

ZX [Lecture]

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## AGE OF DOCUMENTATION

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[Records the speech delivered by Dr Ranganathan in the Seminar on the Role of Documentation at LRDE, Bangalore on 14 November 1963. Describes the new phase of library service to scholars, effect of printing, feeding of literature and the self-education from catalogue. States the advent of reference service and documentation. Analysis the work of documentation giving an analogy from *Ramayana*. Explains the spiral of library service and the New Age of documentation.]

## 1 New Phase in Service to Scholars

We are all glad that the LRDE is becoming a Mecca for documentalists. It is heartening to find many scientists and documentalists mingling together to understand one another and thus do good service jointly to the nation and the world at large. You may all be wondering when and where the Age of Documentation existed. I may tell you at once that we are only just now entering into the Age of Documentation. This is happening all over the world.

The spiral diagram in my presidential address to the 5th Iaslic Conference in 1963 will show you that library service to scholars has today reached a new phase. It is this new phase of service to scholars that has created the Age of Documentation.

### 2 Effect of Printing

In the far off days, the scholars carried their library in their mind, so to speak. There were only a few documents and fewer scholars. The scholars living near one another would occasionally meet and feed one another with their new ideas. About five centuries ago, a change came. Printing with moveable metallic types was invented. This enabled production of copies of the same document at a low cost. This made exchange of ideas easier without the necessary personal contact between scholars. Communication between them became faster. Gradually, it was found to be more helpful to collect the documents at one place in a locality—the library—and ask all the scholars of the locality to go there for using them.

### 3 Self-Selection from Catalogue

Till a few years ago, the scholars had to select their documents themselves, as one selects one's dishes by oneself in a restaurant, from the menu list. After selecting the documents from the catalogue, the scholar has to wait for them to be served at the reading table. Sometimes a biblio-maniac scholar would call for each one of the documents one after another. I had seen such a thing being attempted about forty years ago in the Connemara Public Library, Madras. Such a thing may happen in a restaurant too. I saw that in August 1948 in New York. At that time, the United Nations had appointed some of us as members of an International Committee. On a holiday we all went to a cafeteria. There were sample dishes spread all round a circular desk in lieu of the menu list. Each of us took a plate and stood in a long queue. While walking along the desk, each one would select and ask for what he wanted. But one of the outlandish man in the queue evidently felt that prestige required that he should have something of everything. He therefore began to ask something of every dish displayed there. He held us up for a long time by this process. But fortunately library books are not like the eatables and such biblio-maniacs are not many.

### 4 Advent of Reference Service

Today the library is like a hotel which has nutrition-specialists whom each client can consult about the dishes most suited to his individual needs and tastes. In our age, the library has begun to provide reference librarians to help the scholars in the choice of their books pin-pointedly, exhaustively, and expeditiously. The reference librarian establishes contact between the scholar and the documents with considerable knowledge of.

### 5 Advent of Documentation

There is a further change that is just coming over this new form of library service. We seek to serve not only whole books but even articles in periodicals and parts of books. Further, in serving the scholars, we avoid stale documents and give only nascent ones produced perhaps the previous month or even the previous week. We call this "nascent micro-document". To bring home to the scholars the institution of this improved form of library service, we have called the service by a new name—*viz* Documentation. The person practising documentation is called Documentalist.

### 6 Two-Fold Work of Documentalists

The crux of the problem in documentation is two-fold. The documentalist has to sort out quickly the nascent microdocuments appearing in learned periodicals and arrange their entries in a list in a helpful sequence. In doing this, he employs a powerful tool designed in India, called Facet Analysis. He finds this tool helpful also in analysing the needs of the scholar seeking his help and in determining precisely what his needs are. While with the reader, he finds out all the facets involved in his requirements and determines the exact focus in each facet. He then synthesises these foci. The result is a precise formulation of the requirements of the scholar. As already stated, another documentalist had already facet-analysed similarly the thought-content of the documents themselves and arranged their entries in a list, on the basis of the class numbers constructed by him with the aid of the same Facet Analysis. The documentalist, serving the reader, has just to match the result of his own Facet Analysis of the scholar's requirement with the result of his colleague's Facet Analysis of the documents. This enables him to give the scholar the right microdocuments without any loss of time. This is the distinctive feature of the present Age of Documentation which the library is fast entering everywhere in so far as service to scholars is concerned.

### 7 Ramayana Analogy

A guess may be made as to what should be done to give ideal service in the present Age of Documentation. What should be done has been pictured by Valmiki in the *Ramayana*. Once king Vishwamitra happened to visit the hermitage of the sage Vashista. That great sage played the host to the entire retinue of the king. At the dinner table, Vishwamitra was amazed to see one to one correspondence between the servers and the guests. Vishwamitra asked Vashista how he secured so many people to attend on his party. Vashista showed him with great joy the Cow of Plenty, the *Kamadhenu*, which provided them for him. The present Age of Documentation will reach its high-water mark, only when each industrial and research organization plays the *Kamadhenu* and provides a large number of documentalists approximating to the number of servers in Valmiki's feast. The greater the number, the more thorough will be the service and the more productive the work of the research workers.

### 8 Dial-for-the-Document Age of Documentation

The spiral of library service is sure to make another cycle and come back some time in future to the point where the service to scholars re-appears. What new shape library service will take at that time is difficult now to guess. But my imagination makes me super-impose the Age of Electronics on the Age of Documentation. When they are fully super-imposed, we shall enter into a New Age of Documentation. In order to distinguish it from the present age of documentation, that New Age may be called the Dial-for-the-Document Age of Documentation. A scholar's time and tempo will be saved in an extraordinary way. He has only to enter a special reading room in his local library—say, at Bangalore. This room has gadgets of all kinds. A documentalist is ready to help them in the use of the gadgets. Let us suppose that the scholar wants a document not found in his local library. The documentalist finds out, by a quick trial and error, that the Library of Congress of Washington D C, USA, has a copy. He dials for that library. The relevant part of the catalogue of that library is thrown on the television screen and the sheaves in the catalogue are turned slowly. Each sheaf gives the exact specification of the document described in it—not only in respect of its author and title, but also precisely in respect of its thought-content. The moment the scholar finds the sheaf describing the right document, he presses a button and then dials for the document. The document itself is now thrown on the television screen. Its pages are turned slowly. The scholar regulates a gadget to get the comfortable speed at which the pages should be turned. He wants to take down notes from a certain page. The speed is now lowered. After some minutes he finds that the document is too full of what he wants, to be copied out by himself. He therefore calls the documentalist for help. The documentalist turns the dial and orders for a reprograph of the document in a size demanded by the scholar—full size or micro size or super-micro size. The reprographing work is done in the Washington Library in USA in a few minutes. Then the copy is flown to the scholar. It reaches him at Bangalore within twenty-four hours. That is my vision of the second age of documentation which is yet to come—the Dial-for-the-Document Age of Documentation.

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