

## Khan Bahadur Khalifa Muhammad Asadullah: A Pioneer of Library Movement in South Asia

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Khan Bahadur Khalifa Muhammad Asadullah was a veteran librarian. He played a vital role in launching the library movement in South Asia. Born at Lahore, on August 6, 1890 he received his early education at Islamia High School Sheranwala Gate Lahore and graduated from F. C. College in 1913. He was the first graduate librarian who was appointed in the Government College on a salary of Rs. 50/- per month (Eminent Indians, 1985, p.15; "Mr. K. M. Asadullah," 1931, p. 37).

When Asa Don Dickinson (1876-1960) came to reorganise the Punjab University Library in 1915 and started the University Library Training Class, Asadullah was among the students who attended the first class and obtained a certificate with distinction. Thereafter he organised several libraries using DDC system. He organised Government College Library as well as its departmental libraries, library of the Chemistry Department and Stephenson Vernacular library ("Mr. K. M. Asadullah," 1931, p. 38).

In 1919, M.A.O. College Aligarh (subsequently Muslim University) requisitioned his services to organise its growing collection (Eminent Indians, 1985, p.15). He organised the Lytton Library (now Maulana Azad Library) as well as Siddons Union Library. In the year 1921, he was employed by the Government of India as the Librarian of the Imperial Secretariat Library, the position he retained for eight years ("Mr. K. M. Asadullah," 1931, p. 38). During 1924-25, he was appointed officer on Special Duty in the Imperial Library Calcutta for a period of six months (Saith, 1935, p. 139). In the beginning of the year 1929, he was engaged by the Imperial Library Calcutta to work in officiating capacity, in place of Chapman, who proceeded on leave preparatory to retirement ("Mr. K. M. Asadullah," 1931, p. 38). He was the second Indian and the first Muslim who had the honour of occupying that position. He was confirmed in the grade of Rs. 750-50-1250. He prepared himself for the Diploma of Library Association, London and

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passed the examination. He was the first Indian to have this Diploma to become a fellow of the Association (Saith, 1935, p. 139). Until 1932 there was no national library association in India. It was mainly due to the efforts of K.M. Asadullah that the Indian Library Association was formed on September 12, 1933 at Calcutta. He was its first secretary and the guiding force from 1933 to 1947. He also initiated the All India Library Conference, which became a biyearly feature from 1933 onward. He started library training class at the Imperial Library in 1935 and made arrangements with the Punjab University Library School to hold classes every alternate year which continued till 1945 when the Calcutta University undertook to impart education in that field (Sharma, 1974). In the year 1935, in recognition of his services, the Government of India conferred upon him the title of Khan Bahadur (The Gazette of India, 1935). Having held the eminent position of the Librarian of the Imperial Library, he was a target of criticism in those days. But, by his ardent enthusiasm for the profession and through his official influence, he eclipsed the fame of his predecessors and established librarianship as a profession.

After having been in charge of the Imperial Library Calcutta for nearly 19 years, he relinquished its charge on the July 19, 1947 on his appointment on the partition subcommittee for the division of the Education Department of the Government of India on behalf of Pakistan ("Short sketch of life of Khan," 1950, p.24).

He migrated to Pakistan and served as Officer on Special Duty in the Ministry of Interior, Education Division, Government of Pakistan. It is said that he submitted a plan to Government for the establishment of a national library system. The establishment of Directorate of Archives and Libraries in 1949 is also attributed to him (Khurshid, 1977).

It is a matter of regret that he was not properly treated in his homeland. On October 24, 1947 when the Punjab Public Library advertised the post of librarian in the grade of 300-2-400-EB, 25-650, Asadullah was one of the applicants. The proceedings of the meeting of Sub-Committee reveal that six candidates were called for interview and of whom only two turned up. It seems that Asadullah didn't appear for interview. Anyhow the sub- committee decided to recommend the following names:

1. Kh. Nur Elahi
2. Mr. Fazal Elahi
3. Mr. K. M. Asadullah (Proceeding, 1947)

Kh. Nur Elahi was appointed as librarian w .e.f. 1.1.1948 and he joined the same day (Sirajud Din, personal communications, December 13, 1947).

Asadullah applied for the leave preparatory to retirement and was granted that for one month and 17 days w.e.f October 2, 1947 (A.N) (The Gazette of Pakistan, 1947a). He relinquished the charge on the afternoon of September 13, 1947 (The Gazette of Pakistan, 1947b ). But later on the leave granted was cancelled (The Gazette of Pakistan, 1948). In early 1948, after retirement from service as Officer on Special Duty (Education), Government of Pakistan, he returned to his ancestral city, Lahore, after an absence of about 30 years.

In 1948, the Appointments Board of Punjab University decided that none of the candidates who had appeared for interview for the post of librarian was suitable. It recommended to appoint a Professor or a Reader to take charge of the library on a suitable honorarium in addition to his own duties. The possibility of appointing Professor Dickenson on honorarium of Rs. 5001- per month was also considered in the meeting of the Appointment Board (Proceedings, 1948a). While considering the recommendations of the Board, one of the members suggested that in view of the importance of the University Library and the need for maintaining library classes, the services of K.M. Asadullah be obtained for one year and in the meanwhile the post be advertised with a view to obtain the services of a suitable person. The Vice-Chancellor stated that though Asadullah possessed the requisite qualifications for this position, yet in view of his age and declining health, the Appointments Board did not consider it desirable to recommend him for the post. After some discussion Dr. Syed Muhammad Abdullah Reader in Urdu at the Oriental College was asked to work on an honorarium of Rs. 1001- per mensem as a temporary measure (Proceedings, 1948b ).

He died of brain haemorrhage on Nov. 23, 1949 and was buried at his family graveyard in Lahore (The Civil and Military Gazette, 1949).

On his death the Indian Librarian wrote:

By the death of Khan Bahadur Khalifa Mohammad Asadullah on November 23, 1949, the library world in India and Pakistan has lost who made important contributions both as a librarian of the Imperial Library (now the National Library) Calcutta, and the Honorary General Secretary of the Indian Library Association for more than 20 years.

The late Khan Bahadur combined great technical ability with a driving force which enabled him to overcome all obstacles in the way of success. He possessed a singularly clear mind and had an accurate foresight of the future needs of the profession.

Always modest and unassuming, charitable in his judgements and warm in his appreciations, Khan Bahadur made many friends and admirers. He will be remembered with gratitude and affection by all his friends and members of the profession ("The late Khan," 1949, p. 116).

Dr. S. Datta, Director of Public Instruction, West Bengal wrote "his death creates a great void which it will be difficult to fill up in these days" ("The late Khan," 1949, p. 117).

Dr. P.M. Joshi, Director of Archives, Bombay wrote, "the late Khan Bahadur had nothing nearer his heart than the Indian Library Association and the cause of library development in the country .Indeed by his devotion to the Library idea and by his unflagging energy in furthering it, he carved out for himself a position as leader of Indian Librarians" ("The late Khan," 1949, p. 117). T.D. Waknis, Curator of Libraries, Bombay wrote, "his demise marks the end of an epoch of single-minded and single-handed nurture of a democratic institution" ("The late Khan," 1949, p. 118).

Dr. G. T. Kale, Indian Institution of Science, Banglore wrote: It will be generally conceded that the period after the 30s was a critical time in the development of librarianship in India. Profound changes were taking place which brought about what we may regard as a libraries revolution in this country .He steered the library movement wisely through difficult times and thanks to his personal influence brought status and recognition to the Indian Library Association as an all India body that it is today-- I am not alone in looking back to the All India Library Conference where he served as the guiding light and his name was synonymous with

strength and stability. Otherwise, his main life's work lay entirely in practical librarianship and administration, and in that field he was supreme ("The late Khan," 1949, pp. 118-119).

Y.M. Mulay of the National Library of India wrote:

Not only by virtue of his position as the librarian of the premier library of the country but by his experience of and keen interest in library matters, he was easily an outstanding figure in the Indian Library World. He will be long remembered for his untiring efforts to rear up the infant Indian Library Association. His active and leading part in the formation of the Association is too well known and needs no mention. His interest in the well-being of our profession was very great indeed and I knew how much he was missed by all of us when we met in Conference at Nagpur this year ("The late Khan," 1949, pp. 119-120).

Pt. D. Subrahmanyam, Librarian, Benares Hindu University wrote:

His name stands out permanently in the annals of librarianship of India. His devotion to the profession, ardour for the propagation of library science, tact and organizing capacity are too well-known to a generation of librarians and he can as well be reckoned as one of the pioneers, who laid a firm foundation for the Indian Librarianship ("The late Khan," 1949, p. 122).

Asadullah had been a trustee and Honorary Treasurer of the Indian Museum at Calcutta, Fellow of Calcutta University, Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Member of the Council of the All India Muslim Educational conference and member of the Court of the Muslim University, Aligarh, besides having association with numerous other bodies. As Vice-president and President of the Calcutta Muslim Orphanage and, later, as founder of the Muslim Club of Calcutta, he worked in close collaboration with Kh. Nazimuddin who remained President and Patron of both the institutions for several years .

He prepared a guide for the Imperial Library Calcutta and contributed several articles to Modern Librarian and foreign library journals. He was also a member of the editorial board of The Library Bulletin of Indian Library Association from April 1942-July, 1946.

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