

# Ethical Role of Library & Information Science Professional in Disseminating Information

*Mahua Roy*

## Abstract

*Library & Information Science (LIS) is a profession where ethical responsibilities are there on the part of the LIS professionals towards its users and the institution he/she serves. The paper throws light on why ethics is important in LIS profession. The paper discusses on some ethical codes drafted by IFLA and on some of the common ethical codes which 60 odd countries over the world are following. The paper gives an outline of the Indian scenario of the LIS professional's ethical code and emphasises the need of ethical code for LIS professional's in India. Ethical codes are not new to the Indian culture the codes have been there from the ancient times and time has come when India should have ethical code for the LIS professionals.*

**Keywords:** Ethical code, Ethics, Library and Information Science Profession, LIS Professional, Users

## Introduction

Ethics is a science; it is a study of moral life. Also known as moral philosophy, ethics is essentially an intellectual discipline and its goal is to gain knowledge of moral problems and their possible solutions. In other words, ethic stands for a code of conduct.

### 1. Ethics in Library and Information Science

Library service is a noble profession. The main motto in Library and Information Science (LIS) profession is to provide the highest level of service. Joan Bekker has stated that the library professional should not only comply with requests by the user, but also should give anticipatory service. The responsibility of the LIS professionals as a whole is immense, as the onus of providing the right information to the right reader at the right time lies with library

professionals. LIS professional needs to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the users in retrieving and disseminating information. They also provide the intellectual freedom to the users.

The library professionals are not only associated with the users but also associated with their fellow employees, management, and with the vendors or suppliers who supply resources to the library. Fairness in dealing with all concerned is a part of the code of conduct and to maintain it LIS professionals needs the highest standard of honesty, integrity, and character. There are various kinds of libraries: public, academic and special libraries; consequently, the users are different but whatever the type of library is the ethical role of the LIS professional remains the same. It is an intellectual profession hence library profession requires a specialized knowledge in disseminating and retrieving information. Lifelong education of the LIS professionals is required to become sincere and faithful to the ideals of the profession.



International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) has drafted a code of ethics for LIS professionals. The IFLA code of ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers was approved and endorsed in August 2012. Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) Advisory Committee had collected 60 codes of ethics from around the world. Some common Code of Ethics is discussed below:

- i) The LIS professional needs to provide information that are publicly available and should not manipulate the information so that the users become dependent on him or her. The users visit the library for the right information and therefore the LIS professional need to show character in making available the information to the users.
- ii) LIS professionals should have concern for the profession of librarianship, and also for the high social status of librarianship and its authority.

Code of behaviour and ethics vouches concern for the profession of librarian and the high social status of the librarian, for that it is imperative on the part of the LIS professionals to be professionally trained and well aware of the changes taking place in the profession. The paradigm shift in the LIS profession from mere repository of books to the cloud age has a positive side to the profession but at the same time the information explosion is also a major concern for the profession. The role of the LIS profession in any academic institute is that of middle managers and therefore influencing the decision of the top level managers regarding the library is difficult but not impossible, for that effective communication skill is required,

the LIS professional needs to be aware of their role in the Institute where the LIS professional is working and most of the times it can be seen the role of the librarians are not well defined in the Institute. Therefore both the LIS professionals and top level managers needs to work together to make the LIS profession better and so that the LIS professionals can enjoy high social status and authority.

- iii) LIS professional should continuously enrich his/ her professional knowledge. The successful career of the LIS professional depends on three things character, specific knowledge and experience and the aim can be reached through continuing education. The LIS profession has witnessed a dynamic change in the past decade and therefore it is necessary on the part of the Librarian to continue professional education in the field of LIS profession. As the library profession is a noble profession therefore character and integrity are very important.
- iv) The LIS professional should defend the value of the library within its own Institution. The LIS professional should promote his/her library expertise within the organization and should offer service in favour of the whole organization. In this way, the library is able to entirely fulfil his/ her function within the organization.

The responsibility of the library professional is immense in an Institute as it is a technical position therefore proper education, experience and skill are required for retrieving and dissemination information to the users. At the same time LIS professional requires good managerial skills, working knowledge of the computers as well as good communication skills to fulfil the functions within the organization.

- v) The LIS professional should respect and preserve the copyright and intellectual property rights. The LIS professional's role is immense in protecting the copyright and intellectual property right. For the fair use of the library resources it is necessary the users of the library be made aware of the infringement of the copy right and intellectual rights. According to Mir (2016) it is necessary to create a balance and promote the user's rights and as well as creator's rights. The library users who are unaware about the copy righted materials must be recognised about the copyrighted materials and also must be made aware of their dependence on balanced law and policy for access to information and for gaining knowledge.
- vi) The LIS professional should practice active information mediation and he/she should nurture the user's information literacy skills. The information professional supports the user in his search for relevant information. The LIS professionals are trained in retrieving and disseminating information, in the present scenario information is scattered but guiding the users to the right information is the ethical responsibility of the LIS professionals.
- vii) LIS professionals should be aware of the human rights, equalities and diversity and equitable treatment of users and colleagues. By human rights it is meant that all individuals should be treated fairly and with courtesy, dignity and respect, free from bullying, harassment and discrimination. Users come from different background and therefore information requirements are also different. Some users might not be able to express their requirements

- in exact terms, therefore the LIS professionals needs to give a patient hearing and all the users should be treated fairly irrespective of caste, creed and gender. The co-workers in a library environment should also be treated with respect.
- viii) LIS professionals should reject and avoid actual perceived or potential conflict of interest between their professional role and their personal interest. The LIS profession is a selfless profession where service comes before self. The LIS professional has an important role in collection building and personal interest must not come in between professional interest. During the selection process of the Library Professionals high standard should be maintained.
  - ix) Protection for librarians – against unethical practices that may be forced on them by institutions/individuals; The rights of the LIS professionals needs to be protected and for that the LIS professionals needs to create an intent towards the LIS profession and to complete the mission libraries and for that the LIS professionals needs to negotiate and look for support of the government associations, municipal authorities and NGOS
  - x) Protect each user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed and, acquired or transmitted. LIS professionals need to be sensitive towards the privacy of the users because a user might have various purposes for using the library materials and if the materials are disclosed the purpose of visiting the library by the user might be defeated.

- x) Preservation of the library resources and teaching the users to protect the property of the library is one of the ethical codes of LIS professionals. Libraries are important for preserving the culture of the civilization. Library resources need to be preserved for future generations to come and the library users also need to be made aware of the right usage of library resources without damaging both documented and non-documented resources.

### 1.1 Indian Scenario of the LIS professionals Ethical Code

India does not have any Ethical Code for the LIS professionals though there are several professional bodies, but no professional body has come up with any ethical codes for the LIS professionals. Munigal (2008) has stated that one of the reasons that no ethical code was necessary as the Five Laws of Library Science proposed by S R Ranganathan in 1931 were informally accepted as ethical code:

- i) Books are for use
- ii) Every reader his/her book
- iii) Every book its reader
- iv) Save the time of the reader
- v) A library is a growing organism.

These five laws are in use world over. To bring high social recognition to the profession it is necessary that India also has its ethical code for the LIS professionals. The established profession like doctors, engineers has their code of conduct but till date the library profession has not earned social recognition in India. To create intent for the library profession in India and the mission of libraries ethical codes are necessary. LIS professionals have

the responsibility to bring the social recognition. The LIS professionals are associated with different libraries for e.g. public library, academic library, special library but their ethical role remains the same. In the present scenario the role of the LIS professionals are fast changing for that many ethical issues like IPR, Copyright are cropping up. The LIS professionals need to be well aware of the IPR and copyright issues. As observed by Mir (2016) there is a need for all librarians in India to have a copyright education in order to familiarize with the basic principles and concept of copyright laws in India. Belgium is one of the countries who have set ethical code for the profession, the collection, the overall organization and the user. Belgium's ethical code makes the LIS professional responsible for contributing a positive image of the profession. The personality of the LIS professional is necessary to give a positive image to the profession, honesty and integrity are also essential but at the same time the rights of the LIS professionals need to be protected and they should also receive equal recognition. In India most of the times in schools and colleges LIS professionals are less in number and therefore there can be instances where unethical practices are forced on them by institutions or individuals, but at this moment no such ethical codes are there to safeguard the LIS professionals in India.

#### 1.1.1 Necessity of Ethical Code for LIS professionals in India:

This is high time when India also needs ethical code for the LIS professionals in India. The following are the reasons for suggesting ethical code for LIS professionals in India:

- i) LIS Profession: The LIS profession has witnessed a paradigm shift in the past decade

and due to the advent of ICT in LIS profession we see that the books, journals are not only available in printed format but also available electronically. There are many ethical issues involved in LIS profession for e.g. collection building is a part of the LIS profession. Collection building of a library requires a lot of expertise and in collection building a LIS professional's self-interest must not come in between. The copy right and Intellectual property rights are an important issue for the LIS profession. The LIS professionals need to be well trained in copyright and intellectual property laws. The library users should also be made aware about the copyright laws. The user rights also should be taken care of and fair use of library resources is also necessary. The LIS profession has also commitment towards the society. The library materials should be preserved for the future generations. Libraries can serve as reading areas for the needy because of its study space. In India there are many students who do not have enough space or ambience for study, the libraries can meet up those demands. India is country of diversity and therefore ethical codes will help to maintain neutrality irrespective of caste, creed and gender.(Kumar, 2003) The ethical code helps to keep his profession at a higher pedestal in the eyes of the users or society in general.

- ii) Users: LIS professional's needs to be sensitive towards the users and their rights to privacy and confidentiality should be respected, the users should be provided with the highest quality of service. The users should be educated about the library resources and how the users can make the maximum utilization of

the library resources. Users might come from various back grounds and from different regions they might speak different language in a country like India for that it is imperative on the part of the LIS professionals to give a patient hearing. Most of the users are not aware of copyright laws and therefore the users should be educated through library induction and users should also be made aware of the consequences of the infringement of the copyright act. The users should also be taught to respect the library property. Users right should be protected so should the users show respect to the LIS professionals. A good relationship should be maintained between the users and library professionals. Every reader his or her book, reference service is an important part and as Chakraborty(2010) has pointed out the LIS professionals should cultivate a flair for knowing readers, books, bibliographies, catalogues, reference books, etc. to cope with the complex task of literature searching. Then only the users can be benefited.

- iii) Organization: The organization or the top level management who are responsible for appointing LIS professionals should select the LIS professionals not only on their merit but other factors like duty, discipline, helpful attitude and lifelong learning. The LIS professionals should execute all the roles diligently. The LIS post in school and colleges in India are mostly single and therefore the rights of the LIS professionals should be taken care of by the top level management and vice versa. The LIS professionals should promote their library in the organization through their work. Both top level management and LIS professional need to

work together for the betterment of the library and in this way LIS profession will reach new heights.

- iv) LIS professionals: LIS professional's needs to be well versed with the collection, the communication with users should be pinpointed so that the users can derive the right information. LIS professionals should project a high image in the society with their work. as Chakraborty (2010) has pointed out the information professional has at least three roles i) as a professional with responsibilities to his employers or clients; ii) as a manager or leader with responsibilities to subordinates and a wider public; and iii) as a private citizen, with responsibilities to fellow citizens, neighbours etc. The LIS professional also has a bigger role to regulate the power of knowledge an information which is appropriate for an user might not be appropriate for another user for that is necessary for the LIS professional to judge what is right or wrong. In every aspect ethics is necessary for the growth of the profession from selecting the right LIS personnel for the job to providing the right information to the user.

#### 1.1.1.1 Conclusion

Ethics is not a new subject to Indian culture from ancient times. Ethics was therein scriptures and in this regard Nitishatakam by Bhatrahari is worth mentioning. The ancient scriptures emphasises on the intention rather than the act. For the good of the many if one or two innocent lives are sacrificed it will do well to the mankind. Fore.g.in the Mahabharata we see that to bring an end to the evil forces some innocent lives were lost. Therefore to

judge what is good or bad ethics is required. LIS professionals some times are caught in ethical issues for eg. users request the LIS professional to block book/information so that nobody can get access to the book/ information. In another instance in a scientific library an user might request for a book on drugs, the LIS professional faces ethical problems whether the LIS professional should give the user the book or not. This is because there are no ethical codes in India with regard to the LIS profession. As Chakraborty (2010) stated, the norms protect the profession, the client and professional practitioner acting within the ethical norms. In an age when copyright, intellectual property rights are the burning issues in a library, ethical codes can help to safeguard all this. Time is ripe when India should have its own ethical codes for the LIS profession.

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**About Author**

**Mahua Roy**, Institute of Hotel Management, P – 16, Taratala Road, Kolkata – 700088  
Email: 2mahuaroy@gmail.com

