The main objective of any research is either to expand the frontiers of knowledge or to bridge the gap in the existing knowledge. It may even mean giving new meanings to the accepted facts or discarding old accepted concepts in the light of newly acquired knowledge. In any case, each research has its own objectives, which lead to certain results. From the results come the conclusions, and since the research must go on in the global sense, one must try to identify areas of further research in a foreseeable future.

7.1 Results

The analysis gave the following results regarding reviews of library science books as they appear in the selected seven periodicals of more than 20 years standing.

i. Most frequently occurring content characteristics or categories of description and evaluation were identified (please see Table 18, p. 101) by compromise ranking method.

ii. It was found that there is more of description and of less evaluation. This is true with both assertion counts and the category count, at 0.01 and 0.05 level of significance respectively, as indicated by the t-test for difference. In other words, this is true in 99% and 95% of cases respectively.
It was also observed that even in the case of headlines 79.6% were descriptive, 18.5% evaluative and 1.8% were neutral. This observation could be made only in the case of the Library Association Record. The other periodicals do not have a headline for reviews.

It was also noticed that the descriptions of books appearing in the book reviews have the ingredients of abstracts as suggested in the INQ Standard No 214 (1976). The abstracting nature of book reviews cannot categorically be said to be indicative or informative.

However, it can be said that the reviews in the Journal of Documentation and the Journal of Librarianship gave mostly informative abstract-like reviews. In other words, in such cases, one can get the results and conclusions of a book by just reading its review. In the case of the reviews of Library Quarterly, Library Association Records and Special Libraries, the reviews were sometimes indicative, sometimes informative. But, College and Research Libraries and Indian Library Association Bulletin gave mostly indicative type of description of books.

One can also say that the Journal of Documentation, the Journal of Librarianship and the Library Quarterly were leaning towards being subjective reviews. The other four journals in the sample were objective types of reviews.
v. A majority of the reviews, i.e., 76.3% were written in the third person. The remaining 23.7% reviews were written in the first person. All such reviews in the first person were more subjective than the rest.

vi. Reviews, excepting those which were in the first person, were written in active voice and in the present tense. The reviews written in the first person were partly in the past tense, where the reviewer tried to relate his personal experience or viewpoint in relation to the book.

vii. Highly favourable or highly unfavourable evaluation with respect to any category was far low (11.5%, p. 103). Since all books cannot be of average quality, one can conclude that reviewers carefully avoid extreme evaluations. And wherever there was a highly unfavourable evaluation, some justification or evidence was given (41 out of 45 highly unfavourable comments were justified).

viii. There was no association of evaluation i.e., favourableness or unfavourableness with the novelty of a subject, status of the reviewer, and length of the review. However, there was 90% association with the status of publisher and ownership of periodicals. In other words, there was enough evidence to say that certain books of publishers get more favourable reviews than others.
If one assumes that the reviewers were fair, this means that those publishers bring out better books than the other publishers. However, one can still accept the idea that there was some bias towards books of certain publishers. Evaluation was also strongly associated with frequency of the periodicals. That the time lag was strongly associated with the publishers' status (see p 127) supports the idea that there was some bias towards publishers.

9. Review length of review was found to be independent of the status of the reviewer and the evaluation. The length is a characteristic of the editorial policy of certain periodicals. At the most, one can say length of the review increases or decreases depending upon periodicity. In other words, quarterlies gave longer reviews than monthlies.

10. Time lag was strongly associated with the status of the publisher and the novelty of the subject content of the book under review. These ten sets of findings give a clear picture of the characteristics of the reviews of library science books in the professional periodicals.

Some stray thoughts that occurred while doing the content analysis of the reviews and analyzing the data have to be viewed in the light of the findings. These form the reflections, recommendations and conclusions.
7.2. Reflections, Recommendations and Conclusions

The following are some of the reflections in the form of some probing questions. The answers, based on the results, form the recommendations and conclusions.

7.2.1. Is it really wrong to have more description than evaluation?

One of the objectives of book reviews, is to introduce a new book to the reader. So the review should have enough of description and evaluation. The percentages of D & E indicated in the table 32, (p 132) are 69.76% descriptive assertions, 23.34% of evaluation and 6.32% other assertion should be a good model, to arrive at editorial policy towards book reviews. Thus, there is nothing wrong about having more description. Perhaps 70:23:7 could be a good ratio of description, evaluation and subjectivity respectively.

7.2.2. How subjective should a review be?

As indicated above 6.87% i.e., rounded of to 7% of subjectivity is observed in the sample. However, what is more important is the attitude of subjectivity. It is true, that a lot has to be conveyed through the reviewer's expert opinion. However, certain types of subjectivity are bound to cause noise in the communication, E.g. Stephen Mallinger explains his experience as a prison Librarian, with 47 assertions in a review of 80 assertion while reviewing
William Coyle's book, *Libraries in Prison* For *Library Quarterly*, July 1988. This is really out of proportion, and the book being reviewed is buried in the reviewer's experience. In such cases the review eclipses the book on which it is based.

7.2.3 Do elements of abstracting noticed in book reviews have an adverse effect?

Perhaps the answer should be an emphatic 'no.' The art of abstracting brings in a sort of discipline in the description of books as being given in reviews. In fact, this could be a gift of Library and Information Science to the field of mass communication in general and book reviewing in particular.

Further this study can conclude to say that after all, a book review is an evaluative abstract. Stretching it further, this study suggests that the book reviews could be of two types, viz., Indicative book reviews and Informative book reviews, which can be two classes under objective reviews. If the review lays more emphasis on the conclusions and results discussed in the book it should be informative review, if it gives just the complete picture of its content, it should be considered indicative. In any case a review should have nearly 25% evaluation.
7.2.4. What are the areas where the reviewer should exercise more restraint in pointing out deficiencies of the book under review?

The content analysis of reviews has pointed some cases where American reviewers, obsessed by an excess of British slant have loudly complained. Similarly some English reviewers have even said that more American sources are cited in the bibliography. It is nice to notice such slants. But when someone writes on a subject like Library Science, which has a slender body of theory, it is mostly based on one's own experience. Thus, such slants are inevitable. On the other hand, reviewers also say that the book lacks focus, or it deals with utopia, if the author tends to generalise any concept. Surely, he can't be both general and specific at the same time in a subject like Library Science. It is ideal to remember any flexibility could be both strength and weakness at the same time in case of "soft sciences" like Librarianship.

In view of such conflicting views, it is for the consideration whether reviewers may refrain from making comments where there is heavy sprinkling of authors' own experience.

In a book published in 1986 and reviewed in Library Quarterly 1988, the reviewer cites a book published in 1907 and states that the latter is better than the former. This type of comments are not fair, and should be avoided. A book should be compared only with the literature available at the time of its publication.
The other thing that should be avoided is the following comments of the following type:

"Rather than buying this book, interested librarians might be better advised to add £20 and subscribe to Reference Librarian, each issue of which contributes on a particular aspect of reference work."

- David Butcher,


Librarians have to use such smartness in managing the library with escalating prices of documents and shrinking budgets, year after year. Evidently such comments in a book review suggest that the he/she has gone beyond the brief as a reviewer. The role of a librarian and that of a reviewer are not to be mixed up. It is worth noting that 20 reviews had some comment on the other about the price of the book being reviewed. In all these cases they have said that the book is too expensive.

7.2.5. What are the main problems of reviewers?

The main problem in reviewing Library Science books - it could be in other subjects also - is the increasing number of books which contain articles, papers, etc., by different authors. 110 out of 228, i.e. 48.24%, were collections of various types such as edited works, readers, collections of articles on a subject, conference proceedings, festschrift volumes, etc. It appears the days of single author books are becoming out of fashion. This
has a special problem for reviewers. The following are some of the remarks pertaining to the books of above type, found in the sample while conducting content analysis.

"What is on offer, is an assortment of articles, some of which will be of interest and some not."

— John R Sherwell


"The organizers decided the call for papers should be as broad as possible (P1), the broad is what they get"

— Robert K O'neil


"As with most collections by different authors the essays differ in length, lucidity and scholarly approach."

— Barbara Immorph

"... is an eclectic collection of nine articles on subjects as diverse as... Articles range in length... it lacks focus and structure

- Michael Madden

Review of Advances in Library Administration and Organisation in Library Quarterly, July 1988

These comments amply illustrate the difficulty of reviewers. They cannot review a set of articles in 250-500 words, if the collection lacks focus, and if there is nothing common among the contributions in a collection. Reviewers must identify this problem and find some model for reviewing such collections. Perhaps the ideal would be a paragraph about the central theme, if any, an indicative paragraph about various contributions followed by another, giving important findings in a few of the significant contributions.

7.2.6 What is the ideal style of writing a book review?

There was no direct answer found for this question. However, the following could be the suitable set of answers:

a. As indicated in the section 7.2.3 p. 144 above, writing in the form of an evaluative abstract may give crisp reviews.

b. It would be better to avoid the first person narration. Perhaps reviewers write in the first person, either to exercise their right as reviewers, or to
inform readers about themselves, or just to play it safe.

It is always safe to say that this is my opinion and you may differ. Thus, the first person reviews are safe and give rise to less controversies. However, a review is basically a report, and hence the first person account is better avoided.

c. Some of the smart reviewers have an intelligent way of pointing at the incomprehensiveness and shortcomings of a book under review. They just suggest certain items to be incorporated or a few corrections for the subsequent edition of the book. Here, the reviewer takes the role of a teacher or an adviser. This is a very modest and sophisticated way of saying the bitter truth such that it does not hurt the author.

A lot of space can be saved by clubbing together the categories ‘11. Complete Picture of Theme’ and ‘27. Plan/Organisation or arrangement of thoughts’. In 101 cases out of 257 reviews (39.3%) this was done. These two categories go hand-in-hand. Similarly, category ‘8. Expressed Not Effect of the Book’ and ‘28. Readership’, go together. A reviewer can write that a book is very good for teachers and students but not so good for senior professionals. These are some of the hints which can trigger good book reviews.
Further, the review can be constructed in the form of a cohesive set of answers to the nine questions suggested on p. 78. There were not enough evidences in the sample studied to support such a recommendation. But such attempts could prove useful.

(It is not out of place to consider what Bohdan S. Wynar, editor in chief, Libraries Unlimited has to say regarding the content of the review. According to him, the reviewer should discuss the work and then provide well documented critical comments—positive or negative. Usually the reviewer should discuss usefulness of the work, organization, execution, and pertinence of contents, prose style, format, availability of supplementary materials, eg. the index or appendices; similarity to other works and/or previous editions. Reviewers are encouraged to discuss intended audience and/or level, but the review need not conclude with specific recommendation for purchase. An adequate description and evaluation of a book will speak for itself. — Extracted from the preface of American Reference Book Annual)

These curious questions have brought out the thematic essence of the study. It gives a picture of various factors that could be thought of within the scope of this work. Here the attempt was just to find the nature of book
reviewing as done by teachers and practitioners of librarianship. In the process it was noticed that the psychological commitments of librarians towards promotion of readership, unwillingness to offer opinion about books, as in the case of reference service were reflected in book reviewing.

Book reviews were examined as a form of writing. In the course of the study many ideas about book reviews in librarianship flashed. These were out of the purview of this study, but are suggested now for future research.

7.3. Further Studies

Further research can be done in the following areas regarding book reviewing in Library and Information Science:

1. Time-Series studies of book reviews to know what changes have occurred during last 15-20 years.

2. Choosing a set of prolific reviewers, one can compare their reviews and interpret their ideas about librarianship.

3. The subjects covered by the books reviewed may be used as a pointer to find the trend in which librarianship is growing.
4. One can go through the letters to editors on book reviews, then compare them with the referred books and their reviews. This could prove to be a good feed-back study.

5. Also similar studies can be conducted on subjects like Management and Medicine to find out if certain categories like price, bibliography and index are touched upon by the reviewers or, are these the typical characteristics of Librarians. Also, one can examine if the art of abstracting has influenced the reviewing in other subjects.

7.4 Significance of the Study

The present study besides providing to the future research as indicated above, may and should also prove to be a starting point for application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) or Expert System into the art of book reviewing, not only in Library Science, but even in other fields, and when such expert systems are built the book reviewing can be delegated to machines.

With all its efficiency Artificial Intelligence cannot produce comments as cited below. (Please note the irony or the humor by comparing the comments with the title of the book under the review.)
Andrew Dalby observes:

"It is, ironically, a symptom of the malaise he wishes to cure that Ziauddin Sardar's book is published in English when its aim is to persuade largely Arabic-speaking governments to develop Arabic-language academic and scientific sources."


"Reasonably enough, Dr Mumford does not include living librarians which apparently disappointed some people whom he had to tell that they lacked the final crucial qualification. Dr Mumford has sensibly decided to publish before, as he says, he becomes a candidate for inclusion in his own right."

Stephen Lehmann, while reviewing, Reviews and Reviewing Ed by A J Walford, in Library Quarterly, April, 1988, comments:

"Walford's chapter is a string of quotations in search of a text."
Alan C Montgomery has the following tongue-in-cheek remark to make while reviewing Who is Who in the UK Information World 1988/89 for Library Association Record, October 1988:

"Some of the entries are very detailed and read more like a job-hunter's CV or an election manifesto than a professional expertise or a contact list."

Although Artificial Intelligence may not produce such reviews, it can provide check lists for reviewers. Reviewers still have to read books before reviewing, even when such a tool is available. AI may present reviewers with ideas in different permutations which in turn may many more intense remarks in the mind of a reviewer. Surely such innovations will improve the quality of book reviews.

While such future can be thought of book reviews, in a technical sense, what happens to the status of reviewers is a big question. Status and importance of book reviewers can be best brought out in the following extract from a review of a book on book reviewing:

"Reviewers have long been the staple genre of academic publishing, stuck in the back of journals, adding length but not recognised weight to their writers' curriculum vitae (or cash to their pockets), and are subject to few recognised..."
And yet they can have a serious impact: not only on one book, but also on the career of its author, on the fortune of its publisher, on the discipline itself. Reviewers need all the help we can get. Guides are valuable, but we also need institutional, ethical, epistemological and historical studies to establish a conceptional context and a firmer intellectual grounding for reviewing with the hope, perhaps, of turning around the Nietzschean perception that whether, we praise or blame depends only on which shows our own judgement to greater advantage."

— Stephen Lehmann

Review of Reviews and Reviewing Ed by

A.J. Walford

Library Quarterly, April, 1988

Such pointers coupled with developments of artificial intelligence in the field of book reviewing will, it is hoped, lead to all-round improvement in the field of book reviewing. It is hoped that this study is one positive step towards that future.