
UNIT 11 BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

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11.0 OBJECTIVES

In Unit 10, we have discussed geographical sources of information. In this unit we discuss biographical sources of information.

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- understand what is meant by biographical information sources;
- enumerate different types of biographical information sources;
- elaborate various characteristics for evaluating biographical information sources;
- give examples of some important bibliographical guides to biographical information sources; and
- explain the process involved in rendering biographical information reference service.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Brief biographical writeups of one or more persons who made some mark in any field of human activity, is the most sought after information in libraries. The announcement of a major administrative/judicial or legislative appointment of someone, an award or an honour to an individual, an outstanding performance on a stage or in the sports field, raises in our mind curiosity to know more about the person or the group of persons. Some time an old and forgotten personality suddenly becomes centre of attention and people evince interest in knowing about him. The basic biodata of celebrities in a subject are also sought to complete an article, a radio talk or a footnote in a research paper. In academic institutions or social gatherings basic data on individuals invited to deliver a speech are sought by persons who are required to introduce the speaker to the audience.

A good collection of biographical source books is, therefore, a very important part of the reference book collection in any library. Acquaintance with such sources and are understanding of their scope are essential components of library science training.



11.2 BIOGRAPHY: DEFINITION AND SCOPE

11.2.1 Definition

Books of biography fall under two categories; individual biographies and collective biographies. As librarians, we are concerned with books of collective biographies. Collective biographies are known by various names, the most common being "Biographical Dictionary" and "Who's Who". Some are also called *directory* (*Artists' Directory*), *handbook* (*Handbook of Information Scientists and Librarians in India*) or *encyclopaedia* (McGraw Hill Encyclopaedia of World Biography). Mostly they are self-contained books although some time they also appear as part of a year directory (viz, *Times of India Directory and Who's Who* (now ceased). Standard dictionaries and encyclopaedias also contain brief description of very eminent personalities associated with philosophy, religion, literature or mythology. In this Unit we shall restrict ourselves to sources which are exclusive to biographies, and which are called biographical dictionary. As is evident from the title, a biographical dictionary is a book of biographies or the details about the birth and death, parentage, education, achievements in life, contributions in their specialised field, publications of well known persons, usually arranged by their name or se in alphabetical order.

Harrods Glossary of Library and Information Science, defines biographical dictionary as "a collection of lives of people arranged in alphabetical order".

According to Lwis Shores "A biographical dictionary is a directory of notable persons, usually arranged alphabetically by surnames, with biographical identification that range from brief outline to extended narrative".

11.2.2 Scope

There are wide variations in scope in different biographical dictionaries. Some are data type which contain factual information of the biographee, others are collection of long essays on the lives of the persons covered. Even in a single volume, details about the lives of persons covered varies a great deal. Those who are more famous get longer treatment in comparison to lesser known figures. In some cases even the most famous person get brief description as enough reliable information about them is not available. Apart from variation in details about lives of biographies in a particular biographical dictionary, they also vary in coverage of per-sons in terms of period, geographical area and subject discipline.

11.2.3 Queries Answered by Biographical Information Sources

The following queries can be answered by Biographical Information Sources:

- i) Full name, pseudonym, etc. of an eminent person
- ii) Dade of birth and death
- iii) Education
- iv) Institutions served, period of service, position held, etc.
- v) Achievements, inventions, etc.
- vi) Awards received/ year/ purpose
- vii) Publications
- viii) Professional affiliations
- ix) Present address. Telephone number, etc:
- x) Family members (wife, sons, daughters) etc.

11.3 TYPES OF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Biographical dictionaries can be categorised by using any one characteristic at a time or by using period or time as a characteristic. They may be grouped as:

- i) Current biographical information sources, and



ii) Retrospective biographical information sources

From the point of view of geographical area covered they may be classified as,

- i) Universal, and
- ii) National, regional or local or institutional

Biographical dictionaries are also grouped as: (i) General (ii) Specialised or subject (iii) By gender such as men and women and (iv) By language.

The biographical dictionaries available in libraries are often found to possess more than one of the characteristics in various combinations. Examples of current universal specialised biographical dictionaries have their counterpart in current universal general biographical dictionaries. Similar is the case with retrospective dictionaries.

It would be convenient if we study them under two broad heads - Current and Retrospective.

11.3.1 Current Biographical Information Sources

A) Universal - General Sources

- i) *Dictionary of International Biography*. Cambridgeshire, 1972 -. Annual.

A general reference work containing biographies of about 5000 persons reflecting achievement in every major profession and field of interest on international scale.

- ii) *International Who's Who*. London: Europa, 1935 - Annual.

It offers brief biographical data of some 12000 to 15000 prominent living persons throughout the world. It has come to be recognised as an authoritative source in its fields.

- iii) *Current Biography*. New York: Wilson, 1940 -. Monthly (except Dec.).

Though claimed to be international in scope there is a marked bias to include those who are in some way related to the American scene. Annual cumulation entitled *Current Biography Yearbook* contains between 150 to 200 biographies of international personalities. A cumulative index to the yearbook is issued every 10 years.

- iv) *Who's Who in the World*. Chicago: Marquis, 1971-72 -biennial.

Comparable to *International Who's Who* in scope, it lists about 25000 personalities.

B) Universal - Specialised / Subject Sources

- i) *World Military Leaders*/ed. by Paul irace P. Hayes. New York: Bowker, 1974.

Covers biographical sketches of military and civilian personnel in senior positions in military establishments in all nations of the world.

- ii) *International Who's Who of Professional and Business Women*. Soham: Melrose Pr., 1989 -. Annual.

More than 5000 biographies of senior women in all walks of life - members of parliament, executive, writers, actresses. Index by country and occupation.

- iii) *People in Power: a loose leaf who's who of world statesmen, political leaders and cabinet members*. Essex: Longman.

It is a loose leaf directory which is updated every two month and is available on subscription. The publishers are the reputed firm, which also publishes *Keesing's Record of World events*.

- iv) *Contemporary Authors : a bio-bibliographical guide to current authors and their works*. Detroit: Gale, 1962 -. Annual.

Biographical information on current authors in many fields- humanities, social science and science,



- v) *International Authors and Writers Who 's Who*. Soham: Melrose Pr., 1978 - : Annual.

Claimed to be standard reference source for the lives of novelists, play wrights, columnists, journalists, poets and critics, etc. Covers around 8000 biographical entries. Some editions also carry lists of literary agency and literary societies in appendices.

C) National, Regional, Local Biographical Sources

National General Sources

- i) *India Who's Who*. New Delhi: INFA, 1970 -. Annual.

It is the most important general biographical source material from India, and covers a wide spectrum of the people of eminence in the country. Roughly 5000 concise biographies of people in all walks of life including government, politics, civil service, business and finance, education, art, science and technology are included in each yearly volume. Entries are arranged alphabetically under each broad subject. Entries not confirmed for three consecutive years are dropped from the list. An alphabetical Index is given at the end.

- ii) *Who's Who in America : a biographical dictionary of notable living men and women*. Chicago: Marquis, 1899 -. Biennial

It is considered to be a standard dictionary of contemporary biography of American people. The firm publishing *Who's Who in America* also publishes various sectional supplements such as *Who Was Who in America*, *Geographic Index* and *Professional Area Index*.

- iii) *Who's Who : an Annual Biographical Dictionary with which is incorporated "Men and women . of the time."* London: Black, 1948- Annual.

A biographical dictionary of prominent persons in many fields. Though principally British, but it also lists a few prominent names of other nationalities.

Most of the countries of the world have one or more who's who of contemporary per-sons, specially beginning from the post-Second World War years.

- iv) *Bhartiya Byaktikosh/ Comp.* by Bhagwat Sharan Upadhyaya. New Delhi: Arya, 1986.

- v) *Reference India. V.I.* Biographical notes on men and women of achievements of today and tomorrow. Delhi: Ritacimento, 1992.

D) National - Specialised /Subject Sources

- i) *Artists Directory*. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Academy, 1981. It includes various types of artists, e.g., painters, dancers, musicians, photography, etc.

- ii) *Directory of Indian Women Today/ ed.* by Ajeet and Alpna Cour. New Delhi: India International Pub., 1976.

Sahityik Kosh: 2500 sahityikon, lekhakon our patrakaron ka parichay/ Comp. by O.P. Sharma and Kirshan Kumasi. New Delhi: Sahitya Samaro, 1973.

- iii) *Lok Sabha Who's Who*. New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat - Annual.

This is compilation of the biographies of members of the Lok sabha based on replies received from members themselves. Also contains list of members with their constituencies.

- iv) *Rajya Sabha Who' Who*. New Delhi: Rajya Sabha Secretariat.

It brought out every two years when the composition of the Rajya Sabha undergoes a change.

- v) *American Men and Women of Physical and Biological Sciences*. 17th ed. New York: R. Bowker, 1989. 8V.

This includes information on approximately 127000 US and Canadian scientists. The same information on CD-ROM is titled as *Sci Tech Reference Plus*.



11.3.2 Retrospective Biographical Information Sources

A) Universal - General

- i) *Cambridge Biographical Dictionary*/ ed. by Magnus Magnusson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

A revised edition of *Chamber's Biographical Dictionary*, the first edition of which was published as early as in 1897. It is considered a standard reference tool. The biographical details include a brief outline of the person's life and work. The edition under the new name contains one third more names than the one covered in the previous edition,

- ii) *McGraw Hill Encyclopaedia of World Biography*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1973. 12 vol.

It provides one and a half pages of biographical articles for about 5000 selected people from Moses to Nixon. Designed especially for today's demanding ambitious high-school student.

- iii) *Webster's New Biographical Dictionary*. Springdale, Mass: Merriam Webster, 1988. ,

This is described by Katz as by far the best known and most used of the biographical dictionaries to which we may add in USA". The 1988 edition lists some 30,000 names.

B) Universal- Specialised/Subject Sources

- i) *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary* founded on material collected by the late Thomas William Beale and revised and enlarged by Henry George Keen. Ludhiana: Kalyani, 1972 (Indian reprint).

It is a compilation to assist as a reference book to those interested in the history of Islam of the medieval period of Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and India. In many cases it restricts itself to only listing of the names without providing any other information.

- ii) *Great Composers, 1300-1900: a Biographical and Critical Guide*/ by Daniel Ewen. New York: Wilson, 1966.

It includes biographies of about 200 composers of Western music.

- iii) *Hutchinson Dictionary of Scientific Biography*. 2nd ed. New York, : Oxford: Belicon, 1994.

This book covers the biographies of 1200 eminent scientists both deceased and living. Special attention is paid to scientists associated with experimental or theoretical break-through. In addition to biographies the book contains seven chronological reviews of major sciences and a glossary of 1800 scientific terms.

- iv) *Biographical Dictionary of Scientists*/ed. by Trevor Williams. 4th ed. Harper Collins, 1994.

This book covers the biographies of 1300 scientists many still living. It has many special features not found in other biographical sources: table of Noble Laureates 1901-1993; dates of birth and death of scientists in chronological order from 624 B.C. to 1993. Those who were not accommodated for full-length treatment in the main body are listed in appendix.

- v) *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*/ ed. by Charles C. Gillispie. New York: Scribner; 1970-80. 16 V.

It includes scientists from all periods of history (excluding living ones) from all over the world. Volume 15 is in two parts: part 1 has articles on scientists not covered in the set and part 2 has articles on scientific topics. Volume 16 is index to the set.

- vi) *International Encyclopaedia of Social Science*. V.18 *Biographical Supplement*/ed. by D. E. Sills. New York: Free Press, 1979.

This has the biographies of 215 eminent social scientists who were either dead when the main volumes were in the making or were born upto 1908.



- vii) *Women Who Ruled/by* Guido Jacksson. Santa Barbara, California: ABC - Clio, 1990.

This is an illustrated encyclopaedia covering all women rulers, defacto rulers, and constitutional monarchs, living or dead, of the world... since the beginning of the recorded history.

- viii) *Who's Who in Economics : a biographical dictionary of major economists, 1700 -1986/* Ed. by Mark Blaug. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Pr., 1986.

The first edition published in 1983 had covered 397 deceased and 674 living economists. The new edition has covered names which achieved eminence between 1982 and 1986.

C) National - General Sources

- i) *Dictionary of National Biography/* ed. by S.P. Sen, Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1972-1974. 4 vol. and Supplements.

This is a biographical dictionary of Indians in all walks of life who achieved eminence between 1800 to 1947. With the help of 350 contributors, the main set provides life sketch of 1400 persons, some still alive at the time of compilation.

A supplement, to be completed in 4 volumes is planned to provide biographical information of eminent personalities during the quarter century since 1947. Volume 1 covering the names beginning with alphabet A-D ed. by N.R. Ray was published in 1986.

- ii) *Eminent Indians Who Was Who, 1900-1980.* New Delhi: Durga Dos, 1985.

Biographical write up of Indians who played some role or held important government or social positions during the period beginning from the early 20th century to 1947.

- iii) *National Biographical Dictionary of India/* by Jagadish S. Sharma. Delhi: Sterling, 1972. Needs thorough editing.

- iv) *Times of India Directory and Yearbook including Who's Who.* Bombay: Bennet Coleman, 1914 -. Annual (ceased publication in 1986).

The directory originally appeared as *Indian Yearbook* upto 1947 when its title was changed to the *Indian and Pakistan Yearbook and Who's who*. The title was changed as above in 1953-54 and remained in publication with this title till 1986, when the publication was discontinued. Though very selective in nature, the who's who portion is an important source material for biographies of native state rulers, senior government functionaries, title holders and major industrialists.

- v) *Dictionary of National Biography/* ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. (re-issue) London: Smith, Elder, 1908-09 . 22v.

It was originally published in 63 alphabetical installments between 1885 and 1900. Planned to include "all men or women of British or Irish race who have ever achieved any reasonable measure of distinction in any walk of life". The DNB is the most important reference work of English biography. Its publication rights were transferred to the Oxford University Press which began bringing out supplements after every decade from 1920 till the 1980s after which two volumes have appeared covering 1981-1985 and in June 1996 appeared the volume for 1986 - 90. In between have appeared *Concise DNB* in three volumes, (upto 1970), *Condensed DNB* (1975) (upto 1960) and *IvLissing Per-sons* (1992).

The original set covered 29000 individuals and the supplements have brought the total coverage well over 36000.

Corrections and additions were published in Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Re-search, London. These corrections and addition for the period 1923 to 1963 were published in cumulated form in 1966 by G.K, Hall.

The British Academy has now sanctioned i.e. 250,000 to the OUP to bring out a new edition of the whole work both electronically and in book form.



- vi) *Dictionary of American Biography*. New York: Scribner, 1928-37. 20v. and index.

Designed on the lines of the DNB, it also contains signed articles and bibliographies at the end. The basic set has more than 13600 biographies. It has been kept upto date by supplements every five years. The eighth supplement covering the period 1966-70 was published in 1988. A concise edition *Concise Dictionary of American Biography* comprising the main text and the first six supplements in summary form was published in 1980. The American Council of Learned Societies has plans to revise it.

- vii) *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Pr., 1966-83. Vol. 1-9 (in progress) and *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Toronto: University of Toronto Pr. (1966-83) v. 1-5, 9-11 (in progress) are other English language examples of national retrospective biographical sources of general nature.

D) National - Specialised /Subject Sources

- i) *Dictionary of Japanese Artists. Painting, Sculpture, Lacquer Ceramics, Print/* by Laurance P. Roberts. New York: Weatherhill, 1976.

It limits itself to artists who were born before 1900 or if born later, who died before 1972. It also gives a brief glossary of terms.

- ii) *Biographical Dictionary of American Educators/* ed. by Johan F. Ohles. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr., (1978). 3 v.

It aims to provide a ready source of biographical information about those people who have shaped American education from colonial time to the American bicentennial of 1976. Includes some living names too.

- iii) *Who's Who of Indian Martyrs/* ed. by P.N. Chopra. New Delhi: Ministry of Education. 3. V.

V.1. *From 1857-1947*

V.2. Those killed in French and Portuguese possession and in princely states.

V.3. Those killed in 1857.

- iv) *Who 's Who of Indian Writers/* comp. by S. Bain Rao. New Delhi: Sahitya Alcademi, 1983.

Supplement volume edited by K. Satchidanandan was published in 1990.

The main volume had write up on 6000 living authors in 22 Indian language. Supplement adds another 1800 names.

11.3.3 index Type Biographical Information Sources

There are certain biographical sources, which serve primarily as an index to major retrospective and or current biographical sources. By looking up these publication one may identify sources where detailed information is available on the biographee. Given below are a few such examples:

- i) *Biography and Genealogy Master Index/* ed. by Miranda C. Herbert and Barbara Mc. Neil, Detroit: Gale, 1980. 8v.

A consolidated index to more than 3,200,000 biographical sketches in over 350 current and retrospective biographical dictionaries, The publication is kept up-to-date through annual and cumulative supplements. A cut down version of the *Master Index* is avail-able as *Biography Almanac* and microfiche edition as Bio Base.

- ii) *Author Biography Master Index. Detroit: Gale, 1982. 2V.*

It is an example of master index restricting its coverage to biographies of literary figures. *Index to Scientists of the World Ancient to Modern Times*, (Boston : Faxon, 1962) and *Index to Women of the World from Ancient to Modern Times* by Norman Olin. Ireland (Faxon, 1970) are other examples of one time publication of master index, although some are updated by supplements.

- iii) *Biography Index: a Cumulative index to biographical material in book and*



magazines. New York; Wilson, 1947-. Quarterly.

The index covers all types of biographical material even letters, diaries, prefaces and chapters in non biographical books. The publication claims to survey some 1500 periodicals for its compilation. Newspapers are important source for providing biographical write up on contemporary figures of importance. This is specially true of the obituary column in which a fulsome description is given on the occasion of demise of an eminent person. A cumulative index to such obituaries often provides information on person who might not have been covered in traditional who's who.

Given below are two examples of newspaper obituary index:

- i) *New York Times Obituaries Index, 1958-1968* and its supplement for 1969-78 both published by the New York Times.
- ii) *Obituaries from the Times 1951-1960* and its supplements which after the supplement for 1960-1970 are issued at 5 yearly intervals.

Examples of national level biographical indexes include:

- i) *British Biographical Archive* which covers 310 the most important English biographical references and which is being released on microfiche.
- ii) *American Biographical Archive*: a one alphabet cumulation of almost 400 of the most important English language biographical reference works on the United States and Canada published between 18th and 20th century edited by Gerry Easter.

11.4 EVALUATION OF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Biographical information sources are available in plenty which are being published. You will notice that not all of them provide up-to-date and reliable facts. The funds available to libraries to purchase reference works are limited. It is therefore essential to develop a thorough understanding of the sources before they are purchased. The following criteria will help you in assessing biographical reference works.

- i) **Authority:** The authoritativeness of a biographical dictionary can be assessed from the reputation of the publisher, editors and compilers. It will be useful to know the qualifications and experience of editors/compilers. The learned bodies like Universities, Sahitya Akademies, etc., are considered as reliable authorities.
- ii) **Scope and Purpose:** The title and preface generally indicates the scope and purpose of the work. You should be able to find out whether the source is intended to be - general international, national or specialized in scope. Whether it is comprehensive or selective and the work is retrospective or current.
- iii) **Selection Policy:** Another important point that helps in assessment of a biographical source is to know the criterion it uses in selecting the biographees, i.e. whether it is solely by merit, as per the decision of the publishers, by invitation, subscription, or on payment. Naturally, where the entries are based on payment, the quality is bound to be poor.
- iv) **Methods of Compilation:** Biographical tools are prepared by publishers/editors by using different methods of compilation. The use of questionnaire method is quite common. The biographee himself completes the questionnaire and later checks his own entry. Other method of compilation is publishers researching the material themselves using all published and unpublished sources. Both methods have advantage and disadvantages.
- v) **Treatment:** Are the biographical sketches brief or lengthy, factual or evaluative? The style of presentation is another factor, viz., whether discursive or scholarly. You should look at these factors carefully. This will help you in correct assessment of biographical information sources.
- vi) **Frequency of Publication:** How up-to-date is the information provided about



- ii) *A Dictionary of Universal Biography of All Ages and All People*/by A. M. Hyamson. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1951.

This bibliography contains, 1,00,000 biographies that appeared in 24 collected biographical dictionaries and general reference work.

- iii) *Biographical Dictionaries Master Index, 1975-76*. Detroit: Gale, 1975.

This provides key to more than 50 current biographical dictionaries. Contains 8,00,000 entries mostly Americans.

- iv) *Essays and General Literature Indexes. 1934 -*. New York: Wilson. Six-monthly, annual, and five year cumulations,

1977 edition indexed over 4000 essays and articles mostly biographical.

B) Bibliographical Guides to Individual Biographies

Some library catalogues serve as useful bibliographical guides to individual biographies.

- i) *Biography Catalogue of the Library/* by Donald Simpson. London: Royal Commonwealth Society, 1961.

This contains 12,000 entries with biographical details culled out from the books and periodicals in its stock.

- ii) *Catalogue of the Library of National Maritime Museum*. Vol.2, Biography. London: HMSO, 1969. 2v.

This catalogue is divided into two parts. Part 1 contains a list of collected biographies, individual biographies and autobiographies. Part 2 is a reference index containing brief descriptions of 15,000 biographies taken out from 21 collected biographies.

C) Bibliographical Guides to Specific Types of Biographical Material

- i) *British Diaries: an annotated bibliography of British diaries written between 1442 and 1942*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1950.

- ii) *A.L.A. Portrait Index*. Washington: Library of Congress, 1906. Reprint. New-York: Burt Frankling,1964.

D) Indexes to Biographies in Periodical Literature

- i) *Biography Index: a cumulative index to biographical material in books and magazines*. New York: Wilson, 1947-to date. Quarterly, Annual and three years cumulations.

It is best known and most often used. Biographical information that appear in this index is based on 24000 periodicals and 1000 books. Although international in scope, American bias is there. Each entry contains brief biographical details. bibliographies, portraits and other illustrations are indicated.

- ii) *The New York Times Obituaries Index, 1958-1968*. Stanford: North Carolina, Micro filming corporation. 1970. Supplement 1969-1978,1980.

In all there are 44,00,000 names indexed in alphabetical order of the persons whose obituaries appeared to New York Times between 1858-1868 to 1978. Coverage is world wide. Index entry contains page number, issue number and death date.

Self Check Exercise

- 2) Write short notes on

- a) Biography Index
- b) An Analytical Bibliography of Universal Collected Biography
- c) A Dictionary of Universal Biography of All Ages and All People.



- Note:** i) Write your answers in the space given below.
ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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11.6 BIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE PROCESS

As a practising reference librarian you will notice that requests for biographical information are the most frequent. Many of the queries will be straightforward and you can answer by referring to standard biographical sources, but some questions are bound to be complicated and difficult to answer.

It is, therefore, necessary for you to understand the process involved in rendering the reference service relating to biographical questions effectively.

Three important aspects of the process are:

- i) reference interview
- ii) nature of question
- iii) knowledge of biographical sources

The first and foremost factor is to have a clear idea about the query. You can enter into a friendly dialogue with the enquirer and ask questions until you clearly understand the subject and scope of the information sought. It will be helpful for you to know the nationality of the person whose biographical details have been asked for, whether he is alive or dead, and inter-national, national or local figure. Ask your enquirer if he belongs to a particular profession, and what his contributions and achievements are. Seeking clarifications on all these points will help you in establishing a systematic approach to the process.

Depending on whether the enquirer is a student or a research scholar or a professor, etc., the nature of question differs. Generally, a layman and student will ask you ready reference type of question whereas a researcher will need information in depth. Sometimes a simple question about not so important a person creates problem. Therefore, analyse properly the nature of question and then think of the right information source.

The third and most important factor is biographical source. As a reference librarian you should know about the typical characteristics of the biographical dictionaries. The common characteristics that you will notice are:

- i) In spite of the fact that the source is an international biographical dictionary, it is biased towards the country of its publication and includes more name and provides comparatively detailed biographical data about the biographees of that country.
- ii) Biographical details will be comparatively more about a biographee in a national biographical dictionary although his name appears both in international and national biographical sources.



- iii) Specialized/Subject biographical dictionaries will provide much more information in comparison with the two sources mentioned above.
- iv) Current biographical sources that are published as monthly, quarterly, etc., will have again many details of the biographees with up-to-date facts.
- v) Encyclopaedia and national biographical dictionaries are appropriate sources for biographies of deceased persons.
- vi) Newspaper and periodical indexes provide short cut to biographical articles and obituaries that appear in periodicals and newspapers and at times serve as ultimate source.
- vii) For biographies of local or district persons, the history books relating to those areas will be of great help.

In addition to knowing the above characteristics, you should apprise yourself with all biographical sources in your collection and find out whether you are able to answer all questions using them. You should get acquainted with latter editions of the existing sources and carefully study the contents of new ones.

Supplementing Biographical Information Sources: a continuous activity of the librarian

You must be aware that biographical information of all persons is not *covered in any of* the information sources studied so far. It is your duty to develop biographical information sources at your library level.

The librarian should be involved in compiling biographical information of local/institutional interest by developing newspaper clipping collection and secondly, collecting biographical information about person related to his institution in a form designed for the purpose.

Updating of Information Sources

Information in the biographical information sources is never up-to-date specially in the case of current biographies. Hence, the librarian must develop mechanism for supplementing the information of the original sources. The library must collect information about how authors, scientists receiving awards or industrialists making progress in his field of activity. When some eminent persons die then the date of death may be incorporated in the biographical sources.

The factors discussed above which are involved in the process of providing biographical in-formation are very vital from the point of rendering effective, prompt, and exact information.

Self Check Exercises

- 3) Discuss briefly the process involved in rendering biographical reference service.

- Note:** i) Write your answers in the space given below.
ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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11.7 SUMMARY

Biographical sources are important and found in reference collections of all types of libraries. These sources are available in large numbers. They need to be studied by dividing them into



different groups like, general or universal, national, regional or local and special or subject biographical sources.

The use, evaluation and bibliographical guides to these sources and processes involved in answering biographical reference questions have been elaborately explained.

Examples of all types of biographical sources with complete bibliographical citation and an-notation have been provided in the Unit to get a clear idea about them and their relevance so as to acquire them in a particular type of library.

11.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

- 1) The points to be considered in evaluating Biographical Dictionaries are :
 - i) **Authority:** The reputation of the publisher editors, and compilers is to be considered.
 - ii) **Scope:** Whether it is comprehensive or selective and whether the work is retrospective or current.
 - iii) **Selection Policy:** Whether the entries are based on merit, or other criteria (subscription, payment, etc.).
 - iv) **Treatment:** Are the biographical sketches brief or lengthy, factual or evaluative. Also the style of presentation.
 - v) **Currency:** How often new issues are brought out. How recent is the information content.
 - vi) **Format:** How legible is the typography. How good is the binding,
 - vii) **Other Features:** Whether it contains bibliographies, portraits, etc.

- 2)
 - i) *Biography Index* is a cumulative index to biographical material in book (1000) and magazines (2400) and is best known and most often used. Although international in scope, there is American bias.
 - ii) Part I of *An Analytical Bibliography of Universal Collected Biography* contains analytical index of 56,000 name entries included in 3000 English language collected biographies. Part II contains complete bibliographical details of the work analysed.
 - iii) *Dictionary of Universal Biography of all Ages and all People* contains 1,00,000 biographies that appeared in 24 collected biographical dictionaries **and general** reference works.

- 3) Three important steps involved in the process of rendering biographical reference service are:
 - i) Reference interview - It is necessary to have a clear idea about the enquiry. Entering into a friendly dialogue with the enquirer and ask questions until clear understanding is established about the subject of the information sought is vital.
 - ii) Nature of question - It is necessary to analyse the scope of the enquiry - is it a simple reference type question or a long range enquiry?
 - iii) Knowledge of biographical sources- Having understood the subject and scope of the enquiry, one should then think of the right source keeping in mind the special characteristics of each source under consideration.

11.9 KEY WORDS

- Bio-Bibliography** : A bibliography which contains brief biographical details about the authors.
- Biographee** : A person who is the subject of biography.



Biographee Entry	: The entry in a catalogue (dictionary name, or subject) under the name of the Biographee, the subject entry of a biographee.
Biographer	: A person who writes a biography of another.
Biographical Dictionary	: A collection of writing on lives of people arranged in alphabetical order.
Biography	: (i) A written account of a person's life. (ii) The branch of literature concerned with the lives of people.
Biography-File	: A file of : cords on cards, or of cuttings, giving information about individuals. Also called a who's who file.
Genealogical Table	: A representation of the lineage of a person or persons in tabular or diagrammatical form.
Portrait	: A representation of a person, made from life, especially a picture or representation of the face.

11.10 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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Higgins, Caving, (ed). (1980). *Printed Reference Material*. New Delhi : Oxford & IBH.

Katz, William A. (1992). *Introduction to Reference Work*. Vol. 1: Basic Information Sources. 6th ed. New York: Mc Graw- Hill.

Krishna Kumar (1996). *Reference Service: 5th rev ed*. New Delhi: Vikas.

Mukherjee, A.K. (1975). *Reference Works and Its Tools*. 3rd ed. World Press: Calcutta.

Activity

Please find out biographical information of the persons mentioned below. Give title of the publication, year and page number of the reference book consulted.

- 1) Atal Bihari Vajpayee
- 2) Abdul Kalam
- 3) Arundhati Roy
- 4) Sachin Tendulkar
- 5) Bhimsen Joshi
- 6) Vijay Bhatkar (Director C-DAC and Inventor of Parana Super Computer)
- 7) Man Mohan Singh