

SOCIOLOGY OF LIBRARIANSHIP

By

J. C. BINWAL

Lecturer, Department of Library Sciences,
Banaras Hindu University.

ABSTRACT

Defines 'Sociology of Librarianship'. Indicates the need for its study. Divides it into four areas: (1) Relationship of the Library to other aspects of society, (2) human relations within the library, (3) impact of the library on the behaviour and personality of its participants, (4) the library and the community. Discusses the scope of each of these areas. Indicates the problems for investigation.

We Librarians usually talk in terms of the 'library and the community' or the 'social background to libraries'. The literature of library science is full of references to these topics. 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 in it. Therefore, the present paper is an attempt to define and delineate the scope of sociology of librarianship.

1. *What*

Sociology of librarianship may be defined as the scientific analysis of the social processes and social patterns involved in the library system.

A-PDF Mergers DEMO: Purchase from www.A-PDF.com to remove the watermark
It is held that librarianship is a combination of social acts and that sociology is the analysis of human interaction.

2. *Why*

Of all the social institutions which contribute to the life long education of people by preservation, organisation and dissemination of embodied knowledge, the library is far and away the most significant. Libraries come in contact with more people for a greater variety of reasons than many other institutions. The functions of the libraries are becoming more and more complicated as the societies become more complex. It is one of the functions of libraries to help in moulding the

society but in this process they also get moulded by the society, which makes them most complex institutions.

Further all human activity is carried on in a social setting. The outcome of an activity to a greater extent depends upon the nature of that setting, the accuracy with which it can be defined and consequently better understood and its impact on the activity being carried on. Library service is one of the activities and, therefore, gets influenced, by the social setting in which it takes place. Libraries are basically social institutions. Their primary function is to preserve and to disseminate the best of the knowledge, ideas, and customs of one's culture. As social institutions, libraries are necessarily affected by the social and economic situations and changes in cultural patterns. They also contribute to social and cultural changes.

Closely related to the above is the need for an understanding of the patterns of social interaction and social roles within an institution and the relation of personalities of that institution to outside groups. Such an understanding contributes to efficient functioning of the institution. Library is such a social institution where interaction goes on continuously among staff members, among readers and between readers and staff members, where there are several social roles and where the personalities have to maintain relations with the outside groups.

3. *Scope*

From the foregoing discussions, the following tentative outline of sociology of librarianship can be derived. It includes subjects on which evidence is available, but also those areas which have been the subject of either no investigation or of limited investigation.

31 *Relationship of the library to other aspects of society*

This area of sociology of librarianship has been the subject of active discussions since long but lacks considerable evidence upon its various aspects. This field of the sociolog of librarianship includes :

- (a) The function of library in culture ;
- (b) The relationship of the library system to the process of social control and power system ;
- (c) The role of the library in the processes of social and cultural change ;
- (d) The relationship of library to the social class or status system ; and

- (e) The role of the library in the relationship among racial, cultural and other groups.

32 *Human relations within the library*

This field of the sociology of librarianship includes the analysis of the social structure within the library. Library development has sufficient age and stability to have created a considerable body of behaviour patterns which may be described as a library culture. Although it is closely related to the culture of the larger society, the library has some distinctive features of a subculture. Cultural patterns within a library are somewhat different from other aspects of the society. There has been very little work on this area, and much remains to be done to describe and to analyse the nature of this library culture, particularly as it differs from the culture, outside the library.

The library, like other social systems, can also be examined in terms of the positions which the various people in the institution occupy. Different persons behave somewhat differently in each position, but in spite of these personal variations, each situation calls for certain kinds of behaviour. A position in a social group refers to a pattern of behaviour and an expected set of relationships with others in the group. There are expected behaviour patterns generally recognised as necessary to fulfill the position. Therefore, an analysis of the social structure of the library requires examination of the nature of significant positions in the library and the common relationships between them.

In broad terms there are two levels of social structure in a library. One involves the staff and the relationship among them. The second level concerns the readers. Moreover, in order to understand the nature of both social structures, it is necessary, to recognise the relationship between the two levels of groups.

33 *Impact of the library on the behaviour and personality of its participants*

This category of the sociology of librarianship deals with socio-psychological problems associated with it. This area also presents a phenomena of limited investigations.

It has been already indicated that the position involves expectations by those who associate with the person who occupies it, the occupant is influenced accordingly. The expectancies of a particular social situation, as interpreted by the actors in the situation, are termed a role. If the person consistently adopts a particular set of roles in a variety of situa-

tions, his behaviour becomes stabilised and consequently others expect him to behave in these ways. The personality, once fixed, affects in turn the expectancies in each new social situation. Therefore, the role expectations associated with positions in librarianship in varied types of libraries and communities required analysis.

These characteristic patterns of expected behaviour are formulated through the interaction of persons in recurring social situations. The combination of recurring images which a person has of himself and which others have of him is his personality. In accordance with this supposition, personality can be defined as the patterns which characterise the behaviour i.e. ideas, attitudes, and actions of a person in dealing with himself, other persons, and situations. This leads us to the fact that the librarian's personality requires investigation.

The librarian takes a variety of roles in various social situations. These roles require particular patterns of behaviour in many situations. Such behaviour is said to be typical of librarians. Therefore, an analysis of the roles which librarians play in various social situations can provide the foundation for an investigation of the hypothesis that librarians can be characterised as having an occupational personality. In this respect, the relationship between occupational role prescriptions and the personality of persons occupying the positions also requires investigation. The present evidences suggest that a librarian occupational type can be identified, but much more empirical research is necessary before valid generalisations can be made about it.

Even if it is established that the librarians do have distinguishable personality characteristics, it may require further investigation that whether the occupation selects the type or the personality is formed by the conditions of life within the occupation, or both. Besides these, there is a need for studies concerning personality maladjustments among librarians.

Although the behaviour of the librarian is of vital interest, the major significance of this behaviour lies in its effect on the readers. Relatively little attention has been devoted to this aspect. An examination of the responses of readers to different types of librarian behaviour is warranted. There are probably as many distinguishable features of librarian behaviour in relation to readers as there are situation in which they interact.

34 *The Library and the Community*

Libraries do not operate in a vacuum. They are part and parcel of the community which nurtures them. Therefore, a fundamental

criterion of librarian's effectiveness and skill should be the ability to understand, to appraise, to interpret and to utilise the community.

Community has been defined by Lloyd and Flaine F. Cook as "A population aggregate, inhabiting a contiguous territory, integrated through common experience, possessing a number of basic service institutions, conscious of its local unity, and able to act in a corporate capacity".

Communities differ in size. Size is an important factor in determining the way of life in any community. In the smaller communities, social relationships are based on close face to face relationship. In the bigger communities social relationships are contractual in nature.

In addition to size, communities can be classified by function as industrial city, capital city, resort town, mining area, university town etc.

Aspects of a community which affect library system can be enumerated as :

(a) *Demographic characteristics*: Population statistics, trends, composition and characteristics.

(b) *Ecological pattern*: The community's geographical limits, spatial distribution of people, and the location of buildings and service institutions.

(c) *Historical backgrounds*.

(d) *Life activities*: It refers to the behaviours engaged in by the people within the pattern of institutional structure. They include such factors as (1) making a living (2) home and family life (3) health and physical well being (4) training the young (5) spending leisure time (6) getting information (7) religious behaviour (8) politics, law and order (9) social class, and (10) the world outside.

(e) *Value system*: Every community has a system of values.

(f) *Power system*: Every community has a system of power relations arranged in a hierarchy. Power is the ability to dominate or to compel action.

(g) *Stage of technology in the community*.

In the days when libraries were designed primary for the intellectual elite, there was little need for community centred libraries. But with the spread of democracy, the masses began to look to the library for fulfilment of their various needs. This set the stage for a close association between the library and the community. Evidences are available on this topic. Yet an extensive amount of research is necessary to have generalisation on :

- (i) How libraries relate to the community;
- (ii) How libraries can utilise community resources; and
- (iii) How community can use the library as a service centre for the community.

CONCLUSION :

Librarianship in India today stands at cross roads. No doubt, we have been in a position to develop a body of theory, yet the service aspects of our libraries present a phenomena of neglect. A little and careful thought may attribute it to the scanty attention that has been paid to social aspects of librarianship. Therefore, India needs extensive and intensive investigations on the topics indicated in this paper. This may in turn require revision of the syllabus for the advanced training in Library Science, to which our library science experts should devote serious thoughts.