutions to use Information and Communication

Technology (ICT) for course delivery and management of student affairs. Under National Mission for Education, a National Information and Communication Technology infrastructure for networking of ODE institutions shall be created, and reputed foreign education providers shall be allowed. These provisions have far reaching implications for LIS education as almost every Open University and Directorate of Distance Education of regular university now offer LIS courses. Besides these developments, certain steps taken by the Government of India and other agencies directly relate to LIS education and research.

3. THE INTER-UNIVERSITY BOARD OF INDIA

The Inter University Board of India was formed on 23 March 1925 with a view to promote inter-university cooperation and interaction. In 1943, the Inter-University Board of India resolved that, "in order to maintain uniformity of standards at various centres for training for librarianship, it is necessary that only graduates be admitted to the diploma course"⁵. It became necessary as the Board dealt with the issue of equivalence of degrees awarded by foreign and Indian universities. The Board adopted a new name, Association of Indian Universities, in 1973 and is still very active.

4. THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR LIBRARIES

The Ministry of Education, Government of India set up a nine member committee under the Chairmanship of Shri K.P. Sinha to recommend the future library structure and its development in India. The Committee submitted its report in 1958. Although the Committee was mainly concerned with development of public libraries, it made recommendations for training for librarianship. The Committee recommended to the Government of India to set up an expert committee to suggest complete reorganisation of the syllabus, teaching methods and conduct of examination of the then prevailing library diploma course⁶. It recommended that UGC should provide financial assistance to universities offering diploma courses for establishment of full teaching departments. It also recommended that the terms and conditions of work of library science teachers should be same as those of other departments.

5. THE INSTITUTE OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

In 1959, the union Ministry of Education provided grants to establish an Institute of Library Science at the University of Delhi to impart instructions mainly to 'public librarians and to prepare teaching aids and materials'⁷. But the Institute was finally closed down in 1964 and the staff was merged with the Department.

6. THE WORKING GROUP OF PLANNING COMMISSION

The Working Group⁸ of the Planning Commission on Modernisation of Library Services and Informatics for the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90), looked into the state of libraries in India in detail. It also made some recommendations for the library education for the Plan period. The recommendations included setting up of a National Centre for Education and Research in LIS along the lines of NCERT, NIEPA, etc.

In view of large number of LIS schools, the Group suggested, for the next five years, term consolidation instead of expansion. Moreover, LIS schools should offer specialisations on different areas and organise continuing education programmes (CEP) for teachers and practicing librarians. The Group suggested for provision of grants to LIS schools for research fellowship, travel grants, etc., to attract quality students particularly with S&T background. One appreciable recommendation of the Working Group was to include LIS in the bilateral exchange programmes.

7. THE NATIONAL POLICY ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SYSTEM

In the year 1985 the Indian Library Association (ILA) and the Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), both prepared separate drafts of National Policy on Library and Information System. In fact, due to continuing debate on National Policy on Education that finally took shape in 1986, both these efforts were made. The ILA draft devoted one full section on manpower development⁹. It proposed the establishment of a National Centre for Education and Research in Library and Information Science. The RRRLF draft called for uniform pattern and standards for LIS education for the entire nation¹⁰. It also stated that research and specialised courses may be offered by universities as well as leading research and library promotional organisations such as National Library, DRTC, INSDOC, RRRLF, etc.

In October 1985, the Government of India set up a Committee on National Policy on Library and Information System (CONPOLIS) under the Chairmanship of Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyaya. Its report entitled National Policy on Library and Information System—A Presentation was submitted in 1986, and was subsequently assessed by an Empowered Committee chaired again by Prof. Chattopadhyaya to draw up an action plan¹¹. The Empowered Committee in its report submitted in March 1988, recommended that IT should be used as a tool for maintenance of standards in LIS education. Professional development activities be strengthened in a systematic way. An

accreditation agency for LIS courses was suggested to check falling standards due to proliferation of schools. It was also suggested to establish a National Centre for Higher Education and Research in LIS.

8. NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE COMMISSION

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted on 13th June 2005 to advise the Prime Minister of India mainly on creation, management, use and application of knowledge institutions and services. It recommended, in its first report, setting up of a National Commission on Libraries and National Mission on Libraries¹² to conduct a survey of manpower requirements and evaluate the status of research. It also recommended establishment of a well-equipped institute for advanced training and research in LIS and services to revamp LIS education in India.

9. UGC AND LIS EDUCATION

UGC has played a vital role in LIS education in independent India through its various committees and subject panels. Besides its responsibility towards higher education in general wherein it formulates various norms and guidelines applicable to all the disciplines (including LIS) being taught in the universities and colleges in India, UGC has also given special attention to libraries and library education.

10. THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE

To look into the various aspects of functioning and management of university and college libraries, the UGC appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr Ranganathan in 1957. Its report published in 1965, covered all aspects of academic libraries including the education and training of professional librarians¹³. The Committee recommended that the university departments should offer only professional courses such as BLIS, MLIS and PhD. The practice of offering certificate course by universities should be stopped and the diploma should be converted to BLIS.

The Committee also made recommendations for faculty. A department offering only BLIS course should have a minimum of one reader, one lecturer and one demonstrator; while those offering MLIS course should have at least one professor, one reader, two lecturers, and two demonstrators. Moreover, a full-time teacher-student ratio should not exceed 1:10 in BLIS and 1:5 in MLibSc. The Committee also suggested to appoint a committee to look into the question of quality and standard of library education. Since, it was the first scientifically prepared comprehensive document on college and university libraries, the UGC accepted its recommendations as norms¹⁴.

11. REVIEW COMMITTEE ON LIBRARY SCIENCE IN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

Realising the need for a committee to investigate the state of library education, UGC appointed a Review Committee in 1961 under the chairmanship of Dr Ranganathan, to look into the standards of teaching and research in library science in Indian universities. The report of the Committee published in 1965, contained a detailed review of library science education¹⁵. The Committee made wide ranging recommendations on all aspects of library education. The syllabus it designed for BLIS and MLIS courses was adopted with minor changes by almost all library schools in India. At that time, some library schools were having non-professional subjects like general knowledge, language, cultural history, etc., this practice was discouraged by the Committee. It also suggested for redesignation of diploma in library science to BLIS and urged universities to offer only professional courses like BLIS, MLIS and PhD. The Committee also urged library science departments to have a provision of six-month apprenticeship before BLIS.

Regarding faculty, the Committee suggested a minimum of two lecturers and one reader for a department offering only BLIS course, and one professor, two readers and four lecturers for a department having MLIS also. This was a slight improvement over what the Library Committee had suggested; however, on teacher-student ratio its suggestion was same as that of the Committee.

The Review Committee also delved on the issue of teaching strategies and evaluation and suggested at least 400 working hours during a session for BLIS. The Committee emphatically called for independent teaching departments of library science, similar in all respects to other departments in the university. However, a close cooperation between the department and university library was deemed essential.

Although, the Review Committee devoted one full chapter on research, the condition of research was not very encouraging. After a decade of independence, only D. B. Krishna Rao got a PhD degree and he was lone in the list for nearly two decades that followed. The Committee called upon UGC to organise a survey of the new entrants coming out of universities and employers to assess the need for library professionals and the quality of university products.

This was the first exhaustive document on library education in India. Many of its recommendations like the model syllabus of BLIS and MLIS, change in the nomenclature of the course, etc., were readily implemented by most of the departments.

12. UGC PANEL ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

In the 1970s the Department of Library and Information Science of Delhi University organised two national level seminars (in 1973 and 1977) with the financial support of UGC. These were held on methods of teaching and evaluation in library science and LIS education. After a detailed discussion on the recommendations of these programmes and LIS courses and curriculum the Panel made some significant recommendations¹⁶.

Universities having adequate facilities may start a two-year integrated programme leading to MLIS. Like the Review Committee, the Panel also suggested that LIS departments in the universities should have the same independent status as other teaching departments. One significant change occurred in Indian library education during 1970s was inclusion of the components of information science like information storage and retrieval, computer application, etc. in the LIS curriculum. In view of this, the Panel suggested that the nomenclature of the departments may be changed to reflect the changed curriculum. It also urged the departments with adequate infrastructure to offer research programmes of MPhil and PhD. Interestingly, after D.B. Krishna Rao (1958) the second PhD in library science in India had just been awarded to Pandey SK Sharma in 1977. But since then research has got a boost.

13. THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES

After the Review Committee Report, library education was drastically changed. In fact, the Review Committee not only touched upon all aspects of LIS education, it set the direction and pace for the future. LIS education followed the path suggested by the Review Committee for more than two decades. Since then, two curriculum development committees have gone into the LIS curriculum in detail.

13.1 The Kaula Committee

The first Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) in LIS was appointed by the UGC under the Chairmanship of Prof. P.N. Kaula in 1990. After wide ranging deliberations, the Committee submitted its report in 1992. It contains, besides a well- designed detailed syllabus, well thought out suggestions to LIS schools and recommendations to UGC¹⁷. The Committee suggested LIS schools to clearly specify the objectives of each course offered by them. Admission for the courses be on the basis of academic achievement, admission test, and an interview. In the university

courses the medium of instruction should be English. The CDC also made recommendations regarding teaching methods, aids and other infrastructural resources required for the courses. Endorsing the UGC Panel's recommendations the CDC suggested an increase over the Review Committee suggestions, in the minimum faculty strength of LIS departments. It suggested for the departments having only BLISc course one professor, one reader and three lecturers, and for departments also offering MLISc course one professor, two readers and five lecturers. The CDC made some specific recommendations to UGC regarding independent status of LIS departments similar to those in other disciplines. The same issue was earlier taken up by the Review Committee and the UGC Panel also. The CDC also recommended for the creation of one post of professor at least in the LIS departments offering MLISc course. It also urged the UGC to issue guidelines to all universities for treating LIS departments as science departments for allocation of equipment grants. The scheme of papers and detailed syllabus designed by the CDC remained a model for subsequent curriculum revision exercises done by the departments.

13.2 The Karisiddappa Committee

The UGC constituted the second CDC in LIS under the chairmanship of Dr C.R. Karisiddappa in 2000. The Committee submitted its report in 2001¹⁸. It is an excellent document on curriculum containing not only syllabi and infrastructural requirements needed to be met, but also areas like allotment of marks, teaching hours and their break-up, etc. It emphasised strongly for two-year integrated master degree course. And of course, due to the strong words used by Dr Hari Gautam, then UGC Chairman in the foreword of the Report, regarding implementation of the same, a number of departments also went for the two-year integrated master degree course. The Committee also emphasised practical component and made specific provision for practice in certain papers.

14. NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in 1994 by the UGC. As an outcome of the Government's National Policy on Education, 1986, NAAC was established to assess and accredit institutions of higher education in India. NAAC assesses only those higher education institutions which volunteer for this purpose, although UGC is endeavoring to bring all institutions under its purview. Interestingly, assessment of specific academic programmes¹⁹ has also been stated in its mission, but it has primarily concerned itself with assessment of institutions only. The establishment of NAAC is a welcome step to bring

in qualitative changes in higher education. It has begun with the accreditation of institutions; let us hope to see it accrediting courses too, to bring further quality in higher education including LIS education.

15. CONCLUSION

Library education has completed a century in India. During this period, it has covered a long distance from a small beginning of short-term training to a country-wide network of universities, colleges, polytechnics, research organisations, professional associations, etc., offering certificate, diploma, PG diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree, MPhil, PhD and even DLit through regular and distance modes. This brighter side is not so bright in reality.

The frequently highlighted need for consolidation has not been given proper thought. Still, the emphasis is on expansion. In fact, anyone enjoying support of authority soon develops ambition of starting a LIS course. The concluding remarks made in the Status Report, given along with CDC report (2001), only indicate a dangerous trend. "In conclusion it can be expressed with serious concern that there is a undesirable growth of LIS courses at all levels in the country, in contrast to the state of the happenings in other countries like USA, UK, Australia and so on, where the LIS schools are either abandoned or merged with the departments offering high profile courses, to enhance their marketable potentiality"²⁰. This mushrooming of LIS courses has created a large army of half-baked unemployed youth.

This problem is compounded by overlooking the cautious recommendations of the Advisory Committee for Libraries (1958), Review Committee (1961), UGC Panel (1979) and CDC (1992) to have independent departments of LIS in universities. Frequently, LIS courses are being started from library without establishing a proper department and recruiting full-time teachers. In fact, the notion that a good librarian can teach LIS content in an excellent way to produce potentially highly employable professional is debatable. No doubt, a technician or semi-professional can be produced through this technique, but not a professional. It is essential to have a department of LIS along the same line as other teaching departments in the university.

The proliferation of LIS courses has another reason. The distance education that got boost through the NPE, 1986, has changed the entire scenario of LIS education in India. Today, we have many times more students in distance stream than in regular stream. The idea of taking education to the doorsteps of the student, who is unable to go for regular courses due to non-educational constraints, is very appreciable. But making it a shortcut

to get a degree or diploma by avoiding the rigorous educational requirements of regular stream has become the practice in distance stream. IGNOU does not need to offer its courses for resource generation, but for other universities Directorate of Distance Education is the main source of income. The Distance Education Council may keep record of infrastructural aspects but at the level of implementation the deterioration has no limits. Universities without having a single LIS teacher offered all courses from bachelor degree to Master of Philosophy. Of course, now MPhil is offered through regular stream only.

LIS education is marred by another burning problem of insufficient faculty strength. Although, all the committees have recommended minimum faculty strength, but it is widely violated. To add to the woes of the departments, even the existing faculty positions are not filled timely. Talwar²¹ has claimed that 78 LIS departments having 291 sanctioned positions of teachers were running with a shortage of 75 teachers. In certain states governments impose blanket ban on appointments, which adversely affects the recruitment of teachers also. The suggestion of the Working Group of the Planning Commission for Seventh Five Year Plan, for a National Centre for Education and Research in L&IS along the lines of NCERT, etc. and reiterated by the NKC besides making recommendations for setting up of National Commission on Libraries and National Mission on Libraries, have not been able to attract the attention of our policy planners.

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