APPRENTICESHIP

S. R. Ranganathan

[Stresses that library science is a professional subject. The know-how has to be learnt by actual work in a library. The fundamentals of the science have to be learnt in a library school. The course in the fundamentals can be made realistic and effective only if the students have already served at least for six months in a busy library. Such a prior apprenticeship should be made a necessary condition for admission to a course in library science.]

Library Science is a professional subject. The profession falls within the sphere of social service in the intellectual plane. This fact carries with it certain implications. To take a professional course with profit, some preliminary acquaintance with the know-how of the profession is necessary. This cannot be learnt from book alone. Nor can it be learnt from lectures alone or tutorial work alone. It is best learnt by doing. A certain hand and eye training is necessary. A wide acquaintance with the highways and byways in the book world is necessary. Familiarity with the psychology of readers is necessary. These can only be acquired by apprentice service in a busy library.

In the older professions, at one time, the entire training was through apprenticeship. It was so in medicine. We have examples of the great success of this method even to-day. In March 1953, I had occasion to consult an Ayurvedic physician. He examined me. Then his son did so. The latter checked up his diagnosis with that of his father. The son drafted the prescription. The father corrected it here and there explaining the reason. I was charmed by the intimacy and the thoroughness of this method of "individual pedagogy". The father and son worked together in preparing the
medicine. It was so in building-construction. It was so in agriculture. It was so in music. It was so in all the other arts and crafts.

In modern times, economic pressure makes it difficult to make the entire course of training in a profession one of apprenticeship under a master. Moreover each profession has long since emerged from the purely repetitive stage. It has become dynamic. Mere imitation of the master is inadequate. The routine work of the profession has to be often changed and lifted to higher level. It has to be improved continuously. This cannot be left solely to the off-chance of a genius doing it in the intuitional plane. It has to be done in the intellectual plane. For this, the members of the profession should get an insight into the fundamentals forming the foundation of the profession’s work. Therefore, apprenticeship is not sufficient. And yet the other professions deem it necessary and continue it. It is rightly so. For both theoretical instruction and practical apprenticeship is necessary. Therefore professional institutes make apprenticeship in an approved factory for a prescribed period a necessary condition for admission to its courses.

Historically, the library profession depended solely on apprenticeship in its early years. It was so till the turn of the present century. Then some sort of theoretical instruction was given as a supplement to the apprenticeship. This tradition has led to the healthy practice of preferring for the library course persons with experience of work in some approved library.

During the first fifteen years, my rule had been to admit to the library school only persons who had been working in libraries. This made class-work realistic to the students. But during the last nine years, various forces have led to the admission of raw graduates to the course. Sometimes old persons of other professions are deputed by governments. The exceptionally able among them get on all right. But the majority of the students without library experience fail to get full benefit from the course. The teaching work also becomes ineffective. Such candidates have had no acquaintance with reference books of any sort. Their knowledge of the book
world is appallingly poor. The nature of the instruction prevailing in the colleges has seldom made them go beyond their text-books and notes. Nor have they had any experience of keeping records, or writing accounts or of doing any systematic work.

I have been feeling that the teaching effort is often wasted on such persons. They persist in carrying into the professional course the method of cram-work which proved sufficient in their degree course. I am convinced that we can get a satisfactory return in the library schools only if prior apprenticeship in an approved library is made a condition for admission.

I should suggest six months as a minimum period for apprenticeship. To make this practicable, some of the good libraries in the land should be willing to take aspirants to the library profession as apprentices. This means that the permanent staff of the library should give the apprentices guidance in picking up the know-how. They should take responsibility to make the apprentices maintain a diary of their work and certify satisfactory completion of the apprenticeship course. The head of a library school should keep in touch with such libraries and place their prospective students in them for apprenticeship.

In India today apprenticeship is often made a ritual in some professions. In Engineering for example a student takes his apprenticeship course only after completing his four or five years of theoretical course. This is to a large extent putting the cart before the horse. On the other hand I have found that some of the good engineering institutions in the West insist on apprenticeship of at least one year before admission to the theoretical course. I am keen that the new profession of Library Science should not imitate the Indian approach to apprenticeship. It should put apprenticeship first and instruction in a College of Library Science second.