UNIT 4: ON DEMAND REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Define reference and information service;
- Explain the need and purpose of reference and information service;
- Able to establish the reference and information service section in the library;
- Know the different types of reference and information service;
- Know about the different types of reference sources of information.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Reference service in the early years of the twentieth century was limited in general to the instruction and guidance. The implied policy was of minimal assistance and emphasis on the librarian as instructor. Librarians, however, soon found themselves increasingly drawn into “fact finding” and providing direct information service. The need for librarians

to become more expert in diverse fields led eventually to a growing trend towards subject specialization in reference.

The Reference and Information Services Section addresses all aspects of reference works, in all types of libraries, in all regions of the world. Current interests encompass the new electronic environment and the resulting changes in reference work, role of the reference librarian, and the quality of reference services.

4.3 DEFINITION

According to Ranganathan, reference service is personal service to each reader in helping him to find the document answering his interest at the moment pin pointedly, exhaustively and expeditiously. It is the process of establishing "contact between the right reader and right book at the right time and in the right personal way".

According to James I Wayer, reference work is "that part of library administration which deals with the assistance given to readers in their use of the resources of the library". This definition is too narrow because in these days, the reference librarian assists the readers to use resources outside his/her own library.

Samuel Rothstein defines reference service as "the personal assistance given by the libraries to individual readers in pursuit of information".

According to Hutchins, "reference work includes the direct, personal aid within a library to persons in search of information for whatever purpose and also various library activities especially aimed at making information as easily available as possible".

ALA Glossary states, "reference service is that phase of library work which is directly concerned with assistance to readers in securing information and in using the resources of the library in study and research".

4.4 NEED AND PURPOSE

The demand for reference and information services in libraries grew exponentially with the end of World War II and the tremendous growth in higher education that followed. In general, the need and purpose of reference service arises from the following facts

a) **Complex Nature of Library Tools and Techniques:** In order to facilitate the use of the library, the librarian provides various tools like classification numbers, library catalogue (OPAC), shelf list, written guides of various kinds, bibliographies, indexing and abstracting of journals / books, etc. But all these tools are based on complex rules and practices and the users are not supposed to be aware of the ways by which they can be operated. So, there need to be a reference librarian in the library who can serve as a sort of canvassing agent for these tools.

b) **Increase Volume of Information:** A variety of information sources emerged in large numbers. It is so large that it is impossible for the reader to keep track of its variety and its location. So, there is a need of reference service for the selection of the right kind of document at less possible time.

c) **Peculiarities of Sources of Information:** Each kind of information source follows its own practices in the arrangements of entries, provision of subject headings, preparation of indexes, etc. So, it is not always easy to get the desired information out of some sources of information (indexing and abstracting journals, bibliographies, encyclopaedia, etc) without the help of the reference librarian.

d) **Lack of Time:** Information has a value only if they are received in time and put into practice. But many research teams and others do not have the time required to search for information in their parallel development. It is also not desirable to expect from a highly paid research scientist to spend time in search for the literature in libraries. It is also unprofitable for the parent organization. So, the trend is to seek the help of a reference librarian to get the information in time, for

the preparation of bibliographies, indexes, abstracts, and for arranging for translation etc.

e) **Personal Psychology:** The users may be of shy nature, gentle, aggressive, and meek; they may be less educated or highly educated and so on. They need to be taken care of by a person when they come to a library for the first time. Otherwise, they may feel utterly lost or confused with the result that they may not come again. Even those who come regularly to the library would need occasional personal assistance. All these call for an arrangement for reference and information service on demand.

f) **Promote and Support Library Service:** A good reference and information service is bound to encourage the use of the library. The satisfied users serve as a friend of the library and can lead to greater library support. After all, the reference service is treated as the hub of all the activities of the library. It may be considered as the ultimate manifestation of the laws of library science.

g) **National Economy:** Sometimes the questions on a subject or topic are repetitive in nature in the event of some local function. If each answer seekers goes to find the answer on their own, a lot of man – hours will be wasted. So, in this regard reference service helps the national economy by saving the time for the users.

4.5 STRATEGIES IN ESTABLISHING A REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICE

For establishing the reference and information service, or to provide the reference and information service, the librarian needs to go through the following steps:

a) **Determining Aims and Objectives of the Library:** The kind of reference service being provided would vary from library to library. The service being rendered would depend upon the type of library, its aims and objectives, its collection, the objectives of the reference section and the philosophy of the chief librarian. The librarian should

not waste much time in providing answers to the questions that do not come within the scope of the parent organization, and the library.

b) Staffing: Library and information science professionals should be appointed to look after the on-demand reference and information service.

c) Facilities Organization: In addition to an extensive research/reading room, there is also the need of a multimedia room equipped with high-speed computers with Internet and multimedia capabilities, phone / fax machine in the reference section so that the Reference Librarian can instantly provide the answers sought.

d) Building Reference Collection: The maintenance of the print reference collections including dictionaries, directories, and encyclopaedia is a must for any kind of reference service. Compiling bibliographies, establishing and maintaining vertical files, preparing displays, bulletin boards, and exhibits also often fall within the scope of the Reference staff. Some fugitive materials consisting of newspaper-cuttings, magazine clippings, folders and collection of some similar kinds of materials should also be included in the reference section.

e) Gathering Knowledge of the Subject: The librarian should have a sound knowledge about all the reference collections in his library. He should also know about the search engine, subject directories and so on.

f) Marketing/Visibility: The library reference services should be marketed extensively to get the attention of the library users.

g) Origin of the Query: Queries to the Reference Librarian can be made by the library user himself physically, by post, through phone calls, email, online chat, and so on. The Reference Librarian should be in a position to answer the queries in a mode suitable for the user. He should be able to provide answer to the fact-finding question on phone / chat instantly.

h) Reference Interview: A user will feel the need for information. He may approach the Information / Reference desk and make a request for information in the form of a specific query. In the first attempt the

Reference Librarian should determine the readers' problem. He should be able to state clearly what the reader wants.

i) **Initiating the Search*:*** The Reference Librarian should pick up the keywords to search in bibliographies, indexes, online databases, subject search engines and so on. By using the prior knowledge he/ she should be able to decide the order in which each of the various sources available should be consulted and then should follow the possible short-cut method.

j) **Solving the Query:** The reference librarian finds out and provide the answer to a specific question raised by the library user. The information sought by the enquirer, its quality and level will depend on the query and type of the question. It may take the form of delivering the specific information itself or directs him to appropriate sources of information. The librarian may also get the concerned information translated and provide the translated version of the document. He may provide a self prepared subject bibliography, delivering the result of the literature search and so on. In all cases the reference librarian's answer should be user-centric.

k) **Ethics and the Provision of High Quality Service:** The library users have different psychological temperaments, some are seek and inert, some have a superiority complex while some are not articulate enough to express their wants or needs correctly or in a precise manner, and some others may be of limited patience. The reference librarian should follow some basic ethics to deal with every one. He should not share his personal experience about the users with others.

l) **Assimilation:** In the reference service the experience is the most important thing. The librarian should periodically able to absorb information and learn from his experience so that in near future if same type of problem arises his movement should directly lead him to the path most likely to provide the information he wants.

m) **Sharing Experience with Others:** A reference librarian should try to share his experience with his colleagues in the reference section. During his work, he would discover certain weakness in the collection,

in the library catalogue, in the arrangement of documents, etc. He should make suggestions to his colleagues in various sections of the library to bring about the necessary improvement in the functioning of the library.

The reference librarian would also be dealing with the indexing and abstracting services prepared by outside organization, bibliographies, national and international document service. He should also share and point out the shortcoming of such tools to respective authorities.

n) Continuing Education of Reference Librarians: The reference librarian should be regularly sent for training. For him training is essential to find the information he needs. Besides, the emergence of the digital information sources and the rapid changes in technologies make it necessary for the librarians to go for training periodically.

4.6 TYPES OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICE

The emergence of the internet extends the reference librarian's ability to provide diverse and complex services and potentiality to show their real professional expertise to meet the demand put on them.

a) James I Wyer Theories: In considering the scope of reference services, James I Wyer proposed three theories of reference service i.e conservative, moderate and liberal. Samuel Rothstein called them minimum, middling, and maximum.

i) Conservative: It includes giving occasional personal assistance to the inexperienced and bewildered reader. It limits the help to pointing the way only and so it is traditional in nature.

ii) Moderate: The moderate reference service goes beyond providing mere instruction to actually helping the reader in using the book or finding the document and facts, etc.

ii) Liberal: It includes the provision of the full and direct supply of reliable information to the readers.

b) Edward B. Reeve's Categories: Edward B. Reeve and others have categorized the activities of reference staff into the following five categories on the basis of related functions.

i) *Instructional Activities:* These are characterized by explicit teaching function.

ii) *Skill Maintenance Activities:* These are related to up-dating the knowledge of reference tools.

iii) *Patron Service Activities:* This deals with providing information to the users of the reference service.

iv) *Maintenance Activities:* These are house keeping activities.

v) *Surrogate Activities:* These are those activities which the reference staffs perform on behalf of the other departments / sections of the library.

c) Dr. S. R. Ranganathan's Classification: Dr. S. R. Ranganathan identified two aspects of reference work - Ready reference service and Long range reference service.

i) *Ready Reference Service:* Most of the ready reference services are of the nature of fact finding types that can be finished in a very short time – in a moment if possible. The librarian generally uses reference book for providing such kind of services. The need of ready reference services arises from the fact of the complex nature of a reference book, its artificiality, and arrangement of information. The eminent person, foreign dignitaries or scholars generally approach for such type of services. Sometimes some regular customers also need the fact finding reference service because of shortage of time on their part.

ii) *Long Range Reference Service:* The long range Reference Service is based on consulting every possible source of information to arrive at the required information; as such, it is not possible to render this type of service immediately. The time needed may range from half an hour to weeks. The search in the long range reference service starts at the reference books and then goes to the ordinary books,

pamphlets, reports, articles in periodicals, etc. If the information is not available in the library then the search can even go to other local libraries and occasionally to the other libraries in the country. The long range reference service provided today can become the ready reference service tomorrow, as by this time the reference librarian will be able to locate the material quickly from his past experience. Slowly, the scope of long range reference service started expanding. Now bibliographical service, referral service, translation service, etc are considered long range reference services.

d) American Library Association's Categorization: In 1942, the American Library Association undertook a series of library job analysis. This association has stated the following six functions of Reference Service

i) Supervision Function: This function consists of the proper organization of facilities, reference section, selection of reference materials, direction of personnel, and study of the library clientele.

ii) Information Function: There should be an Information Desk where enquiries are received and routed to proper section. The Reference Librarians should be prepared to answer all types of questions and should be able to produce the sources that would answer the questions.

iii) Guidance Function: The Reference librarian should be able to recommend a good book for respective fields. He should be able to give guidance to the readers regarding higher education, career related information or profession or vocation. He can also give guidance to the readers in the location of the document, in the choice of books and other reading materials.

iv) Instruction Function: The Reference librarian should instruct the readers about the working of the library, the location of the material, the use of the catalogue card, the reference book, etc. An initiation or orientation programme should be arranged to familiarize the readers with the library practices and procedures.

v) *Bibliographic Function:* There should be a preparation of bibliographies of interest to the readers so that they are able to know about the books and other reading materials required for their respective subjects.

vi) *Appraisal Function:* The libraries should possess the right kind of materials and reference collections and the staff should be able to get the most out of it.

4.7 GENERAL CATEGORIZATION OF REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICE

The focal point of Reference Service is answering questions posed by the library user. Based on the activity that are performed to meet the user demand, the Reference and Information service can be categorised as follows:

a) Instructional: Instruction in using the library and library resources (bibliography, encyclopaedia, OPAC), assisting the end user to locate the appropriate material within and outside the library, etc are an important function associated with the Reference and Information Service of a library. Questions that range from as simple as "Where are the bound volume?" or "Where is the catalogue?" to research questions that may take hours or even days to properly answer are to be dealt with in this category.

b) Referral Service: It directs enquirers to a source of information which may be an organization or an individual expert. Generally, when a library or information centre does not have the material and cannot obtain it from the sources but it knows the exact location of the document / information, then it can refer the user to the sources of information.

c) Information Scouting: Information scouting service consists of keeping abreast of who has what information and where. Then it can refer the request to the appropriate person and place in the organization or outside it or both. Information scouting is an extended form of referral service.

d) **Citation Verification Service:** Citation Verification Service is intended to verify the citations/references and authentication of bibliographical details of books, articles, reports, theses and other published materials obtained from sources other than the authoritative indexing and abstracting services offered by reputed publishers and licensed database producers. The library patrons need this type of service for the preparation of assignments, dissertations, theses, and project proposals.

e) **Literature Search / Bibliographical Survey:** Literature search may be defined as a systematic search for literature in any form on a particular topic. It forms the very first step of a research pursuit. Otherwise, if a research work is duplicated the valuable time, money and labour of the researcher will be wasted. The literature search is also needed to present the latest available facts in writing articles or topic on any theme. Special library and information centres generally provide literature search facilities to its patrons on demand. Later, the result of the literature search is circulated to the enquirers. A sub type of this service is also known as Database Search Service (DBSS), which intends to obtain information critical to the proposed or ongoing dissertations, theses, post-doctoral research and other project work by consulting different online and offline databases.

f) **Preparation of Bibliographies, Indexes and Abstracts on Certain Minute Subject:** If demands come from the research scholar or a research team member of the parent organization, the library prepares the bibliographies, indexes and abstract for him/her to meet the demand. It offers the bibliographies or reading lists on diverse topics relevant to the proposed or ongoing dissertation work, doctoral and post-doctoral research. The compilation of bibliographies is the end product of a literature search. From the bibliographies, the users can find out all the materials on a given subject at a time. It helps the user in selecting the required information by saving time.

g) **Translation Service:** Translation is a process of transforming precisely the information contents of the text in one language into another

language. The former is called the Source language and the latter is called as the Text language. Translation service helps overcome the language barrier.

In the field of science and technology, the National Translation Centre, Chicago, America, International Translation Centre, Delft, Netherlands, British Library Lending Division, Boston and in India, INSDOC, New Delhi have foreign language translation service for all the individuals and organizations, who cannot afford the expensive in-house translation facilities. In case of online, whenever a search result lists a relevant resource in another language, one can check out AltaVista's translation feature. With this service, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese websites are translated to English (and vice versa). One can also try with Google Translation to meet this purpose.

h) Document Delivery Service (DDS): DDS is concerned with the supply of document to the user on demand, either in original or its photocopies irrespective of the location and form of original documents. DDS may be provided by Photocopying (Xeroxing), scanning the pages, printing from a web document, and so on. Many libraries provide DDS service to the users on no gain no loss basis.

i) Interlibrary Loan Request: Interlibrary loan (ILL) is a cooperative activity. In theory, it is capable of expanding the walls of the library to encompass all the world's library collections. The ILL concept is expanded by UNESCO's Universal Availability Publications Program (often called UAP). UAP has the goal of making any publication available to any person anywhere in the world. ILL has practical limits that make its scope smaller but still its potential of expanding customers' access to other libraries' collections is great. The material obtained from ILL may be delivered through different means and avenue (physically, making photocopy or printing, scanning) based on the need of the user.

Processing interlibrary loan request from other library and delivering the material through email / fax / speed post is another duty of the library reference staff.

j) Consultancy Service: Consultant can be defined as "an expert who gives professional advice usually on payment basis" and consultancy can be defined as "an organization that provides professional or organization expert advice on payment basis". In the industrial sector the consultants play a vital role by providing information & advice on production, export, import etc. "Information Consultant" is a term used for those persons or firms involved in various activities including library or information centre design, database design, records management, hardware & software selection & training, etc. The library and information science professionals can effectively discharge their duties as information consultants for various organizations as well as individuals but to perform this duty they should have vast practical experience and in-depth subject knowledge. In this connection the following points are to be noted:

i) Tools: Information consultants have their own unique set of tools, e.g. bibliographies, search and meta search engines, databases, reference collection, etc. The consultants get their work done with the help of these sets of tools, a particular combination & configuration of specialized equipment technique & style in addition to their knowledge base as the organizer of world information to get their job done.

ii) Benefits from Information Consultant: The importance of information consulting profession is directly related with the advancement in micro-computer technology and information explosion in print as well as digital environment. Consulting the information consultant can give four benefits to the clients. These are-

- It provides objective independent advice in regard to political, religious and other matter;
- Taking the help of consultants can be highly cost-effective because money can be saved by not going through the vast number of documents and by procuring them and getting the required information;

- The consultant has the necessary knowledge and skill;
- They are easy and convenient but the funding of the organization makes it difficult to employ them for a long or short term basis in the organization.

iii) Services: Services rendered by consultants and consulting organization mostly fall within the scope of technical enquiry service, feasibility studies, reviewing some technologies, software, evaluating technologies, marketing of the products, market survey, designing new databases, software to be used in information processing, storage or retrieval, system analysis & management, advice on collection development, doing cataloguing, editorial services like indexing, abstracting, etc.

k) Information Broker Service: An information broker (IB) is "an individual or organization who on demand seeks to answer questions using all sources and who is in business for a profit". They are those individuals or firms who are so professional and experienced enough in their lines that they can gather the requested information with a computer and a telephone within a few minutes or hours. An IB may not simply be a librarian, or simply one who "goes online" and searches for the answers to questions and problems of the patron; or he isn't someone who "has all the answers".

The Association of Independent Information Professionals, the first professional association devoted to information brokers, was formed in Milwaukee in 1987. The profession has its roots in 1937 when librarians and other information professionals formed an organization called the American Society for Information Science and Technology in an attempt to establish their professional identity separate from public libraries.

i) Tools: IBs use a combination of online, offline, and physical search techniques depending on the clients' needs. Every assignment is different and the IB determines the appropriate method of obtaining the clients' requested information, while remaining within the clients'

budget. Once all the required information is located and retrieved, the IB then cleans up the raw information and presents it in the manner most appropriate for his/her client. This may mean summarizing the information or verifying the correctness of it.

ii) *Importance:* If anyone had a major health problem he would not attempt himselves to solve it. He would seek the services of the appropriate professional (a doctor in this case). So, just a person would use an attorney for legal work or a doctor for medical work, they use an Information Broker for access to the needed information. A great impetus for the growth of information broker has come from the recognition that knowledge is a business and information is a commodity and the fact that many people simply are not aware of many of the avenues available to find the needed information. People can locate information in many cases, but it is the experienced IB that knows and has access to more avenues of information retrieval than the average individual or firm. After all, this is the IBs' specialty.

iii) *Services:* Information broker helps in getting the appropriate information by the end users. It is a cost effective and time saving mechanism. The common uses for the information brokers include market research, patent searches, and any other type of information research, preparation of report on any subject, and so on.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Match the Following

a) James I Wyer.	a) Minimum, Middling, and Maximum theory of Reference service.
b) Samuel Rothstein	b) Conservative, Moderate and Liberal theory of Reference service.

c) Dr. S. R. Ranganathan — c) Direct the user to appropriate sources of information.

d) Referral service — d) Ready and long range reference service.

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B) Find out True and False Sentences

a) Information Scouting is an extended form of referral service.

b) Database Search Service (DBSS) is a sub type of Literature/ bibliographical Search.

c) DDS concerned with referring the user to the document.d) ILL is a narrower form of Document Delivery Service.

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4.8 LET US SUM UP

Previously, personal assistance was provided on a part-time and occasional basis. Increased demand for it resulted the reference work to become a specialized function. It eventually gained the status of a separate department in libraries. Personal contact with the client and explaining the policies and services of the library can create a great interest of the reader for the library. Personal appearance of the member of the library staff in front of the groups and individual is also helpful in this regard.

Currently, reference departments in public, academic, and school libraries attempt to offer at least moderate levels of reference and information service in all areas of its scope. It helps the users find information for them, teach and instruct them how to use library resources and how to do library research and by this way increase the popularity of the library and its support by the library users. Departmental, professional school and research institute libraries now tend to offer reference and information service of such a quality and depth that it approaches that of a special library.

The Reference librarian is well aware of the vastness of the world of knowledge and the varieties of intricacies of the information required by the reader at different level. So, he can do much more for his reader. He can set the information seekers in the right track.



4.9 FURTHER READINGS

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4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1:

a) James I Wyer. a) Conservative, Moderate and Liberal theory of Reference service.

b) Samuel Rothstein — b) Minimum, Middling, and Maximum theory of Reference service.

c) Dr. S. R. Ranganathan — c) Ready and Long range Reference service.

d) Referral service — d) Direct the user to appropriate sources of information.

Ans to Q No 2:

a) True. b) True. c) False. d) True.



4.11 PROBABLE QUESTIONS

A) Short Answer Type Questions

a) What is the American Library Association's Categorization of Reference services?

b) Define Reference service.

c) What is the conservative, moderate and liberal theory of Reference service?

B) Essay Type Questions

a) What are the need and purpose of Reference and Information service?

b) Describe the strategies in establishing Reference and information service.

c) Describe the Ranganathan's aspect of Reference service.

d) Write notes on Consultancy, and Information Broker service

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