

## **INTRODUCTION**

Human beings always have a fascination for knowing past events. Knowledge of past events and the reasons behind them as well as information about the patterns of past happening enables human beings to understand the present status of the given phenomenon. Secondly, understanding a particular past event, helps in taking correct decisions in the present time. Proper understanding of the past events also helps in analyzing the interrelations between them. By studying the past events even one can predict about the future course of development. Historical research helps in knowing and understanding past events. Considering these and other uses and benefits, historical research is conducted in all subjects. Like any other subject, historical research is conducted in librarianship to know the significant events in the past, reasons responsible for those events and to analyze the impact of those events on various variables. Historical research is particularly useful in librarianship to know the history of libraries and information centers, history of reading material, and history of library and information science education.

## **WHAT IS HISTORICAL RESEARCH?**

According to George Mouly (Mouly, 1978) historical research is a scholarly effort to know past events. Here, scholarly means systematic, scientific, logical, and objective. In other words historical research is a research which not only describes the past events but also interprets them. It analyzes the reasons for the past events and impacts of those events on each other. Historical research is a research which interprets the past, helps in understanding the past, and enables to predict the future. It enables to predict the future by critically analyzing the past. It is the research that interprets the past events so as to arrive at consistent meaning of the past. Historical research is a research that enables to have new meaning and new understanding of the past events.

As stated above the historical research helps to understand the past. This understanding helps in taking correct decisions in the present. Very rarely, though, a situation similar to past may repeat in future. According to John Tosh (Tosh, 1991) historical research is that research which provides guidance in taking decisions in case the situation repeats. The findings of a particular historical research may help in avoiding past mistakes.

## PURPOSES OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Historical research is conducted to serve the following purposes:

1. **To prepare a chronological list of past events:** Historical research is conducted to prepare an authentic list of past events in a particular subject. Such a list is prepared in chronological order i.e. date-wise. This is known as chronology. Indian Library Chronology is the best example of chronology (Kumar, 2000). A chronological list of past events helps in understanding steps in the development of a given subject. A chronological list also helps in knowing barriers and other facets in the life cycle of the given subject. For preparing the chronological list of past events the historical researcher uses reliable sources.
2. **To know the causes:** Historical research is conducted to know why a particular event took place in the past; what were the reasons for progress or regress in the given field of study; why a particular situation emerged in the past etc. In short, historical research is conducted for knowing and understanding the causes responsible for past events.
3. **To know patterns:** Historical research is conducted to know trends, patterns in the various past events. For example, historical research may be conducted to know the acquisition patterns of public libraries in Maharashtra, in the past 50 years. Similarly a historical research may be conducted to know the changing patterns in reading habits.
4. **To write history:** Historical research is conducted for writing history. History is written by understanding the reasons responsible for a particular past event. It is written by critically analyzing the inter-relations between various past events. While writing history the historical researcher analyzes events directly related with the given subject. Most importantly, he also considers events in peripheral subjects. For example, the researcher writing history of libraries has to consider all the events directly related with libraries. These events may be related with opening of a new library, automation, new services and facilities, new designations in the libraries, new leadership in the library field etc. The historical researcher will also consider events in the related fields such as printing technology, communication, literature, education, publishing, and book trade, political decisions and so on. Thus, the history of libraries

does not present only libraries' history rather it presents history of human culture, history of reading, history of education, history of literature, etc. The historical researcher writing libraries' history has to consider all such facets because all these facets influence libraries. Not just this, but even all these facets are influenced by libraries. Therefore, history of libraries is never only history of libraries it is always history of whole human society.

In short, historical research aims to critically analyze and conclude about a particular past event. It intends to analyze factors responsible for those events. Historical research also aims to study the inter-relations between various past events, and influences of those events on each other.

## STEPS IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH

1. Identification and formulation of research problem
2. Formulation of hypotheses
3. Identification of information sources
4. Internal and external evaluation of the information sources
5. Data collection
6. Analysis and interpretation of data
7. Report writing

Let's know more about the activities carried out under each of these steps in historical research.

### 1. Identification and formulation of research problem

Historical research is conducted to know why a particular situation emerged in the past. It is conducted to know the reasons behind a particular incidence. Therefore, a historical researcher should identify a research problem which will help in fulfilling such objectives. The following questions are worth considering by library and information science researcher for historical research:

- (a) What situation led to the establishment of new public libraries during a specific time-span?
- (b) Why the number of public libraries drastically increased during a specific time-span?
- (c) What policies and programmes helped college libraries in developing their collections?

- (d) Which factors brought changes in the LIS education in India in last 100 years?
- (e) What paradigms have emerged in the information storage and retrieval arena since Cranfield II?

After identification of the problem the researcher formulates the problem. That means he provides more details about the proposed research problem. These details include:

- (a) Reasons for selecting the specific research problem
- (b) Description of various facets related with the selected research problem
- (c) Objectives of the proposed research
- (d) Scope of the proposed research

A historical researcher must identify research problem for which information could be gathered through some source. The problems identified must have some historical significance.

## 2. Formulating hypotheses

Since the historical researcher is interested in knowing and interpreting causes responsible for the given event he usually formulates a causal hypothesis. A causal hypothesis predicts cause and effect relationship. The historical researcher formulates causal hypothesis because he believes that the particular past event happened due a particular reason. Of course the historical researcher cannot control the environment like the experimental researcher. He cannot administer a treatment to test effect of an independent variable of his choice. He even cannot manipulate the independent variable to test the causal hypothesis. This is because the event studied in the historical research had happened sometime in the past. Therefore the historical researcher has no control over the causal factor. As against this the experimental researcher can control the environment, control the variables. In addition to control, the experimental researcher is able to manipulate the independent variable to test its effect on the dependent variable. Historical research is 'ex-post-facto' research. That means it is about an incidence, or situation which emerged in the past. Therefore the historical researcher cannot have any control over the variables. In spite of these differences between the historical and experimental research, the historical research formulates causal hypotheses predicting correlation between a specific past event and the cause responsible for that event. With the help of

are classified into primary and secondary categories as per their contents.

**3.1 Primary information sources:** Sources which contain information recorded by individuals who have seen the incidence are known as primary information sources. In other words primacy information sources are the sources which contain information recorded by its witnesses. Primary information sources contain original information, firsthand information. Primary information sources contain information which is based on direct observation, listening, and firsthand experience. For example, librarian's diary, his correspondence, his autobiography, etc. are examples of primary information sources. In addition to these, newspapers, photographs, journals, theses, etc. are also known as primary information sources. Office records such as accession register, circulation record, agenda, and minutes of meetings, constitutions of public libraries, library rules and regulations, collection development policies, agreements with database vendors etc. are also examples of primary information sources. Transaction logs of user's database and OPAC search and e-mail are also primary information sources. Being produced by the witnesses themselves the primary information sources are the most reliable information sources for research (Shiflett, 1984). Therefore, most of the data required for a given historical research should be collected from primary information sources.

**3.2 Secondary information sources:** In the context of historical research, all information sources except primary sources are recognized as secondary information sources. Secondary information sources include textbooks, encyclopedias, abstracts, literature reviews, etc. Secondary information sources are produced with the help of primary information sources. These are specifically produced by summarization and repackaging the information available in the primary information sources. Since these information sources are produced by individuals other than the witnesses they are not as reliable as primary information sources. However, they summarize the information given in primary sources, and therefore are helpful in getting a consolidated view about the concerned subject. They may also provide interpretations of the given event. It is quite possible that different information sources (both primary and secondary) may provide different types of information about the same incidence. The difference may arise due to the recorders attitude, his relation with the incidence, language and terms, etc. For enhancing the reliability of the historical research, the

researcher should collect data from maximum information sources. Factuality of an event could be confirmed if more than one information source provides same information about a particular event.

A researcher should identify various information sources useful for his specific research. For this he should consider the objectives, scope, and hypotheses of his proposed research. It is better if he identifies more than one information sources useful for his research.

4. **Internal and external evaluation of the information sources**  
Both primary as well as secondary information sources are useful for historical research. However, all the available information sources may not be authentic, and dependable. All identified sources may not be authoritative sources. Reliable inferences can be drawn only with the help of authoritative data. Authoritative data is available in authoritative information sources. And as stated above, every information source identified by the researcher may not be authoritative. Therefore, it is necessary to verify the authoritativeness of the source before considering it for seeking information. Authoritativeness of the given information source can be verified by evaluating the given source. Authoritativeness of an information source can be verified through their external and internal evaluation.

#### ***External evaluation:***

External evaluation is verification of the originality of the given information source with the help of its physical verification. It is an evaluation based on the physical qualities of the given information source. In external evaluation the historical researcher verifies whether the given information source is really produced in the past and during the period of the incidence. He verifies whether it is produced by the direct witnesses of the event, etc. Such evaluation is carried out by considering external features of the given information source.

The process of verifying the originality of the given information sources with the help of its external qualities of the information source is known as 'external evaluation'. External evaluation of historical information source is also called as 'external criticism'. In other words external evaluation is verifying the authoritativeness of the given information source by considering its external nature/

features. The following criteria are useful in external evaluation of a historical information source:

- (a) **Physical condition:** for example, if a letter is said to be 100 years old, then its physical condition, like colour of the paper (bright white or yellow), edges (sharp or blunt), printing (fresh or faded) etc. should be considered for verifying the originality of the given information source.
- (b) **Script and language:** whether the concerned information source is produced with the script and language that belong to the claimed old time or it is of recent origin?
- (c) **Ink and paper:** does the ink used for writing and or printing of the concerned information source belong to the time of the incidence? Does the nature of the paper used for producing the given information source match with the time of the event recorded. Chemical tests could be conducted to test the authenticity of ink and paper.
- (d) **Binding:** Type of binding of the given information source can also be considered for verifying its authoritativeness. For example, a document in spiral binding cannot be 150 years old document because the technology of spiral binding did not prevail at that time.

In sort external evaluation is evaluation of information sources with the help of external criteria such as paper, ink, binding, etc. External evaluation is carried out to establish originality of the given document. If the external evaluation confirms that the given information source is authentic, original then before taking data from such a source, it must also be evaluated internally i.e. its contents must be evaluated.

#### ***Internal evaluation:***

After verifying and confirming the originality of the concerned information source through external evaluation, the historical researcher has to verify the originality of the content of that information source. For this purpose the contents of the information source has to be evaluated. Evaluation of contents of the information source to be used for historical research is known as internal evaluation. Internal evaluation is the process of ensuring originality, reliability of the contents of the concerned document. Such an evaluation is carried out with the help of certain criteria. These criteria include:

- (a) **Authority:** Whether the author has the authority to write on the topic which he has written?
- (b) **Reputation:** How reputed is the author of the concerned information source?
- (c) **Impartiality or integrity:** Is the author impartial in his writing; or he has produced the contents with any biasness.
- (d) **Purpose:** What was the purpose of creating the fact as it is or to create misunderstanding and confusion?
- (e) **Socioeconomic condition:** What was the sociological, political, economic condition during the period of producing the given information source? Has the author produced the given information source under some socioeconomic pressures?
- (f) **Author's relation:** What was the author's relation with the event that he has recorded? In what relation the author was concerned with the event or person about whom he has written? Was he only a passive observer or an aggrieved party to the event he has recorded? Was the author adversely affected by the event or unduly benefited by the event he has written about?
- (g) **Consistency of the terms used and period of production of the document:** Certain terms are used in certain time-period. The internal evaluator must verify whether certain terms used by the author were in use at the time of the event recorded in the information source. For example, a document containing the term 'library software' cannot be 150 years old.
- (h) **Citation style:** An internal evaluator can verify the originality of the source with the help of citation styles. For example the author, date pattern of citation is a recent pattern of citation. Earlier, the pattern of superscript numbers and footnotes, *ibid* and *op cit* prevailed. Based on the citation pattern used in the given information source, the historical researcher can assess its originality. The type of documents cited can also be a criteria used for internal evaluation. For example, the citation of web based document is again a recent phenomenon.
- (i) **Consistency of year, place, and incidence recorded:** The internal evaluator should verify that there is consistency in the year, place, and event recorded in the given information source. For example if the information source to be used for historical

research mentions that 'A' public library was established by an individual named 'B' at the village called 'C' in the year 1800. Then the internal evaluator should verify whether 'C' village existed in the year 1800. If yes, then was there a person named 'B' during the year 1800 and if yes, was there 'A' public library functioning during the time mentioned in the document. If consistency is found in all the above four facets of event then it can be said that the contents of the document are authentic and can be considered for data collection.

Through external and internal evaluation, the historical researcher ensures that the information source belongs to earlier time and it is produced by a reliable author and therefore, it is an authentic information source. After such confirmation, data from the evaluated document can be collected for the concerned historical research.

#### **5. Data collection**

As mentioned above historical researcher collects data from primary and secondary information sources. For collecting accurate and reliable data the historical researcher should use maximum information sources. Non-print documents and archives may not be easily available and therefore, these may be neglected by an historical researcher. However, the historical researcher must identify and use such information sources as they provide valuable primary information. It should also be remembered that the archiving institutions organize their information sources very systematically. They produce descriptive lists which enable easy searching of the information source in the archive. Therefore, existence of archiving institutes should not be neglected by historical researchers.

Cards may be used to record data from the primary and secondary sources. These days Microsoft Excel and other software prove very useful in recording data from information sources. Use of software enables easy recording and coding of data. Data recorded through software is easily searchable and it can be analyzed more easily.

#### **6. Analysis and interpretation of data**

At this stage of the historical research the collected data is analyzed and interpreted. Providing rational explanation for the past event; explaining why the particular incidence happened in the past; explaining reasons for the emergence of

a particular situation in the past are called interpretation. The data is interpreted by critically analyzing and comparing in various evidences. Importantly, most of the analysis in historical research is not based on quantitative data. Rather it is based on critical analysis of the evidences. Most of the analysis and interpretation in historical research is qualitative. Therefore, the historical researcher should ensure objectivity in analysis and interpretation. Objective analysis and interpretation enables valid generalization.

## 7. Report writing

Report of historical research is mostly descriptive report. It may not contain much of graphs, charts, and tables. However, it must be substantiated with a large number of citations, as historical research is a documentary research and almost all the data referred to in such a research is collected from documents.

## IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN LIBRARIANSHIP

History of any subject is the result of historical research in that subject. In other words history is written with the help of historical research. The science of writing history is known as 'historiography'. Historical research is the foundation of historiography. Most of the input to historical research comes from information sources. Information sources are the 'stock of the trade' for librarianship also. Considering this fact, Felix (1964) identified many similarities between librarianship and historiography. These similarities are:

1. Both librarianship and historiography use written / documentary sources to a large extent.
2. Both the professions are interdisciplinary and have universal approach.
3. Researchers in librarianship as well as history need to have mind as well as head that means they have to apply qualitative approach as well as objective approach. In other words researchers in both the fields have to adopt positivists as well as interpretivist epistemologies.

According to Gorman, and Clayton (1997) historical research in librarianship help to understand the process of collection development; process of budgeting, etc. Historical research in librarianship also provides analyzed input for taking accurate

decisions. Changing information culture can be understood with the help of historical research in librarianship. It also helps in making forecasts about future of librarianship.

The Library History Round Table (1989) of the American Library Association suggested a number of compulsory components for library science education. History of library and information science is one of these components. This suggestion highlights the importance to history of library and information science. The understanding of the history of librarianship helps in understanding the principles and practices of librarianship. For example, one can understand the issues related with intellectual property rights, right to information, issues related with fees for public library services, approaches towards application of technology in library management etc. only by considering their historical contexts. Understanding of history of librarianship does also help in enhancing leadership qualities. In this context Davis (1998) and Shiflett (2000) believe that historical background of librarianship does help librarians in performing effective leadership roles. Historical background will also enables library professionals to avoid repetition of past mistakes.

According to Busha and Harter (1980) historical research in librarianship helps to enhance knowledge of the field; helps in knowing and understanding past events and reasons thereto; helps to know the importance of those events. According to Shera (1952) historical research in librarianship helps the in proper understanding of the current situation. Such an understanding helps the library professionals in performing their responsibilities more effectively. So also the historical research helps in under-standing the complex process of collection development; the rationality for the budgetary decisions and various library services. According to Library History Round Table, one can understand issues and current trends related with facets such as fees for library services; availability of government information; application of information technology in libraries etc. only with proper understanding of history of librarianship.

## **PROBLEMS SUITABLE FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN LIBRARIANSHIP**

It is possible to conduct historical research about the following facets of librarianship.

1. History of library movement (may be further focused to a specific geographical area)
2. History of specific types of libraries e.g. history of research libraries, history of public libraries, etc.
3. Biographical history: For example, history could be written through biography of a renowned library professionals
4. History of particular library e.g. history of library of Indian Parliament, history of Asiatic Society Library, etc.
5. History of knowledge organization tools and techniques used in librarianship, e.g. history of classification schemes, history of catalogue codes, history of thesaurus, history of metadata, etc.
6. History specific types of information sources. For example, history of encyclopedias, history of indexing and abstracting periodicals, history of electronic information sources, etc.
7. History of library automation, history of LIS education etc.

## **TYPES OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH**

According to Hilway (1964) there are six types of historical research. These are:

1. Biographical research
2. History of institutes and associations
3. Research related with information sources and their impact
4. Editing and translation of historical information sources
5. History of concepts
6. Bibliographical research

### **Oral history:**

Oral history is a type of historical research in which data about the past event is gathered orally from an individual who has witnessed the event. History of the concerned event is written by analyzing information collected orally. Oral history is a history based on oral information. Sometimes adequate, accurate information about a particular past event may not be available in any information source. However, there could be some individuals, fortunately still alive, who have personally seen / witnessed / participated in the concerned event. Information about such events may be available only with these individuals. Thus in such cases the living individuals become information sources. Information about such events (i.e. not recorded

in the documents) could be collected through interview of the individuals who have witnessed the event. However, instead of conducting interview the individual may also be requested to narrate the event. Thus information in such cases is collected orally from the witnesses mostly through narrative interviews. The information communicated orally may be written down or it could be recorded with the help of tape recorder or video recorder. Such information is primary information. Most of the time information about a locality could only be collected orally. Such information is useful in writing local history. History is written by analyzing the data communicated orally. This method of gathering information is especially useful for less-known places, small libraries in sub-urban areas, less-known library activities and events, and less-known personalities, etc.

Collecting information orally for historical research has its limitations too. For example, the witness may provide consciously or unconsciously incorrect information about the past event. This could happen due to various reasons. Age of the interviewee could be one of the reasons. Usually the witness in such cases may be quite old, say 90 years or more than that. This puts limitations on their memory. They may not remember certain facets of the event properly. Sometime they may provide incorrect information due to over enthusiasm. Therefore, the historical researcher should verify the information collected orally from other contemporary individuals and with the help of documents.

## CONCLUSION

Proper understanding of the past helps in taking appropriate decisions about the future. Past could be properly understood only by having adequate and accurate knowledge of the past event and forces responsible for those events. Historical research helps in proper understanding of the past. Through historical research one can know the history of libraries and library movements; one can know the contributors to library movements. Historical research helps in knowing past mistakes. This knowledge could be used for avoiding those mistakes in present and future time. Historical research is also useful in knowing the development of library and information science education. Speed and direction of development of librarianship can also be understood with the help of historical research. Considering these and other contributions of historical research, I must state that there is always a need for quality historical research in librarianship.

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