

Round the Clock Librarianship

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Professions are providing the required manpower for industrialisation and development for both the developing and the developed countries. Industrialising societies are professionalising. (Goode, 1960) Professions offer best of services, high level of commitment for public welfare, a high level of technical/scientific expertise. Public's recognition of a profession and its privileges depend on what critical areas/tasks of the society the profession is involved in. Professionals believe that the more they show their efficiency, service mindedness and expertise, the more they will be recognised by people for higher incomes, rewards and status in society.

Probably due to some systemic inherent weaknesses and lack of professional commitment to the general public, some occupations remain as occupations and some as semi-professions. Nevertheless, members of every progressive occupation/craft wish their practice to acquire the coveted title of a profession. It is a struggle amongst the occupations/crafts/jobs to offer the best of their services to people and in turn to attract public attention to acquire more social status, physical facilities and financial rewards.

If we view it from this sociological background and context, librarianship¹ is one such occupational category which is in the struggle for attracting more and more public attention for higher

financial rewards and social status. roughly speaking, based on an overview of the literature of library science from a sociological point of view, it appears that librarians in general are not aware as to what specifically they should be doing at this juncture and what they should not be doing, to raise their occupation/craft to that of a profession.

The concept of Round the Clock Librarianship (ROCLOLIB) is one such opportunity of terminal and critical importance to librarians, which helps people (clients) in general and reassures them about the professional commitment and devotedness of librarians. Although the concept is old, it is an exercise here to analyse its importance for the overall image and status of the practice/occupation.

Why should Libraries be open for 24 Hours

Readers/users of libraries in general come from diverse backgrounds, interests and places. Two major difficulties/constraints of the reader/user in using libraries are time and place. By the time an employee comes home from office the library (if at all it exists) nearest to his home or office is closed. There are some libraries which close during lunch hours—a time when some workers/wards may wish to use the library. In general, most of the public libraries the world over being open during day-time are ideal for all those who work on a regular basis during night shifts only. Those of the librarians who empathise (Kalyane and Devarai, 1993) for public and those of the librarians who have continued to be readers of libraries (other than those where they are employed) can comprehend the problems of distance (home and library) and time.

The present timings of the libraries are suitable for those who can avail some of their working time towards reading and towards accessing information in libraries. The authors are of the firm opinion that due to inconvenience of time many committed potential users are unable to make use of libraries, either for reading or for accessing a particular piece of information. Information is of critical importance in many areas. It has become an essential input for progress and development. Though information has acquired vital importance in all walks of common man (Devrai and Damodaran, 1993) its practice is still not very much focussed on the common man and his needs.

Practicing information for the common man whole heartedly means bringing libraries nearer to his home and work place and keeping them open round the clock. If the constraints of space (distance) and time (round the clock) are solved the day is not very far when librarianship will be considered as one of the essential services and the practice of librarianship will acquire the coveted title of a "fullfledge profession".

The ROCLOLIB is a very comprehensive phenomenon having crucial implications for the profession. As one of the corollaries it implies that the librarians are to be on duty round the clock. In every successful profession the professional status and standing is achieved by sheer hard work, devotion and sacrifice on the part of the practitioner, the best example being that of a doctor. If at all a librarian is interested in his professional development he should continue to be a librarian round-the-clock. He cannot cease to be a librarian the moment he comes out of his office library. According to Lancaster (1978), "The future of the librarian lies outside the library, closer to the community to be served. Modern communication technology makes the de-institutionalised librarians an increasingly feasible proposition." If time demands, he should be able to discharge his duties anywhere and everywhere. Librarians round-the-clock means:

- Informativeness of the librarians out of their libraries, office;
- Practice of residential librarianship after office hours.
- Eagerness to help clients making emergency calls by cutting short ones resting time (sleep);
- Emergence of private library homes by enterprising librarians in the model of nursing homes;
- Emergence of emergency wards/counters in big public, private and research libraries for priorotising among the library/information services;
- Emergence of librarian as an information resource consultant;
- Emergence of librarians as freelance information practitioners off the libraries.

All these hypothetical derivations will come true in the year 2001 if librarians pledge to practice their profession as a way of life. Librarianship in the near future will become their way of life provided they decide to study the professional model and understand the process of emergence of a new profession so that they can do the needful for their practice to achieve professional status. (Devarai and Damodaran, 1993)

Provision of Information as a beginning of solution of an individual/group problem

According to sociologists society is a web of social relationships. When we derive further social relationships may be explained in terms of stimuli and responses resulting in varied interactions.

By keen analysis one can find out that the information resource forms the very base of human interactions resulting in varied social relationships. Lack of sufficient information may result in unhealthy, incomplete and lopsided social relationships. Provision of right information at a right moment help to solve many an individual and group problems. The problem rarely realised is the recognition of the expert information from a professional for the solution of individual and social problems. It is not that the society does not recognise the importance of information in human relationships, the problem is, it has not yet recognised a professional expert to offer this service. Though libraries and librarians do exist, they are far and wide. Task number one is to bring libraries to every city, colony, village, clan and tribe and the task number two is to enhance the working hours, the best arrangement being to open round-the-clock. This eventually leads towards proliferation of de-institutionalised freelance information specialists located far and wide in society—reaching the unreached. This ideal situation of freelance practice of information is possible only when libraries are open round-the-clock. This helps people to be more informative and help librarians to be more equipped to answer information queries.

Bernard Barber (1963) defined professional behaviour in terms of four essential attributes, “a high degree of generalised and systematic knowledge; primary orientation to the community interest

rather than to individual self-interest; a high degree of self control of behaviour through codes of ethics internalised in the process of work socialisation and through voluntary associations organised and operated by the work specialists themselves; and a system of rewards (monetary and honorary) that is primarily a set of symbols of work achievement and thus ends in themselves, not means to some end of individual self interest". In a nutshell, the success of the ROCLOLIB depends on professional behaviour of the practitioners and the priority to information given by public in their day to day lives.

ROCLOLIB and Readership/Usership

There is no class/segment of the population which will not be benefited by the ROCLOLIB. As indicated earlier, information forms the very base of human interaction. The ROCLOLIB enhances general readership/usership in society leading towards progress, prosperity and development. The ROCLOLIB helps students, teachers, people engaged in agriculture, industry, housewives, professionals, etc. It opens a new chapter in the professional history of librarianship. Invariably librarians become user-friendly and start taking active interest in developmental activities. Irrespective of class, caste, creed, profession, level of education, the ROCLOLIB will benefit both librarians and society immeasurably.

Identification

The practice of the ROCLOLIB brings forth issues and problems of practical importance. When librarians work round-the-clock they need to be recognised in the mob. They need to be recognised as professionals in the library (office) and home library. Above all, de-institutionalised librarians need to be recognised, identified. Hence the need of a specific dress and badge for the librarian (be he stationed or freelance). Again libraries everywhere are to be identified and noticed by the adoption of a symbol and a light (for identification at nights). By this a needy individual locates a library with least effort and fulfills his information needs without wasting much time. This is an ideal situation when a needy individual/group just locates librarians (be he on the road, mob or home) with least effort and fulfills his/its information needs without wasting time.

ROCLOLIB and Bibliotherapy: Back to Scholar Librarian

Bibliotherapy is used in medical practice to a limited extent in the treatment of mentally-retarded patients. The librarians working in hospital libraries have joined their hands with doctors in the practice of bibliotherapy. They have restricted themselves to the task of provision of information and reading materials. Can we think of a librarian who prescribes authoritatively a particular package of information and reading materials to his clients/users? For this the librarian needs to be a scholar first. Are we moving towards the concept of a scholar librarian in this age of electronics and in this age of libraries as global information centres? If at all it comes true the ROCLOLIB will be a boon to bibliotherapists and the scholar librarians who prescribe, reading material to solve individual/social problems.

Residential Librarianship

The concept of the ROCLOLIB to all librarians gives further fillip to have their own libraries at their homes. This is the beginning of the emergence of residential librarianship. If librarians along with their library associations come out with total commitment and sacrifice this dream may come true. Finance should not be a problem when we are all committed workers. This will automatically make room for the development of appropriate tools and techniques required.

The practice of the ROCLOLIB together with the modern developments in information technologies and computer communication networks opens up new vistas in information provision and individual libraries will emerge as global information centres.

Emergency Librarianship

Librarians need to do research into those areas of human social welfare, where their information resources are of critical and terminal importance. We have to identify those areas, where a particular package of instantaneous information is *sine-qua-non* for the very

survival of an individual/group and society. Hence, hypothetically speaking, a band of librarians will emerge who are specialised in coping up with high risk emergency calls for packaged and graded information. Hence the genesis of emergency librarianship.

Reading/accessing information any time as a fundamental right

Librarians however committed, sincere, and dedicated they are, cannot by themselves create conditions conducive for the ROCLOLIB. People should come out and demand library services. They must realise reading/accessing information as one of their fundamental rights in their own welfare for their own well being. What librarians can do is to perform an educational function of making people aware of the importance of information resources for their progress and development. If librarians and people join hands it should be marked as a "THE DAY" of mutual benefits wherein people get the best of librarians services and wherein librarians will realise their much-awaited status as a 'fullfledged profession'.

ROCLOLIB: Education, Training and Socialization

If the practice of the ROCLOLIB is to be materialised it has to become a slogan; it has to become a movement of the whole band of librarians all over the world. The concept and idea is to be introduced at different levels in a holistic manner. It should be incorporated in educational and training programmes from certificate to Ph.D. levels. Through a wide ranging programme of seminars, symposia and conferences the idea should be popularised. We have to make way for the process of socialisation to operate. The youngsters and newcomers are to be oriented about the ROCLOLIB and reassure them that librarianship is not an occupation/practice/vocation/craft but a meaningful/purposeful way of life.

Towards ROCLOLIB: A Dream, A Slogan, A Movement

For those who live in intellectual boundaries, for those who never dream impossibles and for those who cannot outclass contemporary thinking, the ROCLOLIB may seem like a far cry! An

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ideal situation where/when librarianship becomes a true way of life, the dream of ROCLOLIB may turn into a reality, it may take the shape of a slogan and a movement. If we pledge to offer only the best to the society, if we want to be at the helm of the affairs of the society, let us take this as a professional challenge! A day is not far when we can achieve this goal and in turn expect only the best of societal benefits, financial rewards and due status in society and leap forward to become a full fledged profession.

References

- 1 The authors don't believe in the tricotomies of Librarianship/documentation/information science. Hence wherever the word librarian and librarianship is used in this paper they should be understood in comprehensive and all inclusive meaning to connote the multifacted profession.
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4. W.J. Goode, "Encroachment, Charlatanism and the Emerging Profession: Psychology, Sociology and Medicine", *American Sociological Review* 25, 1960, pp. 902-914.
- 5 V.L. Kalyane and Rajashekhar S. Devarai, "Empathy in Public Librarianship: A Subjective and Qualitative Analysis", *Indian Journal of Information, Library and Society*. (Communicated).
- 6 F.W. Lancaster, *Toward Paperless Information Systems*, Academic Press, New York, 1978, pp. 153-159.