

LIBRARY HERALD

April 1964

Vol 7 No 1

A (Lecture)

CHOOSING A CAREER : LIBRARIANSHIP *

Dr S R RANGANATHAN

Honorary Professor,
Documentation Research and Training Centre
Bangalore.

0 Introduction

Career is defined as the way of making a livelihood. It denotes the profession or vocation adopted by a person. The career will colour the life of a person all through his life. Usually it imposes on him a scale of values. The choice of career is a major decision to be made by a person at the time of entering his adulthood. Sometimes the decision is made for him much earlier by somebody else—by his parents, for example. Sometimes, it may prove to be a Hobson's choice as a result of the conditions prevailing in the society. It will be so in an under-developed society or in a politically subservient one. It was so in India during the British period. But today India is independent. It is developing fast. It is extending its activities into several spheres. Therefore, a young Indian has now freedom in the choice of his career.

01 GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN CHOICE

Let us then look for some guiding principles in choosing the career. These guiding principles stem from a three-fold urge in man—realization of happiness (sukha), joy (pramoda), and delight (ananda). Happiness is derived in the vital plane. It concerns the body and its needs. Joy is derived in the mental plane. It concerns the intellect and its achievement. Delight is derived in the spiritual plane. It concerns the intuition and its flowering.

*Broadcast talk from AIR, Bangalore, on 18 December 1963.

CHOOSING A CAREER : LIBRARIANSHIP

1 Guiding Principle 1 : Money

Man wants satisfaction in respect of his physical wants. Physical wants belong to the vital plane. They concern food, shelter, clothing, transport, and all kinds of possessions which meet the needs of the body. All these cost money. Till recently, some people inherited money. They had, therefore, no concern with career. But today, the pattern of our public finance, the pattern of our taxes, and the very wish of our country to reach a socialistic pattern are reducing the chances for inheriting money. Every person will therefore soon have to earn his money through his own work. Viewed from this angle, any person would like to choose that career which carries a good salary. This we may call the first guiding principle in the choice of a career.

2 Librarianship

Let us apply this principle to librarianship. Fifty years ago, the career of librarianship did not exist in our country. It was part of the lower clerical service. There were very few libraries, and these were looked after by persons following some other remunerative career, with the help of a clerical staff. Fifty years ago, the Gaekwad of Baroda brought a professional librarian from the United States. But he did not stay long.

21 DAWN OF LIBRARIANSHIP AS A CAREER

Forty years ago, the University of Madras created a librarian's post with a fairly good salary scale—comparable to that of any other profession. This marks the dawn of library career in India. Having been appointed to that post, I had been endeavouring for several years to make librarianship offer a well-paid career for our young men. But success was very slow, during the first twenty years.

22 FIRST STRIDE : DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARIES

In 1946, it was possible for me to persuade the Varadachariar Pay Commission of the Government of India to recognise librarianship as an academic profession and to fix the scale of salary for the librarians in the Government of India on par with that of professors, readers, and lecturers in universities. Shortly thereafter, the advent of the American libraries into our country gave me another opportunity to

fix some of our young men and women in the library career with an equally attractive scale of salary. This marks the first major stride of the library career in India.

23 SECOND STRIDE : ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

In 1958, the Chairman of the University Grants Commission was a seasoned administrator and a far seeing statesman. It was Dr C D Deshmukh. He invited me to chair the Library Committee of the Commission. With the willing co-operation, it was possible to secure for the librarians of universities and colleges the same salary scale and status as that of professors, readers, and lecturers. This marks the second major stride of the library career in India. It is hoped that the librarians working in the public library sector will also soon have a similar benefit.

3 Guiding Principle 2 : Intellectual Growth

Man does not live by bread alone, as the saying goes. Money is necessary. But it is not sufficient for the fulfilment of a person's life. It can give him physical happiness, but not mental joy. A career without opportunity for intellectual achievement will not give the necessary mental joy. It will not attract able young persons, with a spirit of enterprise. Those that are attracted will soon wither away as personalities, even as those who live merely on inherited wealth. A young person of today therefore wants some scope for adventure in the career chosen. Librarianship offers full scope for adventure in the intellectual plane. During the last thirty years, library science has emerged with its own fundamental laws and with its own methodology for adapting library service so as to meet the challenge of the ever-changing conditions and needs of society and also of the turbulent changes ever happening in the universe of knowledge. The career of librarianship has therefore given me ample joy during the last forty years. I can therefore assure our young persons of high intellectual order that there is as much opportunity in librarianship to derive joy through intellectual achievement, as there is in other careers.

4 False Advice by Parents

Here I want to give a warning. Two years ago about twenty

young men taking a course in library science in a university met me. They were mostly persons with a good post-graduate degree. I asked them what made them choose the library career. They first said that their parents had turned them on to that career. I asked them "Do you know the opportunities in library career?" They said, "We do not know. We have come to you just to know about them." I asked them, "What made your parents thrust you into the library careers without knowing its opportunities?" They gave a shocking reply. "Our parents tell us" they said, "that there is now much money in the library career, without any serious work whatever." I asked, "Are you going to be satisfied with money alone? As young men of new India, do you not require a career which will be a challenge to your intellectual capacity?" Only a few of them said, "Yes, we do want joy from intellectual work. Will the library career give us that joy?" I assured them it would. I also told them that to derive that joy from library career, they would have to do very hard work.

5 Guiding Principle 3 : Delight of Creation

Many may be satisfied with happiness in the vital plane and joy in the intellectual plane. But a few may not feel this to be sufficient. They won't feel satisfied until there is delight flowing from creative work. To these few, I can give the assurance that there is unending opportunity for creative work, in the library career. It is particularly so today since fundamental research in librarianship has begun only just now. It is virgin soil. It has been giving me an opportunity for creative work and a good harvest of delight all these forty years.

6 Quantitative Aspect

"How many young men can find a place in the library career in our country?" This is a very important question. Before our independence, there were very few places in the library career. But after our independence, the position has changed completely. The Madras Public Library Act of 1948 has already covered the Tamil Nadu as well as the Andhra Pradesh with a network of public libraries. Mysore desires to achieve something similar. In this desire, it has taken from me a public library bill, which it is hoped, will soon become an Act. The Kerala Government too has done similarly. It will not be long before every constituent state of India has a statutory public library grid. Then there will be about 350 district library

systems and 500 city library systems. Universities and colleges are increasing in number. There will soon be about 100 university libraries and perhaps 2,000 college libraries. There will also be a number of school libraries. The country is forging ahead in industrialization. It has by now learnt that it cannot make much progress if it depended only on the import of outmoded designs and techniques. Our industries will soon have their own research establishments, as their first line of support. In their turn, then research establishments will have specialist libraries as their own line of support. There are also the national laboratories both on the civil side and on the defence side. This gives an indication of the scope for library career in India today and tomorrow. In 1950, I made an estimate of possible number of posts in the library career. I arrived at about 100,000. Now it is sure to be in the neighbourhood of 200,000. About 150,000 of these posts may be only semi-professional. But the other 50,000 posts will surely give the joy of intellectual achievement. At least 500 of these will also provide opportunities for the delight of creative work.

7 An Appeal to Aspirants to Library Career

In one essential respect, the work of a librarian is different from that of an engineer, an agriculturist, or a doctor. Any mistake done by the latter will soon show forth. Public opinion will immediately be alerted to apply the correction. But the results of a librarian's work are deferred—deferred beyond a generation. Further, our people do not yet know their library rights. Therefore, to be useful to society, a librarian should sail during his career on the steam of his own conscience. Otherwise he will soon degenerate, fail to derive delight and joy from his career, and fall to the level of a mercenary. He will then be a curse not only to himself but also to society. On the other hand, the work of a devoted librarian will bless him as well as the society he serves. May India be blessed with such conscientious librarians of a high level of integrity.