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Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī and the Development of Social Librarianship in Iran

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Abstract

Modern librarianship in Iran emerged relatively late and, from its inception in the 1960s, was largely shaped by an emphasis on technical services such as cataloguing, classification, and resource organization. This orientation, reinforced by key academic and institutional centers, contributed to the marginalization of public services and the social dimensions of librarianship. Against this dominant trend, a parallel and less visible movement gradually developed, focusing on libraries' social responsibilities and their role in fostering equity, inclusion, and community engagement. This article is primarily based on document analysis and qualitative content analysis, aiming to reconstruct and interpret the intellectual and professional contributions of Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī through her life, thought, and professional practice in the development of social librarianship in Iran. Drawing on historical analysis, professional documents, and testimonies of colleagues and students, the study explores Anṣārī's commitment to the principle of "Books for All," her advocacy for public libraries as democratic and inclusive institutions, and her sustained efforts to redefine librarianship as a socially engaged profession. Particular attention is given to her pedagogical innovations, curriculum development, emphasis on reference and public services, and her six-decade involvement with the Children's Book Council of Iran (CBC) as a practical embodiment of social librarianship. The article argues that Anṣārī's enduring legacy lies in advancing and consolidating social librarianship in Iran and demonstrating that the professional legitimacy of librarianship is grounded not in technical sophistication alone, but in its meaningful integration into the social and cultural life of the community.

Keywords: Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī; Social-Oriented Librarianship; Public Libraries; Children's Book Council of Iran (CBC); Ranganathan.

Introduction

Modern libraries and librarianship in Iran, compared to the Western world, do not have a long history. Although the first short-term training courses in librarianship were offered in Iran in the early 1930s, the earliest indications of modern librarianship as a professional field can be traced to the 1960s (1340s Sh.). This decade witnessed the establishment of several specialized and academic libraries that played a foundational role in shaping Iranian librarianship in its modern sense. These included the Central Library of the University of Tehran, the Department of Library Science, Iranian Documentation Centre, Tehran Book Processing Centre, and the Iranian Library Association.

During the same period, three additional institutions were founded that would later prove highly significant for the social dimensions of librarianship in Iran: The Children's Book Council of Iran (CBC), the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescents, and the City Park (Pârk-i Shahr) Public Library.

In fact, the establishment of these institutions was, in many respects, interdependent, and in some cases represented a continuation of one another. For example, the establishment of specialized and academic libraries, particularly the Central Library of the University of Tehran, created a demand for highly trained librarians. This, in turn, highlighted the need for formal library education and paved the way for the establishment of the Department of Library Science at the University of Tehran. Academic education in librarianship, and its first formal institutional base—the Department of Library Science at the University of Tehran—contributed to the development of the library profession and the emergence of modern librarianship in Iran in several ways. The presence of American professors, who were in fact the first instructors in this field, played a significant role not only in training the first generation of modern Iranian librarians—many of whom were later appointed to leading positions in the profession—but also in the establishment and development of other influential institutions, including the Tehran Book Processing Center, the Iranian Documentation Center, and the Central Library of the University of Tehran.¹

¹ For example, John Harvey, one of the founding professors of the Department of Library Science at the University of Tehran, played a key role, in addition to his teaching responsibilities at the university, in the establishment of the Tehran Book Processing

Naturally, these professors brought with them the professional tradition in which they had themselves been trained and introduced it into Iranian librarianship. Their understanding of librarianship and their approach to the profession, both rooted in the Anglo-American tradition of librarianship, led the field in Iran along a distinct path.

At this time, alongside academic libraries, institutional libraries such as the Iranian Oil Company library were also established. The need to collect and organize the resources of these libraries, and the requirement for suitable tools and resources, led centers such as Tehran Book Processing Centre to attract a large number of librarians and focus more and more on tool development. Similarly, the university's library science department focused most of its energy on technical courses in classification and organization, ultimately training a specialized workforce for the related institutions.² According to the memoirs of some pioneers of Iranian librarianship,³ certain professors during that

Center and the Iranian Documentation Center. For more information, see: Māndānā Šiddiq Bihzādī, "Markaz-i Khadamāt-i Kitābdārī va Kitābkhānah-yi Millī: Guft-ū-gū bā Māndānā Šiddiq Bihzādī," in *Tārikh-i Shafābi-yi Kitābdārī-yi Irān*, ed. Abū al-Fazl Najjārī (Tīhrān: Nashr-i Kitābdār, 1400 [2021/2022]), 234. [In Persian.]

² Nūr Allāh Murādī, "Ārshīvhā-yi Dīdārī-Shinīdārī: Guft-ū-gū bā Nūr Allāh Murādī," in *Tārikh-i Shafābi-yi Kitābdārī-yi Irān*, ed. Abū al-Fazl Najjārī (Tīhrān: Nashr-i Kitābdār, 1400 [2021/2022]), 262. [In Persian.]

³ Nūr Allāh Murādī describes the situation in his memoirs as follows: "In those days, little attention was paid to reference services, and cataloging was the primary focus. My classmates were paid 100 tomans [Iran's currency] per hour to catalog books in their spare time. At that time, 100 tomans was a considerable amount of money. Yet no library was willing to allocate even a telephone line to its reference department. The reason was largely social: technical services were visible and measurable, resources could be allocated to them, and at the same time, they were considered essential. Individuals can also exert a significant influence on the course of librarianship, and at times the direction of the profession becomes closely associated with particular personalities. Among the professors of librarianship, Ms. Pūrī Sulṭānī was the strictest, and she had an extraordinary interest in cataloging and classification. When we prepared catalog cards at the Tehran Book Processing Center, she would take a ruler and measure the distance between the author's name and the edge of the card to ensure that it was neither more nor less than one and a half centimeters. Even the spacing at the top of the card had to be exact. When a strict professor is combined with a social need, cataloging and classification naturally become the foremost concern of the profession. From the perspective of the social dimensions of librarianship and librarians' engagement with books, however, Ms. Nūsh-Āfarīn Anšārī played a particularly important role." Nūr Allāh Murādī, "Ārshīvhā-yi dīdārī-shanīdārī: Guft-ū-gū bā Nūr Allāh Murādī," 262-263. [In Persian.]

period “limited librarianship to cataloging and classification” and, through their rigidity, “impeded the healthy growth of librarianship in Iran.”⁴

In other words, “the existence of this attractive and dynamic Centre attracted many of the best library science graduates to the technical side of librarianship. It is said that the management and public service sides of librarianship in Iran suffered as a result and never developed as they should have.”⁵

Alongside this dominant and rapid trend, another trend was slowly but steadily emerging in Iranian librarianship, focused on “public services,” i.e. the human and social aspects of librarianship. This alternative approach emphasized public services, equitable access, and the role of libraries as social institutions embedded within their communities. This marked the emergence of the first sparks of social librarianship in Iran.

Social Librarianship

Before turning to a discussion of social librarianship, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the overlap among certain concepts and to clarify what is meant by social librarianship in the context of this article. When discussing the social dimensions of libraries and librarianship, one commonly encounters terms such as: Social Librarianship, Community Librarianship, Social Responsibility of Libraries, Critical Librarianship and Inclusive Librarianship.

All of these terms, in one way or another, refer to the broader concept of the social responsibility of librarianship. It should be noted, however, that another term also appears in some texts: “Civic Librarianship.”

This term, which is somewhat closer to the field of political science, approaches the issue from the perspective of democracy and focuses on the role of libraries—particularly public libraries—in the realization and

⁴ ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Āzarang, “Kitābdārī va nashr: Guft-ū-gū bā ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Āzarang,” in *Tarikh-i Shafāhī-yi Kitābdārī-yi Īrān*, ed. Abū al-Fazl Najjārī (Tīhrān: Nashr-i Kitābdār, 1400 [2021/2022]), 429. [In Persian.]

⁵ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, “Kitābdārī-yi ijtimā’ī: Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī,” in *Tarikh-i Shafāhī-yi Kitābdārī-yi Īrān*, ed. Abū al-Fazl Najjārī (Tīhrān: Nashr-i Kitābdār, 1400 [2021/2022]), 192. [In Persian.]

advancement of democracy within society.⁶ Civic librarianship should therefore be distinguished from the other terms listed above.

In this article, the term social librarianship refers to that dimension of library and information science that is closely connected to the social sciences. It is concerned with the relationship between the library and society and views the librarian as an intermediary between information resources and members of the community. Within this approach, the primary emphasis is on social justice and human rights.⁷

In fact, social librarianship refers to a concept that has been described and defined through a variety of terms and expressions, some of which have been mentioned above. Reaching a universally accepted terminology for this cluster of ideas remains difficult. Nevertheless, Meneses Tello employs the term Social Librarianship in one of his articles. His understanding of the concept is the closest to the meaning intended in the present study and may be formulated as follows:

Social librarianship is an approach to librarianship that views libraries as socially committed institutions whose mission extends beyond the organization of information to the active promotion of social inclusion, democratic participation, cultural development, and community well-being.⁸

This approach focuses more on public libraries and asserts that all members of society, regardless of their literacy level, physical ability, social status, religion, political beliefs, age, gender, race or nationality, have the same right to use the library. The library system must therefore provide resources that meet their needs. This concept is based on the idea of "Books for all," which is rooted in Ranganathan's second law: "Every reader his/her book."

To summarize the essence of social librarianship, we must talk about justice and inclusion. The main features of social librarianship include information justice, inclusive services

⁶ Ronald B. McCabe, *Civic librarianship affirms the traditional public library mission of education for a democratic society*, (Boston: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 77.

⁷ Paul T. Jaeger et al., *Libraries, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Enabling Access and Promoting Inclusion* (Santa Barbara, CA: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2015), ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸ Felipe Meneses Tello, "Libraries and Society: Interpretation around the Library Social Vision in the Thought of Judith Lica," *Revista Interamericana de Bibliotecología* 34, no. 1 (2011): 315-336.

that focus on the needs of marginalized groups, supporting information and media literacy, and emphasizing the participation of local communities. In this way, the library becomes an institution that leaves no group outside the scope of its services.⁹

In Iran, social librarianship is inseparably associated with one name: Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī.

Starting out in the world of Iranian librarianship

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī spent most of her life outside Iran until the age of 24, as a result of her father's civil service role which took the family to various countries. She studied librarianship at the Geneva Library School and completed an internship at the Old Delhi Public Library. After returning to Iran in 1963, thanks to her family's connections to the cultural and intellectual elite of the time, she soon found herself in the company of people of letters and culture. She began her career at the Central Library of Tehran University, later joining the CBC under the management of Tūrān Mīrhādī. Following her marriage to Dr. Maḥdī Muḥaqqiq, she relocated to Canada, where she completed a master's degree in library science before returning to Iran once more.

This time, she worked in both the Faculty of Literature library and the Library Science Department at Tehran University. While closely connected with the Iranian library community and members of the Iranian Library Association, Anṣārī pursued her own views and ideas from the very beginning of her librarianship career. These were somewhat different from the mainstream librarianship at the time, which was dominated by technical services. What distinguished her professional outlook from many of her contemporaries was her emphasis on the social and human dimensions of librarianship. Over more than six decades of professional activity, she came to be recognized as one of the leading figures associated with the development of social librarianship in Iran.

Surayyā Qizil Ayāgh, one of the famous figures in Iranian children's literature, collaborated with Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī for nearly three decades

⁹ Maḥbūbah Khazāyī, "Ta'thīr-i Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī bar bāft-i kitābdārī-yi ijtimā'ī-yi Īrān" (Master's thesis, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī University, 1404 [2025/2026]), 35. [In Persian.]

at the University of Tehran and the CBC, describes her efforts in alignment with the ideal of „books for all.”¹⁰

Manšūrah Shujā'ī, a social activist, feminist, and librarian, believes that "social librarianship is a term that undoubtedly gained meaning with the emergence of Nūshāfarīn Anšārī in this field, through her activities and approach."¹¹

A recent study of Anšārī's role in Iranian librarianship concluded, based on interviews with librarians and CBC colleagues and an analysis of their testimonies, that:

“Nūshāfarīn Anšārī played a pioneering and inspiring role in establishing and developing social librarianship in Iran.”¹² The nature of this impact has also been described as follows: “By founding and institutionalizing social librarianship, Anšārī has been able to elevate this trend from scattered activities to a structural and sustainable movement. By emphasizing a humane and responsible approach, Anšārī sees librarianship as comprising more than just technical and administrative services, considering it instead to be a way for individual and societal growth.”¹³

Social librarianship is tied to two concepts without which the formation of this movement would be impossible to trace: “books for all” and “public libraries.” Before discussing social librarianship, it is necessary to review these two concepts and their place from Nūshāfarīn Anšārī's perspective and experiences.

The “Books for All” aspiration

Nūshāfarīn Anšārī was born into a family that valued volunteer work and philanthropic activities. Her maternal grandfather and mother were both philanthropists who awakened in her a sense of social commitment and an equal view of people by establishing schools and clinics and doing

¹⁰ Surayyā Qizil Ayāgh, "Kitābdārī-yi ijtimā'ī rāh-i taḥaqquq-i ārmān-i kitāb barā-yi hamah: Niḡāhī bih tajrubah-hā-yi Nūshāfarīn Anšārī," *Kitāb-i Mah-i Kulliyāt*, no. 88 (Farvardīn 1384 [March/April 2005]): 39. [In Persian.]

¹¹ Manšūrah Shujā'ī, "Pazīruftan-i diḡarī dar ḥadd-i fāṣil-i sukūt va tamaddun," in *Zindagināmāh va khabadāmāt-i 'ilmī va farhangī-yi ustād-i farhībhtab va kitābdār-i barjastab Nūshāfarīn Anšārī*, ed. Umīd Qanbarī (Tīhrān: Anjuman-i Āthār va Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 1383 [2004/2005]), 105. [In Persian.]

¹² Khazāyī, "Ta'thīr-i Nūshāfarīn Anšārī," 115.

¹³ Khazāyī, "Ta'thīr-i Nūshāfarīn Anšārī," 115.

volunteer work.¹⁴ Her mother encouraged her love of people, teaching her to form deep, humane connections with everyone, especially her friends and peers, regardless of social status, and to treat everyone as an equal: "This type of upbringing and lifestyle fostered my acceptance of society as a whole and made me a person who loves the community. It was easy for me to communicate with the different types of people around me."¹⁵

That is why, when she studied librarianship at the suggestion of the contemporary Iranian writer Muḥammad 'Alī Jamālzādah,¹⁶ she knew she was in the right place.

My first encounter with librarianship was with the idea of 'books serving society'. Perhaps this was because the Geneva School of Librarianship was close to the School of Social Work, which focused on using books to serve society. I found this aspect of librarianship very attractive, and I loved working in a public library. There, I experienced how much I loved working with people [...] and the joy of serving society through books was introduced to me there.¹⁷

During her studies and internships, she came to believe that "direct work with the community" was more important than "technical library work"¹⁸ In this way, she realized that the scope of library services could extend beyond the library's walls to encompass not only the majority of society, but also those who are marginalized or in the minority for any reason.

Later, during a period in India with her parents, she started working in the Old Delhi Public Library, encouraged by her mother and driven by her interest in public libraries, and of course, with the official

¹⁴ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Zindagī va zamānah-i Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, ed. Parīčihr Nasrīnpay (Tīhrān: Nashr-i Kargadan, 1403 [2024/2025]), 151. [In Persian.]

¹⁵ Manṣūrah Shujā'ī, "Pazīruftan-i dīgarī dar ḥadd-i fāṣil-i sukūt va tamaddun," 105.

¹⁶ Muḥammad 'Alī Jamālzādah (1892–1997) is an Iranian writer and translator, best known for his short stories, and is widely regarded as the father of the modern Persian short story.

¹⁷ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitarab-i furūḡān: Muṣaḥḥabah-i tarīkh-i shafābī bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, interviewed and edited by Paymānah Šālīḥī (Tīhrān: Sāzmān-i Asnād va Kitābkhānah-i Millī-yi Īrān, 1396 [2017/2018]), 61. [In Persian.]

¹⁸ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitarab-i furūḡān: Muṣaḥḥabah-i tarīkh-i shafābī bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 62.

permission of Jawaharlal Nehru.”¹⁹ I experienced the idea of books for all in India.”²⁰ She was impressed by the breadth of services provided by the library system, such as oral services for illiterates, and services for the people with disabilities, especially the blind. “In fact, the library was open to everyone.”²¹

Her work experience in the Indian library system, especially her acquaintance with Ranganathan, had a profound influence on her views and beliefs about library science as a profession.

“Indian libraries operate according to Ranganathan’s theory. He is a man who has influenced me perhaps more than any other thinker in library science.”²²

Ranganathan is an Indian philosopher, mathematician and librarian who returned to India after studying in England, where he laid the foundations of modern library science. His laws are frequently cited as guiding principles for library organization and service provision, and they continue to be referenced in contemporary library management:

- 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 contain an important social dimension. By placing the reader rather than the collection at the center of librarianship, Ranganathan shifted attention from books as objects to people as users. The second law, “Every reader his or her book,” and the third law, “Every book its reader,” imply a commitment to inclusiveness and equitable access regardless of social background, education, or physical ability. For this reason, Ranganathan’s thought may be regarded as one of the intellectual foundations of socially oriented librarianship and public library services.

¹⁹ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, “Shūrā-yi Kitāb-i Kūdak panjāh sālāh shud! Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī,” *Nigāh-i Naw* 21, no. 94 (Tābistān 1391 [Summer 2012]): 65. [In Persian.]

²⁰ Manṣūrah Shujā’ī, “Pazīruftan-i dīgarī dar ḥadd-i fāsil-i sukūt va tamaddun,” 104.

²¹ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Zindagī va zamanah-i*, ed. Parīčīhr Nasrinpay (Tīhrān: Nashr-i Kargadan, 1403 [2024/2025]), 60. [In Persian.]

²² Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Zindagī va zamanah*, 64.

At the heart of the Five Laws lies a user-centered philosophy. They emphasize that every aspect of library work—from acquisition, collection development, and cataloging to information services and resource accessibility—should ultimately serve the needs of users. The laws thus provide librarians with a framework for delivering relevant, reliable, and timely information to diverse communities. Drawing on these principles, India developed one of the most influential public library systems in the developing world by the 1960s.

Among these principles, the second law occupies a particularly significant position in discussions of public services and the social dimension of librarianship. This principle, which can be summarized as “books for all,” emphasizes that libraries should provide appropriate and relevant resources for every user, regardless of language, culture, religion, age, social background, education, race, or physical ability. Over time, the concept of “books for all” has become a central component of many library manifestos and guidelines, particularly those relating to public libraries.

Public Libraries

From the beginning of her career, Anṣārī had a special place in her heart for public libraries.²³

Public libraries occupy a central position in discussions of democratic access to information and social equality. More than any other type of library, they provide the necessary basis for implementing the concept of “books for all.”

In a lecture entitled “Library and Society,” delivered at the University of Tehran in 1971, Anṣārī stated:

The public library has been defined as a ‘university for all’. There are other definitions of the public library, but I would prefer the above them. To explain this definition, it is better to start with its second part. ‘All’ indicates a social transformation, namely the breaking down of the privileges of a certain class, and signifies that vast swaths of the population can enjoy the benefits of science, knowledge and literacy. Therefore, a public library should be an organization where everyone, regardless of age, wealth, health or freedom, can find a suitable book and benefit from its services.²⁴

²³ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, “Kitābdārī-yi ijtīmā’ī: Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī,” 197. Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitārah-i furūṣān: Muṣāḥabab-i tarikh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 88.

²⁴ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Majmū’ah-i maqālāt dar barāh-i kitāb va kitābdārī* (Tīhrān: Tūs, 1354 [1975/1976]), 21–22. [In Persian.]

She further argues that the term university in this definition implies the evolution of today's public libraries and the development and diversity of their resources, in such a way that individuals refer to these libraries not only for entertainment but also to raise their level of political, social and educational knowledge. More than forty years later, she continues to follow this view and develops it in this way: "I have always been interested in the development of public libraries, and this is one of the issues that, if implemented correctly in any society, will play a significant role in the promotion of science and the growth of that society. If society does not change culturally, it will not change in other areas, and a society that wants to move only to the elite will never become a developed society."²⁵

For Anṣārī, the role of government policy was also crucial in shaping the development of public libraries. The huge role of public libraries influenced me greatly. I found the idea of a library network being able to transform a society, very interesting. I had also seen Moscow [during the Soviet era]. It was a closed city in many ways. The Russians saw the public library as an extension of their political agenda, but my view was completely humanistic. I believed that the diversity of the library in terms of different points of view promoted democracy, and from that time onwards, I saw the library as playing a key role.²⁶

In fact, it was what she learned during her internships in various departments of the Geneva Public Libraries and her volunteer work at the Public Library of India that guided her life and professional path. She recalls her time in India as follows:

This period was a wonderful education. I learned to recognize and embrace differences, and I came to appreciate the importance of librarianship more than ever. The more I experienced, the more I fell in love with librarianship. It was there that the idea of the impact of books on humanity, of liberating humanity, and of social librarianship came to me.²⁷

In practical terms, she began working in public libraries from the very beginning of her arrival in Iran, establishing the first public library in Pār-k-i Khayyām with Tūrān Mīrhādī. This library met the standards of public libraries today. Accounts note that the library included carefully

²⁵ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitarab-i furūzān: Muṣāḥabah-i tarikh-i shafāhi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 88.

²⁶ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Zindagi va zamānah*, 55.

²⁷ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, "Shūrā-yi Kitāb-i Kūdak panjāh sālāh shud! Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī," *Nigāh-i Naw* 21, no. 94 (Tābistān 1391 [Summer 2012]): 63. [In Persian.]

selected and classified resources and separate sections for children, photographs, maps, and related materials. She was also entrusted with the first training workshop for public library librarians.²⁸

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī and Social Librarianship

In fact, the same love and commitment that had initially drawn her to the service-oriented mission of public libraries and to the importance of the relationship between libraries, librarians, and the community gave rise to a professional outlook that placed greater emphasis on the social dimensions of librarianship than was common in Iran at the time. She has always emphasized the social role of librarianship and tried to redefine it and believes that the librarian "should, above all, promote the community's access to information."²⁹

In her early years of teaching at the University of Tehran in the mid-1970s, Anṣārī consistently viewed community engagement and service provision as central dimensions of librarianship. Anṣārī considered starting an undergraduate program in librarianship.

Several members of the Department of Library Science, myself included, envisioned the development of librarianship and the transformation of libraries through reliance on the energy and potential of young, book-loving readers. The undergraduate curriculum was designed with this very aim in mind and subsequently approved by the department. In effect, in contrast to the technical services that had taken shape at the "Tehran Book Processing Centre" our focus was on public services, and we regarded the pursuit of socially engaged librarianship as deeply valuable.³⁰

In an article she wrote more than fifty years ago, she emphasizes the importance of placing books and libraries at the heart of society. While listing the types of services that a public library can provide to different segments of society, she points out measures that can be used to attract people's attention and motivate them to visit the library.³¹ In another article from the same period, she argues that the purpose of libraries depends on their usefulness to society. "We know that the time of

²⁸ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Zindagī va zamānah*, 88-89.

²⁹ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, "Kitābdārī-yi ijtimā'ī: Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī," in *Tarikh-i Shafāhī-yi Kitābdārī-yi Irān*, ed. Abū al-Fazl Najjārī (Tīhrān: Nashr-i Kitābdār, 1400 [2021/2022]), 193. [In Persian.]

³⁰ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, "Kitābdārī-yi ijtimā'ī: Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī," 190

³¹ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Majmū'ah-i maqālāt dar barah-i kitāb va kitābdārī* (Tīhrān: Tūs, 1354 [1975/1976]), 5-27. [In Persian.]

luxurious libraries is over, and libraries are organizations created for the use of society. If this use is not fulfilled properly, considering the high cost of books, lack of space, and lack of good employees, having a library may be an unnecessary and uneconomic practice."³²

Anṣārī does not view the role of the librarian or the purpose of librarianship as anything other than connecting with the community and providing services.

In my opinion, the mission of librarians is to create a social movement that encourages the community to read more, learn more and become empowered. The librarian pursues this goal by establishing an excellent library. Social librarianship is manifested in public libraries. The public library is actually the best place for the library and librarian to engage with society. People in the community can become library members regardless of factors such as skin color, and help to manage the library. Public libraries lay the foundations for social librarianship and continue to build on them; they are the only places where librarians can establish contact with the entire community.³³

In her opinion, what makes a library is not only its resources, its building, or its librarians, but also the circulation of resources and services offered in that library, in short, the dynamism of that library. She sees the dynamism of libraries, emphasizing the first and fifth laws of Ranganathan, in their socialization, in their going towards the community, in discovering the needs of the community, as well as in the type and variety of services offered in them.³⁴

Anṣārī often approaches issues from a unique perspective. For example, in discussions about classification, a pure technical matter, she prioritizes the user, referring to the subject and categories assigned to resources by librarians as a 'liberating message'. She believes that classification makes readers independent, connects them with the library's inventory and, by presenting the inventory in a thematic form, gives them the opportunity to choose. This is why, in the early years of her time in Iran, she commissioned an expert to translate Dewey's Decimal Classification into Persian.³⁵

³² Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Majmū'ah-i maqālāt dar barāh-i kitāb va kitābdārī*, 92

³³ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Zindagī va zamanāb*, 166.

³⁴ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, "Pāy-i shuḥbat-i Ustād Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī" [Interview], interviewed by Maryam Aḥmadi Shīrāzī, *Payvast-i Payk-i Mam* (Nashriyah-'i Mu'assasah-'i Mādarān-i Imrūz), no. 27 (Āz_ar 1397 [November/December 2018]): 18. [In Persian.]

³⁵ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Zindagī va zamanāb*, 89.

At a broader level, with respect to the status and standing of librarianship and libraries, she argues that the consolidation of the field's position in society is contingent upon its social engagement. She states: "A librarian finds their role in society only when society articulates demands for services. In the absence of such demands, the librarian becomes merely an ordinary salaried employee."³⁶

Anṣārī's experiences and achievements in social librarianship

Anṣārī's impact on Iranian librarianship is reflected not only in her writings and lectures but also in her institutional and educational practice. The following review outlines how she played this role and the impact she had:

Publications

Across her publications, Anṣārī addresses the role of libraries in society, the importance of connecting libraries with people, and the need to make books accessible to the public. By documenting her ideas and experiences, contributed to the development of a discourse on socially oriented librarianship within Iranian professional literature. Her first written work in Persian was a pamphlet entitled "Libraries in rural areas," which she compiled as part of a nationwide library initiative in Iran supported by an organization called the "Iranian Science Corps."³⁷

Other concepts related to these areas that Anṣārī has addressed in her writings include library services in Iran, the promotion of reading, the establishment of children's libraries in refugee camps, Ranganathan's Five Laws, and public libraries. She has also emphasized the importance of book review and criticism as a mediating link between books and their audiences, as well as bibliographies as a key component of reference services.

In addition, a review of the theses she supervised and advised during her tenure in the Department of Library Science at the University of Tehran indicates that more than thirty of them focused on topics such as public libraries, user satisfaction, user behavior studies, reference principles and services, reference studies, bibliography, reading

³⁶ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitārāb-i furūzān: Muṣāḥabab-i tārikh-i shafāhi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 131-132.

³⁷ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Zindagi va zamānah*, 90.

promotion, children's libraries, and library services for people with special needs.³⁸

Curriculum Content

During her nearly thirty years of teaching at the University of Tehran, Anṣārī sought to moderate the dominance of technical courses and the strong emphasis on organization and classification by developing syllabi that highlighted the social dimension of librarianship and public services. In some library departments, curriculum planning and the selection of faculty members were such that they occasionally gave rise to the perception that courses on technical services—particularly classification and information organization—were of greater importance than other areas of the discipline.

However, as head of the Library Department at the University of Tehran, and through her distinctive teaching style, she offered courses such as Public Services, Library Management, History of Libraries and Librarianship, Reference Studies, Principles of Reference Services, and Library Materials and Services for People with Special Needs. In doing so, she helped ensure that these areas were recognized alongside other branches of librarianship. Consistent with one of her long-standing concerns, this approach aimed to ensure that graduates would not emerge merely as “library technicians,” but as reflective professionals capable of contributing thoughtfully to all fields related to books, libraries, and librarianship.³⁹

She was the first to revise a course entitled “Special Services Outside the Library,” placing particular emphasis on the rights of people with disabilities—especially students with disabilities—and on clarifying the responsibilities of libraries toward these groups. She reintroduced the course under the title “Library Materials and Services for People with Special Needs.” In this course, through a review of various documents and texts concerning disability rights and library standards, including those of IFLA and UNESCO, she once again underscored the necessity

³⁸ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitārāb-i furūzān: Muṣāḥabab-i tārikh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 221-228.

³⁹ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Majmū'ah-i maqālāt dar barāb-i kitāb va kitābdārī* (Tīhrān: Tūs, 1354 [1975/1976]), 65. [In Persian.]

of attending to specific user groups within libraries and reaffirmed the principle of “books for all.”⁴⁰

Teaching style

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī’s teaching style was among the most distinctive at the academic level. One of the most notable features of her approach was that she never reused materials from previous semesters; instead, she consistently followed the latest developments and emerging issues related to the subjects she taught.⁴¹

She conducted her classes in an interactive manner, using questions and answers and actively engaging students in classroom discussions. She also devoted a short portion of the beginning of each session to introducing recent developments in the field, as well as significant events—even in cultural and artistic domains. It should be noted that at the time she employed this approach, social media in its present form did not exist, nor were there newsfeeds or similar tools. In many cases, this information constituted the primary means through which students in those courses remained up to date with new publications, developments in librarianship, and cultural and artistic events.⁴²

Another noteworthy initiative on her part was inviting experts and experienced practitioners from various fields to collaborate in the teaching of courses. This approach stemmed from her firm belief in the primacy of the practical dimensions of librarianship and in the importance of learning from the lived experiences of such individuals.

In some instances, she also held classes outside the faculty environment, enabling students to gain direct and tangible experience of the subject matter.⁴³

One of the most compelling examples of this approach was associated with the course “Special Services.” As part of the course requirements, students were tasked with identifying blind students from

⁴⁰ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitārāb-i furūḡān: Muṣāḥabab-i tārikh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 108.

⁴¹ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitārāb-i furūḡān: Muṣāḥabab-i tārikh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 105.

⁴² This paragraph is based on the author’s personal experiences as a student of Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī between 1995 and 1997 and on direct observations made during that period.

⁴³ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitārāb-i furūḡān: Muṣāḥabab-i tārikh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 107, 109.

different faculties, interviewing them about their information needs, and producing audio versions of selected resources required by them. To further complement the course, seminars were even organized at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Tehran, during which the issues and needs of blind students were discussed and examined in detail, with all proceedings formally documented.⁴⁴

Emphasis on Practical Considerations and the Librarianship Ecosystem in Iran

"Librarianship is not global; it is territorial."⁴⁵

This statement underscores the fact that, despite the existence of global standards such as the Dewey Decimal Classification or RDA, librarianship inevitably varies from one country to another. It is precisely this reality that highlights the importance of the practical dimensions of the field and of its specific ecosystem. When addressing the national aspects of librarianship, it is therefore essential to consider the intended community and the social context in which libraries develop. This is exactly what Anṣārī sought to do throughout her years of professional activity in Iranian librarianship.

"It was important that the main work could be done in this [India] environment and culture. Every country and environment must follow its own path. The experience of India taught me that I must think about the Iranian way."⁴⁶

Special Emphasis on Reference Services and Reference Works

Anṣārī had a particular interest in reference courses from the very beginning of her studies in librarianship, as she regarded reference tools and services as central to the "concept of a librarian being responsive to users." This interest was so strong that she herself considers the

⁴⁴ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitārāh-i furūzān: Muṣāḥabah-i tārikh-i shafāhi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 108.

⁴⁵ According to Nūr Allāh Murādī, "Ārshīvhā-yi Dīdārī-Shinīdārī: Guft-u-Gū bā Nūr Allāh Murādī," 262.

⁴⁶ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, "Shūrā-yi Kitāb-i Kūdak panjāh sālah shud! Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī," 63.

reference courses she took during her master's program at McGill University to have had the greatest impact on her.⁴⁷

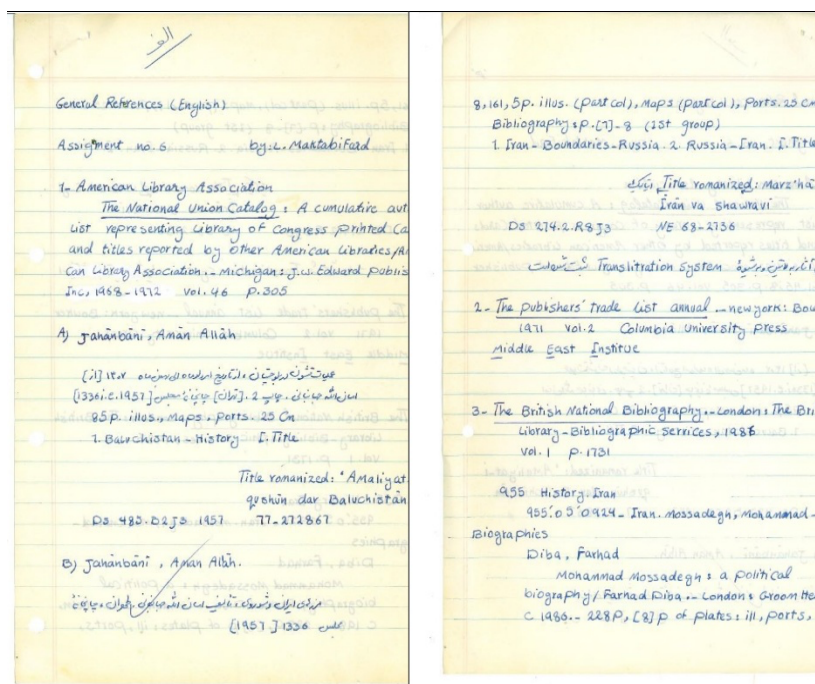
It is widely acknowledged among library science graduates that the most profound and meaningful interactions between a user and a librarian happen in the reference department. Her interest in reference services persisted throughout her career, both in practice and in teaching. For example, in 1968, upon her appointment as head of the library at the Faculty of Literature, University of Tehran, one of her first initiatives was to establish a reference department—a dedicated unit were professors' and students'.⁴⁸

Furthermore, in her teaching, as noted earlier, she delivered courses on reference studies and on the principles and services of reference work with great skill and dedication, incorporating the latest resources and theories in the field. She placed considerable importance on course assignments and actively encouraged student participation.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitarab-i furūzān: Muṣāḥabah-i tarikh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 88.

⁴⁸ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitarab-i furūzān: Muṣāḥabah-i tarikh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 93.

⁴⁹ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitarab-i furūzān: Muṣāḥabah-i tarikh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 131-132.



An assignment prepared by the author while enrolled in Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī's General Reference Sources course (1990s).

The Children's Book Council of Iran (CBC)

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī joined the CBC in 1963, marking the beginning of a new chapter in her professional life. Over six decades of involvement with the CBC, Anṣārī played a central role in many of its activities and initiatives. Surayyā Qizil Ayāgh describes this collaboration as follows:

It is no coincidence that Anṣārī began her socially oriented librarianship activities well before the establishment of the Library Science Department at the University of Tehran, and that she did so through the CBC. Founded in 1962 with the aim of promoting reading among the younger generation, providing suitable books, and improving the quality of children's library services, the CBC offered an ideal setting for putting into practice the aspirations of an idealistic librarian.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Surayyā Qizil Ayāgh, "Kitābdārī-yi ijtimā'i rāh-i taḥaqquq-i ārmān-i kitāb barā-yi hamah: Nigāhī bih tajrubah-hā-yi Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī," 39.

Moreover, the CBC can be regarded as the point of connection between Anṣārī's academic perspectives and the realm of practice, as well as a concrete embodiment of her ideal vision—namely, bringing the university and the library into the heart of the community.

Regarding the necessity of fostering connections between universities and non-governmental organizations, Anṣārī offers the following argument:

I believe that universities around the world will move closer to civil society institutions in the future, as the significance of sustainable development grounded in indigenous knowledge continues to grow—particularly given that in many developing countries, universities are not centers of original thought production, but largely serve as venues for presenting the ideas of others. When there is no action, thought cannot be produced. One of the key instruments for generating thought is experience, and non-governmental organizations are inherently experience-based.⁵¹

This is an approach to which she herself devoted sustained attention throughout her years at the university, alongside her concurrent work with the CBC. She refers to this connection as a “civic bond” and regards her engagement with volunteers from diverse segments of society—each contributing in some way to the advancement of Iranian children's literature—as the source of her deep connection with the broader community.⁵²

The connection between Anṣārī and the CBC can also be interpreted from another perspective. In most of her writings and interviews, when addressing public libraries,⁵³ she has consistently been critical of the condition and status of public libraries in Iran. In her view, excessive political affiliation and centralization characterize these libraries, and there has long been a significant gap between their modes of administration and Ranganathan's five laws of library science.

It should not be overlooked that the CBC is an institution whose activities are carried out through participatory practices and with the support of hundreds of volunteers who are committed to children's literature and the promotion of reading. Clearly, all of the aforementioned activities and achievements have been made possible through the collaboration and dedication of these individuals. At the same time, however, it should not be forgotten that the guiding role of

⁵¹ Manṣūrah Shujā'ī, "Pazīruftan-i digarī dar ḥadd-i fāṣil-i sukūt va tamaddun," 114.

⁵² Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, "Pāy-i ṣuḥbat-i Ustād Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī" [Interview], 22.

⁵³ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, "Kitābdārī-yi ijtimā'ī: Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī," 193.

Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, together with her creative and holistic vision, has had an undeniable impact on bringing these initiatives to fruition.

A review of these activities demonstrates how a non-governmental organization, when guided by a pioneering individual, has the capacity to become a model for other institutions—particularly, in this case, libraries and cultural centers. What began as the love and ideals of its founders has evolved into a collective movement and a turning point in the history of social librarianship in Iran.

Moreover, she even regards the “Faint” or underdeveloped state of social librarianship as a consequence of the poor overall condition of libraries in the country.⁵⁴

Many of the initiatives that Anṣārī developed over the years within the CBC:

CBC can be seen as models for the kinds of activities that could have been realised in her ideal vision of the public library. By enumerating the CBC’s activities, she demonstrates how Ranganathan’s five laws of librarianship have come to be embodied at the very core of the CBC.⁵⁵

Initiatives such as establishing a library within a Juvenile correctional center; setting up libraries in Afghan and Iraqi refugee camps; founding specialised and public libraries such as The House of Librarians for the Promotion of Reading among Children and Young People (as an institution that grew out of the CBC); and projects like the “Bāmdād Library Project,” which focuses on establishing libraries in deprived areas, all exemplify this approach.

Further examples include initiatives such as the “Reading Basket,” aimed at promoting reading within the family; the establishment of book working groups for infants; programs dedicated to books for children with special needs and for hospitalized children; as well as collaboration with inclusive library projects and the production of reading materials for children with various disabilities. These materials include audio tactile and sensory books for blind and visually impaired children, easy-to-read books for children with intellectual disabilities, and film-books for deaf children.

Taken together, these initiatives represent concrete efforts to put the concept of “books for all” into practice and, as Anṣārī herself describes

⁵⁴ Manṣūrah Shujā’ī, “Pazīruftan-i diğarī dar ḥadd-i fāsil-i sukūt va tamaddun,” 113.

⁵⁵ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, “Kitābdārī-yi ijtimā’ī: Guft-ū-gū bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī,” 193.

it, to “move beyond conventional forms of librarianship and toward society and its needs.”⁵⁶

In some cases, these activities were not only unique but also represented the first experiences of their kind worldwide. One such example is the establishment of libraries in refugee camps, carried out with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the results of which were subsequently reported in the journal *Bookbird*.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Library and information science, as a discipline encompassing the various processes through which books and other information resources are acquired and processed to reach the end user, is grounded in multiple dimensions. Each of these dimensions constitutes a part of the process of acquisition, organization, and dissemination of knowledge. The ultimate objective of acquiring and organizing knowledge is its dissemination and delivery to the end user; that is to say, the process of information processing would be devoid of meaning and incomplete without consideration of its final consumer. Conversely, the provision of suitable services to users and the assurance of their satisfaction are only attainable through meticulous systems of organization and acquisition. Consequently, these disparate dimensions, which are predicated on the two pillars of technical services and public services, are interdependent and indispensable to one another, and neither holds superiority over the other.

A review of the history of the formation of modern librarianship in Iran reveals that the discipline’s infrastructure and primary points of focus were, from the outset, shaped around technical services—namely acquisition, organization, and classification. The founders of the field, particularly those inclined toward this orientation, in addition to the influence and authority they themselves held within the profession, seemingly believed that strengthening technical aspects through tool-making and the concentration of trained and specialized librarians in this

⁵⁶ Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, *Sitārāb-i furūṣān: Muṣāḥabab-i tarīkh-i shafābi bā Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī*, 173. For further information also see Qizil Ayāgh, Surayyā. “Kitābdārī-yi ijtīmā’i rāh-i taḥaqquq-i ārmān-i kitāb barā-yi hamah: Nigāhi bih tajrubah-hā-yi Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī.” *Kitāb-i Mah-i Kuliyat*, no. 88 (Farvardīn 1384 [March/April 2005]): 39–41. [In Persian.]

⁵⁷ “Refugee Camp Libraries in Iran.” *Bookbird* 35, no. 3 (1997).

domain would lead to the consolidation and elevation of the discipline's status. Over time, however, it became evident that this assumption was flawed.

What had been largely overlooked was the fact that what truly establishes the position of librarianship and enhances its value and credibility in the eyes of society is not the expansion of technical services and tools, but rather sustained efforts to strengthen the role of books and libraries in people's everyday lives and to respond meaningfully to the needs of the community. This was precisely the point to which Anṣārī paid particular attention from the very beginning of her entry into the field of librarianship and her professional engagement with libraries.

Whether through her executive roles in university libraries, the course content she developed, the creative teaching methods she employed, the personal influence she exerted on her students through her character and conduct, or—most importantly—through her decades-long presence and active engagement in the CBC, especially in her role as secretary and a driving force behind numerous projects and programs of this non-governmental organization, Anṣārī gradually helped shift attention away from an exclusive focus on technical services toward a greater appreciation of public services.

Her role and influence in the emergence and persistence of social librarianship in Iran may be described as follows: While technical and organizational aspects of librarianship have traditionally received greater institutional attention, Anṣārī consistently emphasized its social dimensions and worked to sustain this perspective throughout her career. What has rendered her impact enduring and exemplary, however, is her steadfast commitment to this path and her sixty years of continuous effort to articulate and reaffirm the social role of libraries in diverse forms.

During her years of teaching at the university, she consistently sought to emphasize the unique and indispensable role of public libraries in the socialization of the librarianship profession and in promoting equality in access to information. Through supervising theses and designing relevant course syllabi, she continually reminded the librarianship community, particularly students, of the importance of these libraries.

Although Iran's public libraries, as the most important institutions tasked with realizing the ideal of "Books for All," remain far removed from what they ought to be, what matters is that should the will ever

emerge to transform their structures and reimagine them as vibrant and dynamic social institutions—spaces for the exchange of knowledge and information in its various forms— Anṣārī's perspectives, the unique experiences shaped under her guidance within the CBC, and her legacy in Iranian social librarianship can serve as a guiding light.



From right to left: standing: Īrāndukht Shīrāzī, Muḥammad Tavakkulī, Nasrīn Amīrī, Sayyid Kāzīm Ḥāfizīyān Raḡavī, Majīd Ghulāmī Jalīṣah, Farībā Afkāri, Akbar Nī'matī, Shahrām Iqbālṣādah, Kiyānūsh Kiyānī Haftlang, and others; seated: Humā Humāvandī, Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī, Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, and others. Tribute to Nūshāfarīn Anṣārī. Organized by Iran Book House at the Iranian Artists Forum, Tehran, 2015. Photo credit: Jamāl Raḥīmī.