

LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION ON THE MARCH

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[Gives an account of the experiences in three visits made in 1964, to Europe and America. Illustrates the potency of the Five Laws of Library Science in organising the library system of a state. Refers to the foundations of the theory of library classification laid in India in 1937 and their slow percolation into other countries by now. Refers to the benefit of India having had the Chairmanship of FID/CA. Gives an account of the highlights of Elsinore Conference and the recent fundamental work done in the design of depth classification in DRTC and the interest evoked abroad by the pilot schedules published in *Library science With a slant to documentation*. Ends with a hope for international co-operation.

The paper is based on a lecture delivered at DRTC under the auspices of the Mysore Library Association on 22 Dec 1964.]

1 Size of Libraries

This evening I have been asked to speak about the impressions of my recent tours of the West, USA and some of the European countries. These

countries, I should say at the outset, are rich in libraries. Their holdings are so big that no comparison with our libraries is worth attempting. The books are so many that they can only be described in terms of kilometres. The huge size of a library in the West, some of you might have witnessed and many of you might have at least read about.

2 Purpose of the Tour

The business of my recent visit to those countries was intimately bound up with library techniques being practised there. It does not mean, however, that we librarians are mad after techniques. The purpose of these techniques is after all service to society and service alone. The technique of selecting books, acquiring books, classifying them, cataloguing them, arranging them, and maintaining them—all these techniques are only means to that one human end—to put the books to active and purposeful use by as many persons as possible. To repeat the Five Laws of Library Science :

- 1 Books are for use
- 2 Every reader his book
- 3 Every book its reader
- 4 Save the time of the reader
- 5 A library is a growing organism

These Laws lay down the objective of the work librarians. Their pre-occupation with techniques is only to make the techniques sufficiently sharp to achieve that objective in ever-increasing measure. My recent visit to the West was bound with techniques only for this reason. The most important technique, in connection with which I visited USA and UK in June, Denmark and the Scandinavian countries in September, and again USA, the Netherlands, and Germany in November last, is the technique of library classification. In the first trip to USA, there was occasion to work on the technique of the organisation of the library system of a Constituent State of USA. There is nothing extraordinary in the technique of organising the library system. Of course, this is of vital interest to the members of the Mysore Library Association. Because thanks to the continued efforts of our President, Mr Vaikunta Baliga, which began when he was a Member of the Cabinet some years ago, Mysore is on the eve of putting a Public Libraries Act on the Statute Book.

3 Deriving Library Act from the Five Laws

In USA each Constituent State has its own Library Act. Most of the Library Acts were framed to suit the social conditions prevailing in the nineteenth century. But they now require to be revised in the light of the present-day conditions. In June, the University of Pittsburgh asked me to spend a month with the Master's Degree students of that University to discuss the organisation of a State Library System. It was discussed as implications of the Five Laws of Library Science. The students searched for and supplied the social data of the Pennsylvania State to which Pittsburgh belonged. On their

basis, the framework of the bill was finalised on the last day. Some of the students said,

"It so happens that our State has taken up this subject. A committee was appointed last year. That committee has reported certain things on the basis of the local conditions. And what we have derived from the Five Laws, with the prevailing local conditions as the background, agrees almost ninety per cent with the bill of that Committee."

That gave satisfaction to all of us. This I mention for three purposes. Firstly, there is a movement in USA to revise library legislation and to make it more suited to the present-day conditions. So also it is in UK and some other countries. Let us not therefore persist in the mania to copy blindly whatever is picked up from the West of yesterday. In our country we are only now trying to establish our first Library Acts in most of the States. There is thus a time lag of one century. Thirdly the Five Laws yield realistic results.

4 Classification in USA

My major experience centred round the technique of classification. My first experience in this respect was with the Ph D students of the Pittsburgh University. I was asked to teach them classification for about a month. But in that country, classification and cataloguing are not distinguished sufficiently. This is due to a tradition which became rigid some decades ago. This tradition had even migrated to India. During the last ten years, when new University Library Schools were started in this country, syllabus had to be framed. Some of the librarians, who had visited USA, would say that in India the syllabus was overweighed with classification and cataloguing. I would ask, "How?" They would say "It is not so in USA". They could not answer it in terms of substance. It was a puzzle to me. In my earlier trips, I used to visit many universities in rapid succession. I could not fully understand the American tradition.

41 SCHOOL IN PITTSBURGH UNIVERSITY

When I stayed at Pittsburgh in June, I found that the Department of Library Science had just been started. It had taken over the Carnegie Library School. The Chancellor was very eager to develop the Library Science Department and make it the foremost library school in USA. In order to give a fillip to it, he changed the name. It is called Library Science and Knowledge-Availability Centre. This is a measure of his enthusiasm. Students from different universities are there. He is eager that students should be drawn from all over the world. When, I went again in November, the University had begun the new term. Many foreign students met me. There were as many as 35 foreign students representing 2 different countries. That kind of keeping the door open to give access to the secrets of knowledge for students coming from any country whatever, particularly, in this field, is something which attracted my attention.

42 MOVE TO BREAK THE OLD TRADITION

While teaching Classification to Ph D students in that University, I found that in the Master's degree course, the students had learnt little of the theory of classification. Nor had they studied the theory of catalogue. But they had become practical classifiers and practical cataloguers with a given schedule and set of rules. They had become technicians to do a repetitive job. In the Ph D course, we cannot have enough content if we proceed along these lines. I was even told by some that classification in the M A course often meant not much more than learning the use of a few Decimal Class Numbers. No theory. No digging into the foundations. No training in design work. Some of the younger generation of teachers in USA do not feel happy about this tradition. They wish to lift the subject to a higher intellectual plane. But they have to work hard to break this tradition. Some are bravely doing this.

5 Theory of Classification

51 BEGINNINGS

The conference I attended at Elsinore, Denmark, on Classification Research and the Seminar on Colon Classification held at the Rutgers the State University, enabled me to evaluate my experience. Till 1947, there was very little of development of the theory of classification in the Western countries. The first books on the elementary theory of classification or the grammar of classification, we owe to Sayers of England and later to Bliss of USA. But a more fundamental book laying the foundation for an advanced theory of classification emerged from our country in 1937. But it was only in 1947 that the ideas in that book had percolated sufficiently into Europe. It had percolated to a slight extent into USA also. For example, Bliss and I had correspondence frequently about it in the thirties. Hardly anybody else took interest in this subject. But in Europe, the development of interest was much greater. The international agency mainly responsible for creating and sustaining interest in this discipline is the FID. The founders of this body had taken over the DC from USA and had added several fringes to it and developed it as the UDC. This classification is one of the major fields of attention and work of the FID. Donker Duyvis who had developed this scheme, for nearly 25 years, asked me in 1947 to write a memoir on Classification and International Documentation. It was this piece of work that established contact between me and Europe. I toured the European countries in 1948.

52 INDIA AND FID/CA

In 1950, at its meeting in Rome, the FID decided on the establishment of a permanent committee—FID/CA—to take charge of the development of the Theory of Library Classification so as to lay the foundation for a good system of classification which will be able to bear the load of the newly developing universe of knowledge. The FID asked me to have charge of that commi-

tee. That gave a good opportunity for us in India to develop the theory much farther than what was done in 1937.

53 DORKING CONFERENCE

By 1957, much of awareness about the importance of the theory of library classification grew among the different nations of the world. When the Brussels World Congress was held in 1955, it was resolved to have an International Study Conference on the theory of classification. This was held in 1957 at Dorking. It was largely turned on the *Faceted Classification* originated in India and expounded in the *Prolegomena to library classification* (1937). At that time the countries that sent delegates were mostly those from Europe. In the FID too, the member-countries were all from Europe. India was a member. USA was not taking interest in the activities of the FID. Nor was it much interested in the development of the theory of classification. But for the first time in 1957, three delegates came from USA.

54 DEVELOPMENT OF INTEREST IN USA

Their attendance and participation seemed to have excited interest in USA. In 1958, USA convened an International Conference not on Classification but on Information Retrieval. Classification figured in it as one of the tools for retrieval. At that time, Dr King, President of the FID, thought that was the opportune time to bring USA into this world-body. To carry out his intention, he arranged a meeting of the FID in Washington at the same time as the meeting of the International Conference on Information Retrieval. One interesting result was that many librarians and prominent library-interest of USA became members of that body. In 1959, there was another International Conference in Cleveland, USA. This was also on information retrieval. But it spent more time on classification than the Washington Conference did. Most of the time at the Washington Conference was taken by electronic engineers. But in the Cleveland Conference, many librarians took part. That year the FID met at Warsaw and the presidentship of the FID passed on to USA. That indicates the rapidity with which USA has developed interest in the theory of library classification.

6 Elsinore Conference

At the instance of USA, the second conference on the theory of classification was convened at Elsinore in September, 1964. USA financed that conference, but it also financed it. They saw to it that every delegate from every country was well attended to so that they could turn their full thought on the subject for which the conference was convened. The conference was held for a week in Hotel Hamlet, at Elsinore. I had to preside over it. The theme of my address was "Classification through a century." The first conference of 1957 too was inaugurated with my address. It was on "Classification as a Discipline". In the Dorking Conference, most of the members belonged to

library profession and there were only three delegates from USA. But in the Elsinore Conference, the number of USA participants was the largest from a single country. Librarians as well as engineers interested in machine retrieval attended. It was possible to get at the conference a cross section of the current thought on classification in the different countries.

7 Depth Classification

71 ROLE OF INDIA

In our own country, certain problems connected with the retrieval of minute pieces of knowledge—to use our jargon, micro-thought embodied in articles in the current learned periodicals—had been taken up for investigation. This problem required a very deep kind of classification a few years earlier. We called it 'Depth classification'. When this term was coined for the first time, some newspapers reported it as 'death classification'. When I arrived at the airport in Bombay after attending the Dorking Conference in 1957, some reporters surrounded me and asked me, "what is this death classification about?" This idea of organising tiny pieces of knowledge or information pin-pointedly and exhaustively and without noise or leakage, in such a way that no time of the reader would be lost in getting all that he wanted, was within the province of classification. This is the faith developed in India.

72 EARLY STRUGGLE

But we had been encountering many difficulties during the last fifteen years. Before 1947, the idea of classifying micro-thought systematically and exhaustively had not taken full shape. In our country, it had not at all taken any shape. We had to use the technique of classification for organising books only. Our Colon Classification was based on a different foundation from that of any of the already existing schemes. And yet we did not realise at the time of its foundation—nor till 1948—that it could bear the load of depth classification. However, social pressure and scholarly pressure, made us work along on depth classification during the last fourteen years. At first we could not get many good results in spite of our best efforts. We frequently came across obstacles which seemed insurmountable. I remember Neelamegham and myself walking along the streets of Malleswaram, attempting to get at a good classification technique. Very often I had to part from him in a mood of despair, with no result in sight. Particularly, this Documentation Research Centre began to mock at us, as it were. Because librarians from specialist libraries are deputed here to undergo training in documentation and also to design schedules calculated to organise minute pieces of knowledge for the benefit of their specialist readers. We have to help them in the design of depth schedules for subjects such as 'electronics', 'High altitude physiology', 'Highway engineering', and various other subjects.

73 FIRST BREAK THROUGH

In the second year of the DRTC course, the students made powerful im-

pect on the teachers. Social pressure also became greater in our country; industries had begun to develop at a rapid pace; the progress of the industries came to be based on the progress of research. Occasionally letters used to come to us from industries asking for help to their research with a depth classification. There were letters from friends in USA too asking for similar help. Ultimately, as a result of mutual impact between the teachers and the trainees, we were able to break through a major barrier which had been obstructing progress. To begin with, pilot projects were started. A new periodical was floated to enable documentalists to get access to the results of research and also to elicit evaluation. It is called *Library science with a slant to documentation*. It is a quarterly. It is published under the sponsorship of the Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science in collaboration with DRTC. The new periodical published some pilot projects. Depth classification in 'screw', 'nut' 'bearings' 'drugs' were designed.

74 INTEREST ABROAD

In the Elsinore Conference, in September, I found that these articles had already done some work as messengers. Interest developed in other countries too. But how did interest arise in other countries? This is again due to social pressure. The documentalist of one of the biggest chemical factories in Germany told me, when I was with him in September,

"From 1959 I have been trying to get something done. I have not been able to save all the waste that occurs in our factory due to insufficient documentation service. This particular schedule on 'drugs' will go a long way in putting an end to the waste."

This was an encouragement to us because our design work could be found useful. I had a similar experience when I visited the Shell Research Company in The Hague in November.

75 INTEREST IN USA AND NUCLEAR MEDICINE

A representative of the National Science Foundation of USA told me, "We have now begun to assess the different schemes of classification. We are now taking up 'Nuclear Medicine' We are trying to organise literature on this subject by different schemes of classification. Can you apply your method to this subject?" Work was started on the subject almost immediately. Nuclear medicine consists of six different subject fields. These six subjects were separated out. These are Agency causing Disease, Diagnosis, Therapy, Agent for Immunity, Protective Measure and Pharmacology. We sought the help of the local medical practitioners. But it was not very encouraging. We are now working on the schedule with the knowledge that can be called from published articles. We have already got a good scheme for the depth classification for Nuclear Medicine.

8 Recent Interest

81 RUTGERS SEMINAR ON CC

In June while in Pittsburgh, I received an invitation from Rutgers, the State University of New Brunswick to conduct a Seminar on Colon Classif-

cation. At the Rutgers Seminar I was happy to find the rapidity with which interest in classification had begun to grow. I was agreeably surprised that a number of persons attending the Seminar was beyond 100. At the discussion hour, more questions came from the consumer than from the producers of the scheme. According to me it was a very good augury for the future of library classification, particularly for the future of the approach to classification for which foundation was laid in our country.

82 FARBERWERKE (HOECHST)

We have developed good techniques. But they have yet to be appreciated and used in our country. I am sure that there is a perceptible beginning. USA and Germany can appreciate the value of our techniques better. I found signs of it in my three visits to Europe and America. In the Farbwerke (Hoechst), the documentalist who was once a production engineer in that company, felt that his company was using ideas which were often out of date by six months. That meant an enormous loss of money. He was aware of it. He approached the top management and asked them that he should be allowed to become a documentalist. This has been allowed. He showed me also the use of magnetic tapes and the IBM machines used for information retrieval. What really interested me most while at Farbwerke was the subject Organic Chemistry. The definition of this subject is uncertain. Its boundary lines are giving way as a result of modern research. The number of organic substances existing today is formidable. And new substances are always coming out, adding to the vastness of the subject. This shows that the Fifth Law is working with a vengeance. Dr Fugmann, documentalist at Farbwerke is an Organic Chemist. He has agreed to co-operate with us in working out a depth schedule for Organic Chemistry.

83 HOPE OF INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

The overall experience is one of great hope for the advancement of the subject, great hope for international co-operation in developing this subject. According to my estimate, 5,000 Man-years are required to construct schedules for subjects in Engineering and Technology alone. The keenness with which those advanced countries are taking to this subject is a measure of the sense of great hope with which I have come back to India.
