The History and Development of Libraries and Library Science Education in India

Introduction

India is the world’s second most populous nation, with nearly 1.2 billion inhabitants as of July 2010. 55% of India’s citizens are poor and nearly 40% are illiterate. Although compulsory education is required for children until the age of 14, only 15% of Indian students reach high school. In a nation plagued with high illiteracy and widespread poverty, libraries have great potential to transform the lives of India’s people. As noted by Dwarika Banerjee, the director of the National Library of India, “since education is a process of interaction between learners and information sources, the library serves as a learning resource center.” Formal schooling beyond the primary years may be unattainable for most, but all should be able to utilize the library as a “learning resource center”. Unfortunately, the development of libraries in this nation has not been uniform, leaving many without access to adequate facilities and unable to seek the guidance of library professionals. This paper discusses the history and development of libraries in India, as well as the development of the country’s formal library and information science education system. It also outlines the current status of LIS education and addresses some of the contemporary issues faced by LIS students and professionals.

The History and Development of Libraries in India
The first libraries created in India were tied to the Buddhist educational system, established in the 5th century BC. Although it is believed that the reading and writing of manuscripts in India began around the 4th or 5th century BC, no evidence for writing dated before the 3rd century BC exists. Prior to this, knowledge was passed from teacher to student through oral communication. “Primarily religious and the privilege of the priestly class, the vast literature in ancient India existed in oral communication only and was not available in writing”.

Upon the development of writing in India, Buddhist educational institutions began to transition from oral to written systems of instruction. Shortly thereafter, libraries began to emerge at Buddhist schools.

Ancient Indian libraries were established primarily in religious, academic and royal settings. Records attributed to Chinese Buddhist travelers from the 4th through 7th centuries AD note the existence of monastic and university libraries as well as libraries attached to palaces. Non-university libraries connected with religious sects hoping to preserve the “literary heritage of their faiths” were also common. Many religious temples had colleges with attached libraries that were open to all members of the community who came to the temple for worship.

Private royal libraries and those possessed by scholars and the wealthy increased in number and size between the 13th and 18th centuries but were primarily off-limits to the public. During the 17th and 18th centuries, as Europeans constructed settlements in India, Christian missionaries established printing and libraries with the goal of spreading religion. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, academic institutions with attached libraries were founded in India by British colonists. These libraries are the basis of India’s modern academic libraries.

Until the 19th century, libraries were created and used almost exclusively by royalty, the wealthy, scholars, and religious/monastic organizations. “The early libraries did not serve as an
instrument of mass education… The modern concept of a library being a service institution was missing”\textsuperscript{16}. By the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, some cities had subscription libraries but as in the United States, these were only used by upper class citizens who could afford membership\textsuperscript{17}. The general public still had little access to libraries. In 1835, private sources founded the Calcutta Public Library as an institution to serve the public\textsuperscript{18}. In 1902, the Calcutta Public Library was merged with the Imperial Library at Calcutta (established in 1891) to create The National Library of India\textsuperscript{19}.

In 1885, the Indian National Congress was founded, prompting a rise in Indian nationalism and stimulating public interest in libraries. India’s public library movement began in earnest in 1906 after Sayajrao Gaekwar III, the Maharaja of Baroda State, visited the United States and was “greatly impressed by the role played by public libraries in the advancement of education”. He appointed William Borden, an American librarian from Connecticut, to oversee the formation of a public library system in Baroda. Although this library system had deteriorated significantly by 1947 due to lack of state support, the seed for India’s modern public library movement had been planted\textsuperscript{20}.

In 1948, one year after India gained independence from the British, the Madras (Tamil Nadu) Public Library Act was passed. Madras was the first state post-independence to introduce legislation with provisions for a public library system. Librarian, professor and library advocate S.R. Ranganathan developed and campaigned for library acts in all Indian states\textsuperscript{21} and during the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, nine other Indian states followed suit to “enact library legislation for the establishment and maintenance of public libraries”\textsuperscript{22}.

Although the national government introduced “Five-Year Plans” in 1951 to improve library service and access for all, India’s Parliament has yet to pass any national library
legislation. Under India’s constitution, libraries fall under state jurisdiction and each state is responsible for developing and maintaining its own libraries. Presently, there are approximately 59,000 public libraries in India, but the majority of these offer only small, outdated collections, limited hours, and under-qualified staff.

**LIS Training and Education**

India’s formal LIS training and education programs began in 1911 when Borden established a library science training course at the Central Library in Baroda. A handful of years later, in 1915, Punjab University’s librarian Asa Don Dickinson established a training program for working college and university librarians. In 1929, the Madras Library Association began offering a certificate course in librarianship. Two years later, the course was taken over by the University of Madras and in 1937, converted into a yearlong postgraduate diploma. In 1946, the first Department of Library Science was created at the University of Delhi and in 1951, the university began awarding MLIS degrees rather than diplomas upon program completion. This was the first full-scale MLIS program in India. Over the next dozen or so years, LIS departments were established at six other universities.

Currently, India has over 100 institutions offering LIS programs at various levels. Distance learning programs and correspondence classes are offered at more than two dozen institutions. Eight different LIS certificates and degrees are offered by educational institutions in India. These include a certificate course in Library and Information Science (C.Lib.Sc.), a diploma in Library and Information Science, the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (B.Lib.Sc./BLIS), the Master of Library and Information Science (M.Lib.Sc./MLIS), a Postgraduate Diploma in Library Automation and Networking (PGDLAN), the Master of
Philosophy in Library and Information Science (M.Phil.), a Doctor of Philosophy in Library and Information Science (Ph.D.), and a Doctor of Letters in Library and Information Science (D.Litt.) Additionally, several institutions offer an Associateship in Information Sciences, which some universities consider to be equivalent to the MLIS degree.

Unlike library employment requirements in the United States, LIS students in India are not required to obtain an MLIS in order to obtain librarian positions after program completion. Although some job listings indicate a preference for or requirement of a Master of Library and Information Science rather than a Bachelor of Library and Information Science, both are designed to prepare students for professional positions in college and university libraries or for school librarian positions. Generally, those possessing a BLIS will be limited to junior professional positions while those possessing an MLIS will be able to obtain senior professional positions. Certificate and diploma courses train students for junior level or semi-professional jobs, including library clerk and library attendant positions.

**Issues in LIS**

India’s library and information science field faces a number of significant issues. Perhaps the most pressing of these is the extreme inequity in access to information and distribution of library resources and services from one region to the next. While some areas have adequate facilities and up-to-date materials, many others do not. Rural areas in particular lack sufficient library and information resources. While ten states have passed library legislation to provide access to all, the other 18 have not. As stated by Dwarika Banerjee, the director of India’s National Library,
On one end of the spectrum the country can boast of a highly specialized information retrieval system, but at the other end stands the common man who has no access even to basic reading material or advice because the lack of a public library network spread throughout the length and breadth of this vast country. While there is an “information flood” in some places, there is an “information drought” in many others.\(^{37}\)

Library and information science professionals are also faced with the task of providing information access to the large segment of the population that is illiterate. Individuals who lack basic reading abilities may have an even greater need for library services and guidance from information professionals than those who are literate, due to their inability to make use of print materials without assistance.

In India, as in the United States, one of the most critical LIS issues relates to the role and significance of traditional libraries in an increasingly technological and information-centered society. While technology is rapidly changing and it is necessary for individuals to become fluent in its use, the basic issue of literacy is still huge in India. With nearly 40% of India’s population- and over 50% of its female population\(^{38}\)- unable to read, it is hard to argue that focus and resources should be shifted to the information and technology areas of the LIS discipline, especially if at the expense of basic library services and literacy support. It is imperative that India’s libraries encourage literacy, but it is also essential that they keep pace with the technological advancements and new information formats being utilized by the rest of the world.

Another major issue affecting library and information science professionals and educators is that of LIS program accreditation. In India, there is no overseeing accrediting body to ensure that programs meet minimum standards related to curriculum, faculty qualifications, materials, facilities, or evaluation methods\(^{39}\). Although the national government’s University Grants
Commission recommends a model curriculum for LIS programs to follow\textsuperscript{40}, most schools do not apply these suggestions and instead opt to design their own curriculums. This results in substantial disparities from one program to the next and a lack of consistency in LIS education\textsuperscript{41}.

Because programs are not required to report to any accreditation agency, many institutions’ curricula are out-of-date and do not reflect the changing needs of the LIS field or the trend toward automation and technology in libraries. A lack of relevant computer and technology courses and practical exposure leaves many graduates ill-prepared to work in modern libraries upon graduation\textsuperscript{42}. As noted by P.K. Jain of the University of Delhi’s Institute of Economic Growth, “most of the computerized libraries suffer from paucity of competent personnel at top and middle level managerial positions”\textsuperscript{43}. Adequate training on the use of information technology is severely lacking at programs offered by rural educational institutions in particular\textsuperscript{44}.

Those currently enrolled in LIS programs also must deal with the severe lack of resources and quality faculty available at most educational institutions. Because there is no required accreditation process for LIS programs, many schools have been established without adequate facilities or properly trained staff, resulting in subpar student training and education\textsuperscript{45}. Many schools do not offer access to the latest reference sources or textbook editions and most lack well-equipped computer facilities\textsuperscript{46}. Access to electronic databases is limited, often due to the prohibitively high cost of subscribing to foreign databases\textsuperscript{47}. Many schools have no libraries and others have libraries with inadequate or outdated collections\textsuperscript{48}. As a result, students of these programs graduate with deficiencies in many practical areas of librarianship as well as insufficient knowledge of the most current theory and research.
Finally, the job market for India’s library and information science professionals is grim. LIS programs graduate numbers far in excess of market demand, resulting in prevalent underemployment and unemployment\(^49\). The large number of schools graduating students despite a lack of adequate facilities has “resulted in mass production of substandard library professionals”\(^50\) who are not qualified to work in libraries, further exacerbating the problem of unemployment. The wages for library and information science professionals are also quite low in India\(^51\), creating a situation where even those who are able to find work may not be able to earn a living wage.

**Conclusion**

For some of the more difficult issues faced by India’s library and information science field- for example, literacy and equitable access for all- no immediate solutions are obvious. These issues will likely require major governmental intervention and changes in centuries-old cultural traditions and social structures. However, it seems that many of the other issues presented could be solved or alleviated by establishing an accreditation process for LIS programs. Accreditation would standardize the curriculum and place in effect minimum requirements for facilities and resources, helping to ensure that students are well-prepared for the workforce upon graduation. Elimination of substandard programs would presumably also reduce job market oversaturation, as fewer programs should produce fewer graduates overall, thus aligning job market supply more closely with demand. All of these changes should improve the job prospects for LIS professionals and increase the quality of library workers, benefitting both libraries and their users.
Evaluation of Secondary Sources

Overall, I was extremely satisfied with the sources I selected for this project. Searching the University of Hawaii’s online databases yielded a half-dozen or so articles that appeared quite promising. I ended up discarding two of the six that I initially selected as they were less relevant than the four I reference in my paper, but all contained useful information on the topics of library history and library science education in India. If I had to select the most helpful article of the four that I used, it would be Singh’s “Library and Information Science Education in India: Issues and Trends”, which covers the historical background and present status of LIS education in India and does an excellent job of highlighting some of the contemporary issues faced by professionals in the field. I would recommend this article as a starting point for anyone researching the development of library science education in India.

Both of the books that I cite in this paper were much more detailed than I needed, which made my research a bit difficult. The Munshi book covers ancient Indian libraries in extensive detail. Unless one already has significant knowledge of ancient India and East Asian religions and culture, I would recommend avoiding this resource. Without background knowledge of the general topics the author is writing about (ancient India/East Asian religions and culture), the relevant library facts presented are hard to find and the text is hard to follow. Further, this author only covers ancient and medieval libraries, so researchers will not find anything about India’s colonial or modern libraries. The other book that I used (Patel/Kumar), although also far more detailed than I needed to write a “brief” history, was really helpful. It provides a general history of India’s libraries from creation to present day, and provides separate sections on the development of India’s public, school, and academic libraries in subsequent chapters. I would recommend this resource to researchers looking to replicate this historical study.
7 Joshu Patel and Krishan Kumar, Libraries and Librarianship in India (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 79.
10 Patel, 3.
11 Munshi, 67.
12 Patel, 4.
13 Patel, 7.
14 Patel, 80.
15 Patel, 8.
16 Patel, 80.
17 Patel, 80.
18 Patel, 80.
19 Patel, 9.
20 Patel, 81.
21 Banerjee, 354.
22 Patel, 82.
23 Patel, 88.
24 Patel, 93.
25 Patel, 104.
28 Sharma, 80.
29 Singh, 2.
31 Singh, 2.
32 Jain, 481.
33 Singh, 4.
35 Singh, 4.
36 Banerjee, 360.
37 Banerjee, 361.
39 Jain, 485.
40 Jain, 486.
41 Singh, 7.
42 Jain, 483.
43 Jain, 481.
44 Jain, 483.
45 Sharma, 87.
46 Singh, 8.
47 Sharma, 88.
48 Singh, 8.
49 Jain, 486.
50 Singh, 7.
51 Jain, 485.