

The Modern Library Movement in South Asia

K. M. Asadullha *

The beginning of the modern library movement in India could rightly be traced to the year 1908, when the former enlightened ruler of Baroda (who died only recently) an American expert in librarianship (Mr. Borden, by name) was brought to India to introduce the library system in Baroda State. When Baroda had achieved what was well known to every one present here, and hardly needed detailed narration. The Central Library, the Women's libraries, the Children's libraries, the travelling libraries were all well-known examples of what had been done in that state through the library movement and how free primary education combined with this excellent library system had helped to dispel illiteracy from among the subjects of Baroda state.

The next step in this direction was taken by the Punjab University, when another American gentleman, Mr. Asa Don Dickinson was invited to reorganize the University Library and train a number of librarians in new methods. This was in the year 1915, and I had the honour of belonging to that first batch of librarians who learnt the art of Librarianship from Mr. Dickinson. The Punjab has continued to do this useful work of imparting training in librarianship, ever since then, and classes have been held for the purpose every second year. The example of the University Library was followed by several colleges affiliated to the University either through the help rendered to them by the University or independently. The libraries of the Government College, and the Forman Christian College were prominent in this respect. I had the privilege of being the Librarian of the first-named institution, being the first graduate to enter the profession and being nicknamed 'educated daft VGFR5ari' Happily those days are over now, when librarians of the educated classes were called by that name, and the value of training in librarianship has been realized, and so many Libraries have been reorganised according to the modern methods of the upkeep of libraries.

* Librarian, Imperial Library Calcutta
Founder Secretary General, Indian Library Association

From the Punjab, the 'Infection' spread to the adjoining province, the United Provinces of Agra & Oudh, when the former M. A. O. college (Now Aligarh Muslim University) felt the need of reorganizing its library according to the same methods, and I had to go there to undertake that task. I was helped in this matter by my friend and pupil Mr. Sant Ram Bhatia, now Librarian of the Forman Christian College. Next was the Lucknow University to take up the question of reorganization, where again the product of the Punjab helped to accomplish the desired object.

In 1917 or 1918, the Government of India convened a Conference of Librarians, the first of its kind to be held in this country, which after a few days' deliberations, passed a number of resolutions, purporting to improve the condition of libraries, and librarianship. The moving figures of this Conference are Sir Henry Sharp (then Mr.), the then educational commissioner with the Government of India; the late Mr., I. A. Richey, then Director of Public Instruction in the Punjab, and the late Dr. A. C. Woolner, then Registrar and Librarian of the Punjab University. Unfortunately, not much came out of this conference.

This was followed by the formation of a library Association of which the organizers were again the late Dr. Woolner, and Mr. Richey. I had the privilege of working on its committee, but after some time it was realized that the formation of such bodies was perhaps a little too early in this country, and the Association came to an abrupt end.

About 1921, certain public-spirited gentlemen formed an All-India Public libraries Association, which was also responsible for organizing a number of library conferences which were usually held along with the sittings of the Indian National Congress, and as such were not favourably looked upon by so many men in the profession, and the management of which was dominated over mostly by laymen. This association has been living by spasms, but nothing has been heard of it for the last few years. This body was also responsible for bringing out the first library journal in the English language, which has also ceased to exist now.

In 1929 a few library enthusiasts like Messrs. Bhatia, Manchanda, and others started a librarians' club in Lahore, which ultimately developed itself into the present Punjab Library Association.

This Association, even if it has nothing else to its credit deserves the thanks of all interested in libraries and the library movement for starting and keeping it on the well-known journal, the Modern Librarian. This Association was responsible for convening a number of provincial library Conferences, and infusing interest in the minds of so many people and giving an impetus to what we see in the library world of the Punjab today.

In 1932, the said Association contemplated inviting the All India Public Libraries Association (which by that time had ceased to be a semi-political body that it was supposed to be) to hold their next conference in Lahore. For certain reasons this could not be done, and the idea was taken up by Calcutta. A truly representative body of both, men in the profession and outside was formed to arrange for an All India Library Association. When the late Dr. Woolner who at that time was holidaying in Kashmir learnt of the proposal through the press, he wired to know what the idea was and who were the conveners of that conference. On being satisfied on this score, he at once ran from Kashmir to Calcutta and took a very prominent part in the proceedings of the conference and helped materially in the formation of the Indian library Association. This was in September, 1933.

The Indian library Association started the work assigned to it, in right earnest, and it is already responsible for bringing out a directory of Indian libraries, and is busy compiling a UNION Catalogue of scientific periodicals in important libraries of India. This has been possible with the cooperation of the Inter-University Board, which body was contemplating publication of such a catalogue, and at the instance of the late Dr. Woolner, agreed to transfer the material collected by them for the purpose, to the Indian library Association. Further, all except three Universities have given financial help to the Association, in order to enable it to undertake its publication at an early date. I am sure that with the present Vice-Chancellor at the head of affairs in the Punjab University, that body will not be lagging behind in affording the financial help expected of it, as the original proposal was placed before the 1933 conference by the librarian of the Punjab University Library, and was sponsored by one of its former Vice-Chancellors. Further, the value of such a useful publication could well be realized by the present Vice-Chancellor, as himself is a scientist of no mean parts.

The Association has since then been able to arrange for two more conferences being held, one in 1935 in Lucknow at the invitation of the Lucknow University, and the other at Delhi in December 1937, at the joint invitation of the University of Delhi, and the Government of India libraries Association. This conference was a bigger success both as regards the number of persons who attended it, and the number of papers etc. read there, the proceedings have recently been published, which include for the first time, a number of papers read at the conference.

The Association is further busy with evolving a scheme for interloaning of books between important libraries, and for this purpose did actually place before the second conference a well-planned scheme, but this had not been put into practice, as certain libraries are feeling reluctant to work either as centers for the circles in which it is proposed to divide the country for the object in view, or for taking up the responsibility for fear of increase of work.

Another important activity of the Association is the attempt to work out detailed expansions of those parts of the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme which pertain to India and Indian subjects. A committee has been working upon it, and presented its report in the Delhi session of the conference, but the final results are yet to be determined.

The Association has always been advocating the cause of the introduction of modern library methods, and imparting training in them. It suggested to all the Provincial Education departments to introduce short course in librarianship in their teachers training colleges, so that school teachers who ultimately have to be in charge of school libraries should know how to manage them. Only one Provincial Government (Assam) agreed to this proposal, and did actually acquire the services of a trained gentleman from the Indian library association who lectured to the students of the training college for about a fortnight and this was very much appreciated by the authorities.

The association has recently taken up with the Provinces the question of the establishment of provincial copyright libraries. This proposal was accepted at the Delhi session of the library their replies are being awaited with great eagerness.

Being a trained librarian, and a great advocate of training, I have not failed to help in this direction, for after much 'haggling' with the Government of India, I obtained their permission to start regular classes in the Imperial Library had not been unmindful of the need for training, and about a dozen persons from various parts of the country got their training during the period 1929 to 1933, when the scheme for conducting regular classes was submitted to the Government and the first class of twenty students was started in 1935. The second was held in 1937, with the same number of students on rolls, and the third is to begin from the 1st April next. The scheme has considerably been changed this time, whereby persons not connected with the Imperial Library will be co-ordinated as teachers and examiners.

It is gratifying to note that there is an awakening among the public for library movement, and those responsible for the management of libraries have come to realize the value of training, and employing trained hands to take charge of libraries. This fact is well supported from the large number of applications that have been received by the Imperial Library for admission to its next library training class. This number (112) includes about forty applications from persons who are already working in libraries, and wish to get training. This is a very encouraging sign for the success of the library movement in this country .

I would like to make a reference to the useful work that was being done by certain other associations like the Madras Library Association, the Bengal Library Association, the Calcutta Library Association, the Bihar Library Association, the UP Library Association, the Andhra Desa Library Association, and others.

Pakistani Librarian is an annual journal published by the Department of Library and Information Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

This journal is available on the world wide web at www.geocities.com/pakistani_librarian. Visit this site to find a complete archive of Pakistani Librarian.