

Academic and Research Libraries in India

INDIAN UNIVERSITIES today are facing a problem about which there has been much concern in our own country, but their opportunity to anticipate and to prepare for this problem has been much less than ours. The problem referred to is overcrowded universities, with inadequate resources in personnel, plant, and libraries.

The fact that the attainment of independence in India occurred in 1947 is basic to this, as well as many other problems. The constitution of India provides universal compulsory free education for children up to the age of fourteen within ten years of its promulgation. At the elementary level approximately 30 per cent of the children in the age group six to eleven were in school in 1947, but in five years this had risen to 40 per cent.¹ The number of pupils was over nineteen million on March 31, 1953.

This rapid increase will ultimately have its effect as these students complete their secondary school training and a proportion seek higher education. Before 1947 there were only twenty-one universities in India; in 1953, this number had increased to thirty-one.

Many of the universities have enrollments of 30,000-40,000 students. The need for additional qualified faculty has not been met; at least, one has the im-

¹ Kabir, Humayan. *Education in New India*. (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 6-7.

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pression that this is true in view of the many complaints about inadequate staff and the poor salaries which make recruiting of competent young people to teaching more and more difficult.

The universities are all state supported and controlled. The central government exercises an advisory and coordinating function, collects information and statistics, serves as a clearing house, and provides financial assistance. This latter function is handled through the University Grants Commission, which has recently made several large grants for the construction of new library buildings.

The University of Delhi has recently completed a fine, new building which shows the influence of a visit by the librarian, Mr. S. Das Gupta, to the United States, where he studied many university libraries. Other universities have not been so fortunate, although Baroda University in Bombay State does have a very good building now nearing completion, and already occupied. Dr. C. P. Shukla, the librarian, secured his Ph.D. at Michigan and through the intelligent cooperation of the vice-chancellor (president)² of Baroda was able to force certain necessary changes in the architect's plans, even while still completing his work at Michigan. Many of the new buildings are being designed by architects who are not experienced in library plans and building, without any consideration of the librarian. This is attributable in some measure to the status of librarians in India.

In the majority of institutions visited

² Since the university is a state institution, the governor of the state is usually designated chancellor. The chief official of the university is thus the vice-chancellor.

the librarian did not have faculty rank or status and often was regarded as a high-ranking clerical worker. His title might be assistant librarian, deputy librarian, or librarian. It is common practice to have a faculty member as "officer-in-charge." Some explanation was made to the effect that the faculty member is a "gazetted" officer while the librarian is not, and that all orders and expenditures must be approved over the signature of a "gazetted" officer. In another case, the vice-chancellor stated that he was looking for a properly qualified librarian, who would be accorded full rank and privilege, but that the salary he had to offer was not adequate to attract a man with the proper degree. This brings up the matter of training for librarianship in India.

The library education offered in the universities in general leads to a diploma in librarianship. Admission to these courses is usually predicated on the applicant having completed his Bachelor's degree. At the University of Bombay, undergraduates are admitted, but must attend four terms instead of two as required of graduates. Courses generally include: Evolution and History of Writing, Books and Libraries; Library Organization; Library Administration; Reference Work and Documentation; Classification; Cataloging; Cultural History of India; and Outline of Knowledge. (The latter two may not be characteristic of all programs, but are required at Bombay.) The majority of instruction is given by members of the library staff, which is an added duty with no compensatory time off, and no additional pay.

The program leading to the Master's degree at Delhi University is the only one of this type observed. An established Ph.D. course is not functioning at present. The lack of degree programs and the inadequacy of arrangements for full-time library school faculty are problems which were brought to the atten-

tion of the Secretary of the Ministry of Education of the central government of India by the writer in a final interview upon completion of the assignment in India. Many short courses and certificate courses are springing up throughout the country which will perhaps serve certain local needs, but can only further weaken the position of librarianship in India. The maintenance of standards is a responsibility of the central government. Unless standards are established and some efforts made by the central government to rectify the situation, the salary and status of the librarian will continue to be poor.

Service in many of the libraries is hampered by the need for protecting the books. Locked book cases, with glass fronts secured by padlocks, are quite common. Some libraries have sufficient attendants with keys stationed strategically to give reasonably good service. In others, the borrower must present his request and come back the next day to see if it can be filled. Open stacks are a rarity, and in only one major library did this principle seem operative.

The high cost of books is partly responsible for this situation. One must realize that books from the United States represent relatively five times the list price as we think of it, since the dollar is equivalent to 4.75 rupees, and the economy of the university is geared to that unit. Another factor is inadequate professional staff, which makes it difficult to give the service our students and faculty have come to expect. Finally, the buildings themselves are often so designed and arranged that modern library service is impossible.

The actual size of the book collection is not sufficient to provide for the swollen enrollments in any institution visited, if modern teaching methods are adopted. From 90,000 to 200,000 seems to be the range, although there may be one or more universities above this figure. The

nature of the universities which are "affiliating" is such that separate collections of a few thousand volumes may exist in a number of affiliated colleges. Of those visited, the library seldom had the staff or quarters for proper service. Departmental libraries often proved more adequate in content and staff than those of a college, within the same university.

The lack of an extensive book collection can be explained in part by the nature of the teaching in Indian universities. So much emphasis is put on the final examinations upon completion of the three-year or four-year course, that little evaluation occurs throughout the year in separate courses. This emphasis has resulted in "study guides" to various subjects which are offered for sale at most book-sellers. Students do very little outside reading during the year and cram for the final examinations. Everything rests on their performance at this point, and many answers are memorized and reproduced, sometimes with several papers having identical answers.

The failure to use library materials also rests with the faculty. Many of them do not encourage independent reading, but prefer to be the oracle from whom all knowledge flows.

If the efforts now being made to adopt general education as it exists in American universities is successful, it may well mean a revolution in teaching methods in Indian universities, and a new impetus to library use. The Bhagavantam Report of 1956 made certain recommendations which led to the visit to the United States in 1957 of a team of Indian educators. Following this visit, a team of American educators went to India to assist in the implementation of general education programs in those institutions from which Indian team members had come. It was as a part of this group that my services were requested.

Delhi University approved plans for

initiating a program of general education on a voluntary basis in 1958, and will make it compulsory for all students in 1959-60. Bombay and Baroda are well on the way to organizing similar courses. The implications for libraries in these universities should be evident. They must expect greatly increased demands, and fortunately, they are among those institutions best prepared to meet them.

It is not intended to give the impression that all is bad and nothing good about Indian libraries. All that has been said should be considered in the light of the recency of Indian independence and self-determination. Only about ten years have elapsed since the Indian government under the new constitution has undertaken a substantial increase in the tempo of education. Tremendous changes are taking place, and much that has been said would have been true of the American library situation forty years ago. These facts stated are significant by comparison with conditions in a country where many similar problems have been met and solved.

Research and special libraries present a much more encouraging picture. The Indian National Library at Calcutta under the direction of an aggressive librarian, B. S. Kesavan, is providing many needed services and excellent leadership. Of primary importance is the current effort to establish an Indian National Bibliography. This is a function which seems logical for the National Library, and progress is being made. A number of scholars of eminence in various fields are being attracted by Mr. Kesavan, and should prove of inestimable assistance.

The Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre was established in 1952 by the Government of India with the assistance of UNESCO for providing documentation facilities to scientific and technical research workers. They have grown rapidly and now have an excellent

staff, good physical quarters and equipment, and are doing superior work. The photographic laboratory has a staff well qualified and enthusiastic. Translation services are available and being used. The publication program, including *Annals of Library Science*, is well developed. Other titles are *INSDOC List: Current Scientific Literature* and *Bibliography of Scientific Publications of South & Southeast Asia*. Quarters for INSDOC are provided in the National Physical Laboratory building in New Delhi, and they seem well housed and appropriately located.

Among the government libraries in New Delhi, the Central Secretariat Library, the Library of the Ministry of Education, and that of the Ministry of External Affairs seem to be developing rapidly. Each is specialized and is striving to meet the needs of an area of government. Because of location of the National Library in Calcutta, there is a greater need for strength in these specialized services.

The National Archives, also in New Delhi, has an attractive building which is already overcrowded and an addition is now in prospect. Of especial interest is their preservation work. The lamination equipment occupies extensive space, and the staff engaged in various repair operations is sizeable. Under the International Educational Exchange Program two staff members of the National Archives will visit the United States this year on a project to microfilm documents and records in Washington pertinent to Indian history.

The Adyar Library in Madras was founded in 1886 for research in Eastern civilization, philosophy, and religion. It has an outstanding collection of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Pali manuscripts. Lack of funds has seriously curtailed their acquisition program now, but they continue to serve scholars and to publish.

The *Adyar Library Bulletin* has been published as a quarterly since 1937.

Finally, mention should be made of the Khuda Baksh Oriental Library in Patna. It was founded in 1900 by Maulavi Khuda Baksh Khan Bahadur and is famous for its collection of rare Arabic and Persian manuscripts. It also possesses the only two volumes saved from the sack of the Moorish University of Cordova. The library is located in a building, formerly a residence, on the main thoroughfare of the city. Considering the nature and value of the material, it is poorly housed. There is no air conditioning or humidity control. Some of the volumes are kept in a big safe which stands at one side of the curator's office. Many more, equally valuable, are simply on open shelves along the wall, including the two volumes from Cordova. In spite of their age and present housing, these volumes are in fair condition although smoke-stained. The seal of Cordova University is clear and easily decipherable. Unfortunately, the terms of the trust require that the present location be maintained and it seems unlikely that any effort can or will be made to get this collection into a more appropriate place, such as the National Library.

Libraries such as that of the Geological Survey of India, the Bose Research Institute, the Indian Statistical Institute, the Zoological Survey of India, all in Calcutta; the Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore; the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bombay—all these are important and active in serving research needs.

It is not possible in the scope of a three-month visit with no more than a few days in each center to gain complete and detailed information with regard to resources. This article is a summary of impressions and can only be presented in that light. Any omissions are unintentional.