



of LIS Education in North East India

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2019

2

Changing scenario in LIS education

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Introduction

It is a special occasion of celebrating golden jubilee of the Department of LIS, Gauhati University which is the oldest Department to start LIS education in North East India. It is also one of the 18 Departments of LIS in the country opened till 2017. Today, the number of Departments in the country would be about 200 imparting LIS education at different levels with different modes. Most of the universities now have the Department of LIS. This is befitting time to discuss vital issues relating to LIS education which has been continuously and constantly undergoing rapid changes. The topic is thoughtfully conceived to bring out a publication on the subject enabling professionals to do some introspection of the present scenario and suggest some changes in the present curriculum wherever needed. No doubt that there had been regular recommendations from UGC and other bodies from time to time to update and revise curriculum as needed. Quite a good number of publications have come out on this subject in addition to discussions in seminars and conferences. LIS education started with training, certificate and diploma courses and reached present stage of PhDs. Despite this, professionals coming out of schools/ departments of LIS are not so competent and skilled as required to manage modern libraries in spite of best efforts being put by the teaching departments.

The very pertinent question before the profession is whether the Departments of LIS are able to produce required manpower to manage

modern libraries where core of librarianship is losing ground and are not as essential as the periphery subjects. The subjects which used to be in periphery earlier are becoming core of the discipline. It may not be wrong to say that LIS subject has been invaded by many other subjects and discipline to the extent that its basic structure is at stake, though essential to retain. Let us know the scenario of libraries during 1960s till beginning of 1970 and the corresponding curricula during the period. There was hardly any mismatch between the teaching and practice. Teaching Departments of LIS were meeting the requirements of libraries which mostly were engaged in acquisition, processing, arranging, display and location. Classification and cataloguing used to be basic tools. Documentation and indexing were subsequent developments. Interesting would be to cite here my conversation during 1994 with one of the senior most diplomats of India who had been ambassadors to several countries, asked me a question during our conversation as what librarians do in the libraries except arranging and searching of books. He was also an author of several books. This was the perception of highly qualified diplomat and an author about libraries. It was difficult for me to give him a precise convincing answer. Corollary to this also would have been that what is there to teach in LIS up-to PhD level, where some elementary training in classification and cataloguing would have been enough. Nevertheless, present scenario is different and more transparent today. Since information became an important commodity, the image of libraries also improved. There were not many challenges of LIS education till 1970s, though computer applications had started making its impact, forming the part of curriculum. The recommendations of Ranganathan Committee Report (1965) constituted by UGC was enough to make the changes and improve existing status of LIS education. The latest recommendations were given in UGC Model Curriculum (2001) to maintain uniformity all over the country which further needs revision. It is an admitted fact that libraries are not getting adequately skillful professionals for their modern libraries. Evidence to this is that many posts are not being fulfilled. Those who are already in jobs have to seek external technical know-how to run their libraries. Therefore, we have to accept that it has become difficult to LIS Departments to produce required manpower despite their best efforts and initiatives.

Transitional Nature of Subject

LIS education scenario onward 1970s has been ever changing not only in India but worldwide caused by various factors taking place in the society. These changes have been so frequent that there was hardly time to the subject to establish and stabilize on firm grounds. Similarly, nature of the libraries, their functions and services, usage pattern of users, information resources their organizational and dissemination tools, etc. changed due to external influences. All these changes have direct implications on LIS education calling required frequent changes in the curriculum. The main reasons for such changing dimension have been as under:

Impact of Communication Technology

Most dominating influence on libraries and LIS education had been advent of information technology which came as blessing as well as challenge to information professionals which at one end simplified information control beyond expectations, on the other side many professional challenges came on the way. Who could think of bibliographical control of knowledge during 1960s, which used to be once an impossibility which technology made possible and easier. Computer applications entered the field and some LIS departments started incorporating computer components in their curriculum. There were hardly computer labs available to the teachers and students. Punch card system, hardware components and configuration, etc. used to be the main parts of study in some of the forward looking departments like Delhi University and a few others during 1970s. DRTC and INSDOC which started LIS education in 1962 and 1964 respectively conceived a different curriculum to develop and produce differently skilled manpower especially suitable for special libraries. Their approach to LIS education was to keep more abreast with the changes in view of present and future requirement of the special libraries. Services of the special libraries have been much improved than other types of libraries right from the beginning. Indexing and abstracting services were also initiated by these libraries. Manual indexing followed by computer based indexing systems entered into the curriculum along with classification and cataloguing systems.

During 1980s information sources started coming in the form of microfilm, diskettes, CDs and other formats of multimedia. All large databases which used to come in printed formats started coming in CDs based upon CD-ROM technology. It made a great mark in libraries. At the

same time, library software started appearing on the scene. Consequently, LIS Departments had to incorporate such new advances. UNESCO Library software package, CDS/ISIS and its subsequent versions became part of syllabus in most of the universities. Now there are many library and digitization software available applicable in libraries. Though most of them are user-friendly, still needs expertise to explore their all features. Most of the students coming out with Master Degrees in LIS hardly have competence to do even the installation of these software. During the beginning of 21st century, electronic resources started multiplying. The shift started from print media to electronic media and electronic and digital libraries came into being. Management of e-resources being different than printed material, required new knowledge and technical know-how. Again other software were developed to find solutions to handle these new resources in different formats. Thus, every year there has been changes and convergence of new concept and technology. As such it becomes difficult to cope with such rapid and continued changes for teaching and practicing professionals. What to include and exclude in the curriculum is too complex a problem for teaching departments. As soon as departments revise and update their syllabus and get it approved through different academic bodies, some new concepts and newly emerged adoptable technology is knocking at the door.

Today, convergence of IT in LIS is to the extent that it is difficult to identify and isolate that have no applications in information organization and management. All manual operations have been taken over by tools and techniques of IT. Now question is what type and kinds of IT components are to be incorporated in the curriculum in addition to some already referred above in the preceding paragraphs. These are to be studied, identified and incorporated in LIS curriculum having present and future applicability in libraries. The obvious limitation is that there is a limited time, lack of expertise in IT and correspondingly the curriculum is ever increasing in its scope and coverage.

Now let us compare the competency of IT professionals and present library professionals being presently produced. Who have the better capabilities and skills to manage modern libraries between the two? Technology not only brought changes in information and knowledge management but was responsible for transformation in certain areas.

Call of the Knowledge Society and Digital Era

Let us think as to what is expected of LIS professionals living in the knowledge society. Emphasis in knowledge society is mainly on creation

and sharing of knowledge at global level. Scope of libraries no more remained confined to their respective institutions. Knowledge is to be shared by establishing network at various levels. It became mandatory for libraries to have such manpower in libraries those have the competency to create digital contents which not only requires technical skill but also knowledge of various subjects. Ranganathan was in the opinion that librarians should have basic knowledge of various subjects, therefore had introduced 'Universe of Knowledge' as a subject of study at MLibSc level. Does it have some relevance in the present era? Libraries today need such professionals who are skillful and competent to cope up with the challenges of present digital era. The prime concern is to identify the competencies and skills required not only to create digital contents but promote their usage by imparting information and digital literacy programmes to the potential users not only at local and national level but at global level.

Web-enabled Services

Internet technology brought transformation in the society as well as in libraries. Information accessing and sharing became much easier. All resources and services are to be well organized, managed, advertised and hosted on Internet for wider accessibility and use any time anywhere. Today, what is not web-enabled is not done. Knowledge of web-designing has become one of primary components of present curriculum and requirement of every library. Web technology has been evolving over the years with different features and characteristics termed as web-1 to web-3. It is likely to become more intelligent and understanding in near future. There would be always convergence of new technologies from time to time in near future and profession should be ready to adopt them.

Multiplication of Services

All the advances discussed above led to the multiplication of services. Availability, accessibility and bibliographical control of information became much easier. Mode of generation and dissemination of services also increased along with the increased expectation of users. User behavior over the years have been changing with the changing of time. Their study also became more important to evolve need-based services. The challenges have been at all fronts of the profession. Profession does not require only technical skills but managerial competence is equally required. *Seeking Solutions*

The problems are of course confronting ones, convergence of other subjects and technology has been significant. The subjects which used to be in periphery are become core of study. The basics of the subjects of librarianship cannot be deemphasized. Removing pillars on which profession is standing cannot be disturbed or weakened. The changing structure has to be built and strengthened only on these pillars. However, there is time constrains, lack of manpower and other confronting problems and continued dilemma as what to include and exclude from the curriculum. Profession can think of integrated courses similar to law to produce competent professionals by studying various subjects during the period of 4-5 years. Faculty with expertise in computer and IT need to be essentially inducted or departments of computer applications and LIS should be merged in universities to share expertise of computers and IT of other departments.

Gap between Consumers and Producers

Since the time teaching and practice were separated and LIS departments became independent, coordination between the two became lessor and lessor. Practical training of the students during the course of study remains inadequate. The students remain confined to theory part of the study whereas, practice is more important than the theory. Theories need to be implemented and practiced. The concept of medical education where theory and practice go together should have been more effective and productive.

Course curriculum should be designed and updated in view of the manpower requirement in libraries. What skills and competencies are required need to be identified. Ask the experienced librarians who know the type of manpower they require in modern libraries. They may decide about the abilities, knowledge, skills and other requirements what they expect from the teaching departments and the students. The gap between teaching and practice must be bridged. There must be complete match between producers (departments) and consumers (libraries). As a practicing professional, essentially one may need and expect manpower having following competencies and skills in today's libraries:

- i) Specialization in library software
- ii) Knowledge of networking
- iii) Competency in digitization and content analysis
- iv) Administrative and managerial ability of senior professionals

- v) Web designing and its frequent updating
- vi) Competency of e-resource management
- vii) Data capturing from other sources (copy cataloguing, data import and export from different platforms, etc.)
- viii) Generating various services (Repackaging and creating).
- ix) Basic knowledge of classification and cataloguing.
Cataloguing only descriptive part.
- x) Subject knowledge of other subjects, etc.

This is age of specialization, one individual cannot be specialized in all the subjects. If different specialization is taken by different departments, the result may be better. For example in NE Region, specialization of certain subjects could be divided among the departments by mutual understanding.

Both teaching and practicing professionals should sit together and discuss such issues to arrive at some conclusions and develop need based curriculum.

It is also an admitted fact that real professional knowledge is acquired during service period and the educational qualifications and learning in the universities simply forms the background. Therefore, in-service training and education is essential to up-date knowledge and learn new developments. Departments may think of introducing such courses for in-service professionals also.

It is also well realized that it is not possible to bring frequent changes in the curriculum. Nevertheless, faculty should have the autonomy to teach new developments coming on the way irrespective of being in the syllabus or not. Such autonomy is authorized by UGC also.

These are my stray thoughts on the subject, may generate some better thinking leading to overall professional development by producing competent and skilled professionals.