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UNIVERSITY LIBRARY THEN AND NOW

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[Refers to the absence of university libraries in the nineteenth century. Traces the beginnings of university libraries in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Describes the progress made during the pioneer period of the second quarter of the century. Describes the sudden expansion of the university library system after independence and the slow-down in service. Gives an account of the great strides made by the university libraries during the same period due to the action of the University Grants Commission. Traces the vital role to be played by the university libraries hereafter].

0 Delimitation

I should like to take the 'then' only up to 1857 when the first three universities of modern times were established in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. This is not because there were no universities in India prior to 1857. On the other hand there were many. One of the earlier universities in South India lingered on as late as eighteenth century. Its seat was Tiruvisalur, now a small village near Kumbakonam, on the banks of the Cauveri. We have several anecdotes about this University. The descendants of the professors of the faculties of Mathematics, Medicine, and Philosophy were still holding the land-grant of their ancestors and were still practising these subjects some thirty years ago. These descendants had some remnants of the departmental libraries of the days before our latest lapse into cultural exhaustion. To get a picture of such old university Libraries, it will require a considerable amount of research into literary,

epigraphical, and archaeological sources. This is not within my competence. Indeed, I hold that our country cannot afford to spare any librarian to take up this field of research. It has, therefore, to be left in the hands of historians.

1 Nineteenth Century : Null Period

The three universities established in the middle of the nineteenth century were not really for advancement of learning and research, either by intention or by performance. For, the very preamble to the Madras University Act of 1857, passed by the Legislative Council of India in September that year, reads as follows :

"WHEREAS, for the better encouragement of Her Majesty's subjects of all classes and denominations within the Presidency of Fort St George and other parts of India in the pursuit of a regular and liberal course of education, it has been determined to establish a University at Madras for the purpose of ascertaining, by means of examination, the persons who have acquired proficiency in different branches of Literature, Science, and Art, and of rewarding them by academical degrees as evidence of their respective attainments, and marks of honour proportional thereunto; and whereas, for effectuating the purpose aforesaid, it is expedient that such University should be incorporated : It is enacted as follows."

Apart from there being no reference to research among the above mentioned objectives of the university Act, in actual practice the three universities restricted their activity merely to holding examinations and awarding degrees as hall-marks of fitness for recruitment to the civil service of the country. The teaching work was done by colleges. These did not form an integral part of the universities. The colleges did not feel the need to have libraries with books other than text-books and near-text-books. The universities themselves did not find any need for a library as there was provision for neither education nor research under its direct auspices. However, the older universities of the West could not and did not realise or believe that these Indian universities were merely examining bodies. Therefore, they used to send some of their own publications to the three universities in India. We have no means of knowing what happened to these books. But in the Madras University Library collection I found a few books received by the University in the nine-

teenth century. Thus, to write about the university libraries in India is like writing about "Snakes in Iceland".

2 First Quarter of the Twentieth Century: Period of Small Beginnings

By the Curzonian Act of 1904, the three universities were induced to some extent, to think of research. However, hardly any progress was made till the Delhi Darbar of 1911 held by King George V in commemoration of his coronation as Emperor of India. On the occasion of this Darbar, some money was gifted by the Government of India to each of the three universities. This stimulated the three universities to establish some teaching and research departments. The Madras University, for example, established during this period a Department for Research in the Dravidian languages. The University of Calcutta went very much forward in this direction during this period largely due to the vision of Sir Asuthosh Mukerjee and some of his enlightened contemporaries. This thin advancement of research in the Victorian universities brought with it the beginning of university libraries. In Madras, for example, gift-books accumulated through years in the lumber-room of the University office were organised into a library. The collection was given a home under the roof of the wing of the Museum, which housed the Connemara Public Library. A Library Committee was formed. Some of the professors with leisure engaged themselves in making a list of the books. This list was eventually printed in 1914 as the catalogue of the Library. About the same time, rules were framed for the use of the library. Members of the Senate of the University—called Fellows—were allowed to borrow from the collection. But few did. Graduates of the University were allowed to consult the books in the collection within the library premises. Here again few did. However, the daily number of users just reached two digits by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The staff was recruited from among the attenders and peons of the Museum! The highest qualification was a pass in the matriculation. The post of the person with this qualification was designated—Assistant Librarian. The second in command had studied up to the lower secondary examination. The third and the last had not reached beyond the primary school classes. This I believe is one explanation for hardly anybody using the library. In

addition, the collection itself had been a hotch-potch without any correlation either to the work in the colleges or to the fields of interest of graduates. During this quarter, additional universities were established with teaching as an avowed item of the objective though not research. These universities too continued the method of teaching followed in the colleges of the Victorian universities *viz.*, to prepare candidates for examination rather than to orient the students towards advancement in learning and research. Therefore, the libraries of these new universities were no better than those of the older universities.

3 Second Quarter of the Twentieth Century : Pioneering Period

About 1920, the Montford Act had included education in the transferred half of the subjects delegated to the constituent states themselves. The universities therefore came under the care of an Indian Minister. The Calcutta University Commission had given a shake-up to the complacent mood of the universities. The Indian Ministers of Education enacted new University Law, though unfortunately not in Calcutta. The Patro Act (1923) of Madras, for example, had included teaching and research among the objectives of the University, atleast in addition to providing men for the civil service. Research departments were established in several universities. This naturally made the university library to move towards the heart of university life. We were fortunate in Madras. Thanks to the occasion when Dr P Subbaroyan, the then Chief Minister of Madras, and myself were brought together on a platform, the Madras University Library was able to get an annual grant of about Rs 70,000, in addition to a sumptuous non-recurring grant to purchase many runs of back volumes of learned periodicals and sets of a sufficient number of reference books indispensable for research. Two years later this grant was made a statutory one, and provision was also made for additional grants to the library as and when new departments of study and research would be established. I believe this was the first forward financial step in the history of the university libraries in India in the second quarter of the twentieth century. I had the privilege of developing this library during its first twenty years. I had the good fortune to have a number of colleagues with the dedicated attitude and ungrudging industry inspite of their salary level having

been miserable, and inspite of many extra-academic factors wounding their feelings and tending to depress them from time to time. All honour to them to have demonstrated the possibilities of an energised university library. They also demonstrated the readiness of the students and the graduate to accept library service when it was given to them though they did not know that they had a right for it and that they could insist upon it. The hours of the library were made all the working hours of the day. The days of the library were made all the days of the year. The books were classified minutely. The classified catalogue in cards was brought into vogue. The stack-room was profusely guided. Reading lists were produced in plenty. Public relation work put on full steam. Open access without restriction was introduced. Hardly any reader entering the library at any hour would be left to himself, to go about in shyness without being received by a willing, well-informed reference librarian, with an inviting smile on his face. This was the first forward step in service in the history of the university libraries in India. The public appreciated all this service. The members of the staff, however little their salary, were accosted on the roads and on the Marina as equals by men at the top of the social rung. Even today to whatever part of India I go, I come across men who had used that University Library and who spontaneously refer to the debt they owe to the service rendered by the Madras University Library. I do believe that a similar high level of service characterised the other university libraries in India in the second quarter of the twentieth century.

4 First Half of the Third Quarter of the Twentieth Century : Slow-down in Service

The first half of the third quarter of the twentieth century inherited some of the adverse happenings in the university libraries of the country during the period of World War II. These happenings acted as a blight even before the end of the second quarter of the century. By the time the war conditions cleared up, a new generation of librarians had come into the university libraries. They could not have the thrill of pioneership. Moreover, the number of student population in the universities and colleges had increased considerably without reinforcement of staff. Even the pioneer staff could not have continued by themselves the intimate service which they used to

give before the War. Moreover, the number of universities also began to multiply. Some of the universities continue the Victorian tradition of 'Professor-in-charge of library'. This cuts out all initiative in the library staff of such universities. It induces in them an attitude of satisfying and getting favour from the Professor-in-charge rather than of satisfying the readers and satisfying their own professional conscience. Courtiership began to replace the spirit of service. This depression to a lower level of service spreads like an epidemic even into the older university libraries. Even if there was no Professor-in-charge, the Administrative wing of the university tends to domineer over the library staff and inhibit in them all the spirit of enterprise and initiative. They are driven to seek the source for their delight, not in the joy gleaming forth from the eyes and the faces of readers correctly served by them, but from the smiles and favours of the administrative-higher-ups. Librarians reduced to this plight are themselves made to teach the new generation of librarians; with the result, the new generation starts with a handicap born of bad precept and worse example. But fortunately there are a few honourable exceptions to this. The hope of the future university librarians centres round them. Library hours are cut short. Vital parts of the library such as the periodicals, reading room and the stack room containing research material are locked up early, long before people are free from their work and are able to reach the library. Open access is curtailed considerably even during day time. The old well-qualified graduate reference staff is gradually replaced by non-graduate clerical type of persons. Readers could not get either a welcome or a real reference service as in the pioneer period. The older reader accustomed to better service take it all in a fatalistic way cursing the bad days that had come. The newer generation had already been caught up in the go-gay, do-little-work mood into which the country has begun to fall after the first few years of the jubilation of independence. Therefore, few research workers came to the library for information. No corrective comes from any of the sections of the reading public. Therefore, it became possible for the older libraries also to fall into the habit of slow-down-service. This illness, as already indicated, is not peculiar to library service alone; it is found everywhere in the country now—in the secretariat, in the district offices, and in the educational institutions. God knows where this way of life will lead us to. Let us pray that the conscience of the

educated among us will be quickened soon and that we shall abandon moving in that suicidal direction and ascend up to a higher level of energy—both in our individual life and in the collective life of the nation.

5 First Half of the Third Quarter of the Twentieth Century : Period of Great Strides in Support

The first half of the third quarter of the twentieth century is not however an altogether dark period in the history of the university libraries in India. Though it witnessed deterioration in service, it enjoyed financial and moral support in abundance. This was initiated by the emphasis placed by the Radhakrishnan Commission on the role of the library in the future university education of our country. This was implemented boldly and fully by the vision and knowledge of Dr C D Deshmukh during the period of Chairmanship of the University Grants Commission. He provided large sums of money for promoting research in the universities. He upgraded the salary scales of the teachers. He gave freely and abundantly to the university libraries themselves. He was keen that the library should be the heart of each university. To this end he appointed a Library Committee. I had the privilege of being its Chairman. He helped the Committee to be bold in its recommendations. He made the UGC accept the recommendations of the Committee to put the staff of the university and college libraries on the same scale as the academic staff. He further asked me to conduct a seminar for university librarians on streamlining the administrative work of the libraries in order that the maximum possible man-power can be released by the university libraries to do active, exact, and expeditious reference service to every reader—be he a teacher or a student. In the words of Dr Deshmukh, the report of the Library Committee of the UGC is, "A Classic in that particular field. The contents of that report as also a supplementary one (the proceedings of the Seminar for the University Librarians) will.....guide the development of the University Libraries for at least a generation to come."

6 Second Half of the Third Quarter of the Twentieth Century : Period of Energisation and Hope

But for the difficulties due to foreign exchange, everything has now been well set for university libraries of India to take off. Even this foreign exchange difficulty can be solved in one of many ways, if the libraries get energised and work in concert. I therefore look upon the ensuing twelve years as a period of energisation and hope. The members of the university library staff should develop a spirit of dedication to the service of readers and a devotion to their work at its best. They should even do a little more than this. Every experience picked up in the day-to-day work in the library—be it in book selection, book ordering, periodicals work, accessioning, classification, cataloguing, circulation, reference service, maintenance, allocation of finance, keeping of accounts, library statistics, binding, or any other common office routine in a working library—should stimulate a creative urge in them. This creative urge, they should carry with them whenever they go after leaving the library. They should derive joy in finding something new about them. In this, they should work as a team—with their immediate colleagues in their own library as well as with their remote colleagues in other libraries. For healthy library service requires not only giving the service according to the prevailing standards, but also concurrently improving the standards of service and, for this purpose, improving library techniques of every kind. That the university library work should be energised in this way is the hope with which I look forward into the coming decade.

7 New India's Needs

This is what post-independent India expects of the library profession. New India is aware of the low ebb into which sense of duty and creative urge have gone in the higher age-groups. But new India understands this happening, as a result of the suppression through which that age-group passed in its younger days and its consequent inability to study itself into normal active life after getting released from that suppression. But the lower age-groups are free from that handicap. Their handicap is only the inevitable bad example of the higher age-groups. But the more virile among the younger

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people, should be able to brush aside that example and set a new example. Further, in the next decade a still younger generation will be coming into active life. They should be much more free from all such handicaps. No doubt, the new life should begin globally in all the professions. No profession should say "Let others move forward, I shall start thereafter". The teaching profession and the library profession should never say that. The work of these two professions is that of energising the others, through service of knowledge. The teaching profession should cultivate the intellect and the will in the students. The library profession should make the service of recorded knowledge pinpointed, exhaustive, expeditious, acceptable, and purposeful. For the teaching profession or the library profession to wait till others get into steady motion will be like the soil and the manure saying, "I shall function after the tree grows and flowers." New India's appeal to the library profession is :

"Take off and go forward, now and immediately. The taking off and moving forward of the other depends to some extent on your own moving forward as a pre-condition. The benefit of your action may not be immediately visible. But its deferred benefit is worth much more than the immediate benefit flowing from the action of the other professions. Our society had done much better about you—and that too much quicker—than the society in any other countries. Therefore, plunge into your work in a spirit of abandonment. Do your best in a spirit of dedication. Find the largest amount of your joy in your work within the university libraries and in the extra-mural creative team-work in the area of library science."