



LIBRARIANSHIP AND THE PROFESSIONAL MODEL: A SOCIOLOGICAL TUTORIAL AND CRITIQUE

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An attempt is made in this paper to critically highlight some of the sociological issues concerning Librarianship (LIS) as a profession. Different theoretical formulations are discussed. Importance of the studies of sociology of occupations and professions for librarians is emphasized. Useful suggestions are offered towards achievement of fulfilled status of Librarianship (LIS) as a profession.

KEYWORDS/DESCRIPTORS: Librarianship; Professional model; Sociological issues; Process; Power; Way of life; Profession; Image; Status; Information science

1 INTRODUCTION

Presently we are in the age of information characterised by technological advancements, industrialisation and urbanisation leading towards more employment opportunities, availability of goods and services to a large mass of population across the globe. This, in turn has resulted in the proliferation of jobs, crafts, trades and occupations, apart from established professions like legal practices and medicine.

In the competitive world every craft, trade or occupation exerts itself to achieve this honorific title of a 'profession' which symbolises status and position in society. Librarianship is one such occupational category which is aspiring for this honorific title which entitles it for higher status, position, income and so on in society. In this paper an attempt is made to assess the position of Librarianship as per the professional model. Librarians world over are very much concerned about their low image and status in society. Quite

naturally they all feel that theirs is a full fledged profession. They are also highly confident that their occupation can stand the test of a profession. They are also equally worried and apprehensive about non-recognition of their services in society to the extent required.

It is right time for librarianship to have a self examination in the light of professional model. Librarians need to know about processes of emergence of a profession. Professions are social facts, social/economic categories highly valued for their services and commitment in society. Sociologists are the scholars and researchers who also study trades, jobs, crafts, vocations, occupations and professions in their right perspectives in society. To understand the role of occupations and professions in society and thereby to understand and comprehend librarian's role and position in society. It is necessary to understand some of the sociological concepts. This understanding, should unlock the mystery of the people's conception of the role,

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status and position of various occupations, trades in society about which an average librarian wonders time and again. Hence an attempt is made here to clarify important sociological concepts relating to occupations and professions.

Sociology is an objective and scientific study of social relationships in society. To quote W.P. Scoft [41] 'Sociology is the scientific study of human social behaviour. Sociology studies the processes and patterns of individual and group interaction, the forms of organisation of social groups, the interrelationships among them and group influence on individual behaviour'. *The sociologist studies the structure and processes of social life as a whole...* [45] The study of occupations and professions is an integral part of sociology and the specialisation is termed as *Sociology of professions have varying roles, status and prestiges in society, one has to know the concept of social stratification is relatively a permanent ranking of statuses and roles in a social system ranging from a small group to a society in terms of differential privileges, prestige influence and power. In simple terms it is the hierarchical arrangement of social strata in a society. In this sense social stratification refers specifically to the social class or caste system of a society* [41]. Caste determines its members' prestige, occupation, place of residence or social relations basing itself on heredity. It is more or less an closed stratum. Whereas class is more or less a open system. It refers to a large category of people who share a common social and economic status in relation to other segments of their society. The history of human civilisation indicates that these two social categories which guide the social stratification pattern of the society predominantly decide the status, position and role of the variety occupations and professions in society. Even now we find some communities primarily adopting their age old occupation for their living as a caste occupation. e.g., carpentry, pottery etc. And in the other way round people adopt to various trades, vocations, jobs and professions based on their socio-economic status and position, education and training in society. Hence the close relation of class and that of occupations/professions. In turn

the profession one pursues itself may become a status symbol.

2 PROFESSIONAL MODEL

Professional model is a sociological construct explaining about those occupational categories known as professions bestowed with unusually high status, prestige and position in society. By now it is clear that an occupation is a set of economic activities, and these activities are intended towards earning a living. Whereas a profession is a high class occupation consisting of highly trained specialists carrying on a very important role in society. There is no universally accepted definition of a profession. Cogan [12] after surveying numerous attempts to define the term concludes that a profession is a vocation whose practice is founded upon an understanding of the theoretical structure of some depart of learning or science and upon the abilities accompanying such understanding. This understanding and these abilities are applied to the vital practical affairs of man.

There is no universally accepted theory of professions. When sociological literature is pursued one comes across three theoretical formulations which conceptualise profession and professionalisation. A very lucid explanation is found in a work on journalism by R.K. Sharma [43]. The three formulations are:

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|-----------------|---|-----------------|
| 2.1 Attribution | } | functionalism |
| 2.2 Process | | |
| 2.3 Power | | conflict theory |

These three theoretical formulations fall into two broad theoretical perspectives, i.e., functionalism and the conflict theory. The functional theory assumes that society has certain needs and that it develops certain institutional structures in order to fulfill such needs. Following this assumption the functional perspective points to the existence of the existence of a functional linkage between profession and society [43]. Professions characterised by traits through central needs of the society are effectively catered to [4, 38]. The

conflict theory views professions in terms of their relations to society [28].

2.1 Attributional Approach

This is a very popular approach adopted by many sociologists and individual practitioners for studying a particular occupation/practice (or group of occupations/practices) and put the same in the continuum of professions Barber and Millerson [4, 34]. The major emphasis of this approach is on traits or attributes an occupation/trade has to have so as to qualify itself as a profession. Though opinions vary, there seems to be a set of attributes or traits commonly accepted as a sine-qua-non for a profession. When one pursues though the lists of attributes/traits propounded by various theorists, through at the outset there appears a wide variation, a close observation and analysis reveals that the attributes/traits revolve around a few core parameters. Barber, Millerson, Shaffer Gode and Legatt [4,34,42,21,31] are prominent among those who tried to list a set of attributes of professions. At the outset the attributes listed by various social scientists seem to vary. A close observation and analysis reveals a satisfying similarity and uniformity amongst the social scientists. To cite Reeves [43], the lists of attributes varies from scholar to scholar but a general consensus is claimed upon a few attributes. No characteristics enumerated by them contradict each other. Goode [22], a reputed sociologist and theoretician who dealt at length on the topic of librarianship as a profession, mentions a basic body of abstract knowledge and the ideal of service as the two central generating qualities of a profession. Barber [4] emphasizes on the attributes of knowledge, community interest, self control of behaviour through code of ethics, voluntary associations and a system of rewards. Legatt [31] laid stress on theoretical esoteric knowledge, socialisation, altruistic service, control and code of ethics, as the core traits of professions, Millerson (1964) in his book on *Qualifying Associations* analysed the characteristics enumerated by 21 commentators and lists the following as the most frequently mentioned: 1. Theoretical knowledge, 2. Training and

education, 3. Competence, 4. Code of conduct, 5. Service, 6. Organisation [42]. A librarian and sociologist in himself, after a personal of sociological literature on the concept of profession identified and summarised the following core characteristics which are commonly accepted these days through out the world: 1. Specialised knowledge and skills; 2. Research and continuous in-service updating of specialised knowledge; 3. Intellectual activity; 4. Social necessity; 6. Recognition by people and status in society; 7. Standardised terminology; 8. Close knit professional organisation having an altruistic philosophy; 9. Stability of the profession through permanent membership; 10. Code of ethics for the practitioners; 11. Autonomy of the profession; and 12. Authority of the practitioners.

2.2 The Process Approach

As the very name indicates in this approach the *process* by which an occupation develops slowly into a profession is emphasised. It is perceived as a continuum from occupation/non-profession to profession. The status of an occupation in the continuum depends on the acquisition of number of attributes and the extent of acquisition of each of them. Hughes is the major advocate of this approach. Significant question according to him is to identify the circumstances in which people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession and themselves into professional people. Professionalisation according to him is a change of status of the occupation to its own past and to other occupations. As in apparent from the above description, here, the process of development of the topologies of occupations, non-professions and professions is emphasized.

Many social scientists have tried to list the sequence of steps by which an occupation moves from that of an occupation/non-profession Jenkins G. Harris. [24] defines the variable of professionalisation in terms of six consistent elements: structural, contextual, activity, educational and behavioural.

Social scientists like Barber, Wilensky and Caplow specialising in professional approach try to enlist steps in the process of professionalisation as follows:

Barber (1963).

Leaders of the emerging profession comparing their level to that of the beginning history of the developed professions.

- 1 Publishing code of ethics.
- 2 Trying to strengthen professional associations.
- 3 Establishing measures and titles of more or less professional behaviour.
- 4 Establishing university professional schools.
- 5 Putting up public information campaigns.
- 6 The leaders of an emerging profession will have to engage in some conflict with elements both inside and outside their occupational groups.

Wilensky (1964)

Wilensky who seeks to establish that there is a natural history of professionalisation identifies these stages as those followed on the route to professional status by the established professions:

The occupation is followed fulltime

- 1 Formal training is established
- 2 This training is provided within university.
- 3 Local and then national professional associations are formed as the core tasks are defined in competition with neighbouring occupations.
- 4 Political activity leads to legally controlled licensing and certification, and
- 5 A formal code of ethical practice is developed.

Caplow 1970)

Establishment of a professional association.

- 1 Change in the name of the occupation.
- 2 Development of code of ethics.
- 3 Prolonged political agitations to obtain the support of public power.
- 4 The concurrent development of training facilities.

The professional approach is criticised mainly for its bias towards functionalism. According to critics it may not be practicable to plan professions on a single continuum on the basis of attributes of the profession. No uniform process of professionalisation applicable universally is being observed. It is also criticised as historical.

2.3 The Power Theorists Approach

Against the functionalistic approach, the power theorists approach based on conflict model lays emphasis on power. Power theorists don't seem to bother much about the dichotomy of profession and a non-profession. The power of a profession can be visualised through its authority, autonomy and monopoly over its sphere of work. Uncertainty, unpredictability, indeterminacy and mystery are the enhancing factors of the power of an occupation.

The three approaches explained above vary with each other both with regard to their content and emphasis. The attributional, functional and the processes approach falls under the conflict orientation. Individual sociologists usually deal with the problems in the area of sociology of occupations and professions taking insights from any one of the above approaches. T.J. Johnson [28] has tried to synthesize the above approaches and apply the same to his research designs. According to him 'profession is a type of occupation that has had the power to have undergone a developmental process whereby it has been able to acquire or convince against significant others that it has acquired a high

degree of constellation of those characteristics which denote a profession.

Librarianship as a profession has already attracted the attention of sociologists and other researchers. In the absence of genuine empirical research, the area of study (sociology of professions as applied to LIS) is filled with lots and lots of biased opinions, off hand statements, loose comments without any bias, background or verifiable data.

A general observation indicates that the researchers seem to have used functional approach while studying librarianship as a profession. For arriving at a better picture of the state of affairs of the profession it is necessary that studies be conducted using all the three approaches mentioned above. Librarians seem not to use any model that produces the result that theirs is a semi-profession or a non-profession. They seem to be on the look out for alternative models and approaches for these kinds of studies. Systems approach is one such model [23].

3 LIBRARIANSHIP AS A PROFESSION

Studies on librarianship as a profession are generally conducted by librarians themselves. Writings of librarians on librarianship as a profession are more of a descriptive explanatory, biased, sentimental and professionised type with very less emphasis on research and objectivity. Nevertheless the off hand statements and loose comments are a rich source of information which assist in filling in the gaps of research as far as professional studies on librarianship are concerned.

Librarianship is generally believed to possess low image and status in society. According to Margaret C. Jones [29] *Lack of status is a problem which affects librarians world wide, and it seems that little progress has been made since Ranganathan called in 1969 for librarians to take action to establish their usefulness to society.* A survey conducted by Round Table for the management of Library Associations (RTMLA) reveals that, a overwhelming

majority, 82% or four out of five librarians are convinced that the status is low [39]. A very important sociological observation is that librarians seem not to have a different conception of their status which differs from that of the society. Again to quote from H. Prins [39], we can conclude that the workers in the library and information services don't have a deviant opinion in relation to the rating of the general public. As revealed from the RTMLA survey the three main causes of low status and profile of librarianship are: 1. Invisibility, 2. Education and 3. Professional culture. Devraj and Damodaram [14] assert, *the future status and position of librarians' practice depends on how keenly and sincerely they address and focus their attention on the information needs of common man.*

Right since beginning, the trait or attribution approach is very extensively employed in judging the professional standing of a particular occupation/vocation. As far as librarianship as a profession is concerned studies fall into three categories according to Chopra [11]. There is no consensus whatsoever on the position and status of librarianship in the world of occupations and professions. He has classified the authors/thinkers/ social scientists into three categories i.e.:

Librarianship is not a profession	Librarianship is an emerging profession	Librarianship is a fulfilled profession
1. Labour		1. Dewey, M (1876)
2. Madden HM (1964)	2. Goode W J	2. Bundy M L & Washerman P (1968)
3. Moon E (1965)	3. Rossi	3. Edwards R. F (1975)
4. Moore W E (1970)	4. Blake F M(1965)	4. North J A (1977)
5. McPherson J (1974)	5. Shaffer D E (1968)	5. Reeves W J (1981)
	6. Gillis R(1976)	6. Ashiem L (1979)
	7. Huq, AMA (1978)	7. Birdsall W F (1980)

As evident from the above table some professionalists argue it not to be a profession; some think it to be an emerging profession and yet some consider it to be a fulfilled profession. The latest references cited above is that the LIS profession today is fast undergoing changes.

4 SOCIOLOGY OF LIBRARIANSHIP

LIS (3) professionals are familiar with terms like 'Library and Community' and *Library and Society*. In fact LIS professionals need to consolidate the literature which is widely scattered on the theme mentioned above into what is known as *Sociology of Librarianship*. According to Binwal [5] if the term sociology of librarianship is substituted for such type of studies, a new horizon can be added to the domain of library science. It shall not only consolidate the work done in the field but also stimulate further research. Hence there is a need to define and delineate the scope of sociology of librarianship. Sociology of librarianship, an applied field of sociology is defined as *the scientific analysis of the social processes and patterns involved in the library system* [5]. Understanding of sociology of librarianship helps many a librarians to unravel the mystery of their low profile and status in society and to find ways and means of the process of professional development. This understanding also helps librarians to work out long term strategies to prove their social relevance, which is the most crucial source of enhancing the social and professional image.

5 LIBRARIANSHIP AS A WAY OF LIFE

Members of a profession are known for their unique style and way of life. Their personal and professional lives are so much interwoven, that it is rather difficult to draw a line that separates them. He acquires a special distinction by making himself available to those who wish to have his services any where and any time. The path of professional development is rooted on sheer hard work and sincerity. A professional, practices his profession relentlessly and professes till his last breath. The way he behaves, talks,

dresses, looks, the place he lives in and the surroundings all speak of a distinct life style, the best example being that of a doctor or a lawyer.

If librarians are serious about enhancing their image and status they must opt to practice it as a way of life. It will be extremely difficult for librarians to achieve professional status if they limit themselves to officialdom and bureaucracy.

Library and information centres are to be kept open round the clock [30]. Librarians should have proper identification by their attire and style. He should strive hard to acquire his earlier status of a scholar librarian. Librarians should be available in every nook and corner of the globe. Emergency librarianship should be initiated for catering to urgent calls of critical, crucial and high risk terminal information. All these cumulatively may bring awareness in the common men towards perceiving access to information as fundamental right. It is from here onwards that the road of professionalisation becomes very smooth for librarians. To quote Devarai and Damoderam [14], *'To spell out in simple terms, being a professional means to enter the occupation/practice whole-heartedly, to have service mindedness, to have mastery over a body of knowledge, to have professional autonomy, to desire to remain in the profession, to follow a code of ethics, to have monopoly and authority over the field of understanding/body of knowledge, to socialise newcomers and to cater to practical needs of common man'*.

Future seems to be bright for LIS practitioners. According to Kalyane and Devrai [30], *The year 2001 will be characterised by: demand by people for a library information centre at their colony, village, street and so on; demand by people for access to information from wherever it is available; demand by people to get the desired information in a desired form and format instantaneously; demand by people to expect librarians' active involvement in the generation of diverse tailor-made information products; demand by people to LIS professionals to participate actively in development programmes*

as an active participant; people's expectations of librarians to assume the role of knowledge system experts and knowledge engineers; a situation of information professionals scale high in their social profiles; a situation of helplessness and a state of chaos on the part of general and specialist clientele in the wake of tremendous information being generated every moment; a stage of development wherein the librarian has to retain the best of his conventional knowledge (library technique and procedures) and the best of contemporary information sciences; a stage of development wherein information is consolidated and packaged into different levels of understanding and technically sold out for money like any other goods in the market; a stage of development wherein the absence of relevant information living in the year 2001 i.e., in an information society it becomes practically impossible a point/stage of take off of library profession by proving its social relevance, necessity and indispensability.

6 TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL

Different theoretical formulations like attribution, process and power, conceptualise profession and professionalisation differently. Quite interestingly different researchers employ different formulations depending on the level of advancement of an occupation, maturity of the occupation based on its age, etc. Nonetheless all the three formulations highlight multifaceted dimensions of the world of work and occupations. It is also true that each of these formulations overemphasize one aspect to the neglect of others.

There are some efforts towards synthesis of the three formulations [28]. But works based on this synthetic model do not seem to be available except the understanding at theoretical level. Sociologists and other researchers are still continuing their trials towards formulation of new

and better models for studying occupations and professions.

Open systems paradigm (4) from general systems theory is one such attempt towards the search for an alternative model[23].

The open systems model at the outset extends warm welcome to all those who would like to study occupations whose environments are prone for fast and abrupt changes. Librarianship is not an exception to this (5). To quote: *the open systems model of professionalism we have proposed, is a more democratic professionalism...* The purpose of the professions according to this model is not to dictate what clients must do, but to discover what the clients need and to fulfill these needs by using the specialised knowledge and skills that professionals have developed [23].

However, search for alternative models of professionalism may continue to be explored. A close examination of these different formulations reveals a common thread, a common understanding. A grim latent consensus pervades all through the literature of sociology of occupations and professions. There is no point in exaggerating loose ends of any of these formulations.

7 SUGGESTIONS

Library and information professionals should address the issues like: library and society, librarianship as a profession-different approaches and theoretical formulations in the light of sociological literature and thought.

2. To get a balanced and allround view of the problem of librarianship as a profession, research is required from the point of view of different theoretical formulations discussed earlier.
3. The fast changing environment of the LIS profession (intrinsic and extrinsic) has left the individual professionals in utter confusion. The profession is confronted

with the problems of: 1. Coping up, 2. Distance maintenance. 3. Fragmentation, 4. Craze for false and baseless identities, 5. Craze for new titles and designations for the same functions performed at different places and situations.

4. Invariably a total campaign and drive is to be initiated towards having 100% membership of the professionals in professional associations. Librarian should prove himself to be a professional by being a member of one or the other professional body/association.
5. Our profession is still in the making. The present breed of librarians have great responsibilities as torch bearers for the generations to follow. Professional status can be achieved only by hard work, sincerity, perseverance and sacrifice.
6. The curriculum designers must take a special note of the fact that a paper titled *Librarianship as a profession* be introduced at all levels of library education, i.e., CLIS, BLIS, MLIS and M. Phil, Pre-Ph.D. and Post doctoral levels.
7. There is an urgent necessity to conduct a large scale study on the SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and threats) analysis of LIS profession at different levels, ranks and files.

8 THE SOCIOLOGIST LIBRARIAN

It is not necessary to reemphasize the role of a sociologist librarian as far as the studies on 'librarianship as a profession' are concerned. Planned and thoroughly programmed action is an urgent necessity of the day for grooming LIS as a fulfilled profession. Sociologist librarians act as your local resources readily available for you for answering to any of your queries.

It is high time for LIS professionals to look back to their sociology counterparts and learn the

basics of making of a profession with which they will have a life time binding and association.

9 CONCLUSION

An attempt is made in this paper to highlight the various sociological issues that revolve around the theme for 'Librarianship as a profession'. The need for the understanding of sociology of occupations and professions for LIS professionals is stressed. The purpose of the paper is served if the curiosity and mental faculties of the LIS professionals are activated about the issues raised in the paper.

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