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## UNIVERSITY LIBRARY RESOURCES : SOME OBSERVATIONS

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[Examines some of the factors calling for a re-emphasis on the need for inter-library co-operation in building up the collection of reading materials in university libraries. States the reasons which have retarded the progress of the co-operative efforts in building up the collections. Concludes that the co-operation in building up the library resources will prevent undesirable duplication ; relieve shelving space for the new and more often used volumes ; provide access to the collection of documents in a large number of libraries thereby extending the nation's library resources within the same book grant.]

### 1 Introduction

Library co-operation is a hackneyed term. More is said about it than is practised. The University Grants Commission has made several recommendations in respect of co-operation among university libraries in this country. Co-operation is certainly possible and there are many good examples of co-operative efforts among libraries in the acquisition, technical processing, and distribution of reading materials. In the last decade certain factors have come to compel our attention to a rethinking of the acquisition policies in the university libraries in India.

### 2 Growth of Extensive Collections

Collecting reading materials for the use of its present clientele and those of the future has been conceived to be one of the principal functions of a university library. In this respect it is equated with a

national depository of documents. The result is that the university library collection has been allowed to grow unchecked.

## 21 ESTABLISHMENT OF RESEARCH DEPARTMENTS

The Acts establishing the first three universities viz the universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, did not contain any provision for research. The universities functioned merely as examining and degree-awarding bodies. The central enactments of 1904, 1920, the Madras Act of 1923, the appointment of the Calcutta University Commission, and other factors turned the attention of the universities to the provision of post-graduate studies and research departments. To begin with, research departments were established for the humanities. Then came the science departments which required costlier and more elaborate equipment. At present many universities in the country can boast of laboratories and research facilities for advanced studies. In fact, these post-graduate and research departments are to be considered as the fostering ground for the personnel to staff the research laboratories, industrial undertakings, and teaching departments in the country. The establishment of these research divisions in the universities has brought in its wake the need for extensive library facilities in many subject fields. Unlike in the industrial research laboratory, teaching and research work in the universities are not confined to just one or two subject fields. Hence, the university library collection has to be comprehensive in scope. Consequently university libraries began to acquire the source material to support research—a large number of current periodicals, extensive runs of back sets of these periodicals, reports, patent literature, etc. Library collections grew faster than they had done two decades ago. Libraries which were adding 1,000 volumes a year began adding at the rate of 4,000 to 6,000 volumes a year.

### 211 DOCUMENTATION SERVICES

With the extension of research facilities, documentation services became a necessity in the university libraries. Without such service a large collection would be of little practical value. Documentation service brought to the notice of readers more documents in their respective fields. As a result, the demand for documents increased.

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Although we do not have actual figures from the university libraries to demonstrate this increase in demand for documents, the following figures on the document procurement service of Insdoc support our conjecture :

Year	Demand from Universities & Colleges	
1956-57	...	2,265
1957-58	...	2,440
1958-59	...	3,239
1959-60	...	2,880

"Insdoc has provided service to 946 enquiries during 1959-60. A major portion is from the group 'Individuals' both attached and unattached to institutions. Research scholars and post-graduate students working in universities and colleges account for the large number under this group. The requisitions that are received under the clientele group research institutes and learned societies and universities and colleges are from the heads of institutions or from the heads of the departments and they are paid for by the respective institutions." (1)

It is assumed that the university libraries approach the Insdoc only after they have exhausted fully the local resources.

## 22 UGC AID

In recent years the University Grants Commission has been disbursing substantial amounts to the universities to help them carry their educational policies to give the best possible results. The Commission considered the library's role as particularly important in helping the university play an effective part in its educational and research activities. The Commission has, therefore, provided sizable grants for the acquisition of reading materials, and for the construction of library buildings to house them ; it has helped in the raising of status and salary of the university library staff, and has generally promoted the provision of adequate library service to the readers. The UGC aid further accelerated the rate of growth of university library collections in the last five years. The expansion of the collections has been somewhat sudden. In fact, in a few cases the acquisition programme has not been as carefully planned as it ought to have been.

### 23 INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS

As compared to the situation a generation ago, there are now not only a larger number of students entering the university, but there is also a wider range of variation in their capabilities, backgrounds, IQ, etc. It is not those in the top centile alone who have now facilities to equip themselves with university education. This is a result of social pressure and the socialistic pattern of society which India has adopted as her goal. As a consequence, there is a need for reorientation of teaching techniques. There is a great disparity between the number of teachers and the number of students--there are too many students per teacher. For some time to come, the bad effects of this deficiency has to be mitigated, by making teaching more library-centered than text book-centered. The university library is, therefore, obliged to acquire documents of such standards and variety as to meet the requirements of the several grades of intelligence and capabilities.

### 3 Need for Co-operation.

#### 31 COMPREHENSIVE COLLECTION : A THING OF THE PAST

Extensive collection of documents was possible in the past say, a generation or two ago. Many of the forces which we have discussed in the preceding sections were not apparent then. Moreover currently the number of documents on the subject is said to double every ten years. If a library has collected 100,000 volumes in the last hundred years, it would have collected 200,000 volumes by 1975(1).

#### 32 THE COST

It is not merely a question of providing shelving space. The major items of library cost are acquisition, housing, cataloguing, and service. A sizable proportion of the library budget will have to be spent on maintenance, processing, and servicing if the collection is not going to be a dead-load on the university. As a library grows in size, unit costs also go up. For instance, the larger the collection more is the time required to find out whether or not a particular item is already in the collection. To locate or to replace a document on the

shelf in the collection of 100,000 volumes definitely requires more time than to locate or replace the document in a collection of 50,000 volumes. The library budget cannot hope to keep up with the geometrical progression in the rate of increase of the number of documents, and the cost of acquisition, processing, and servicing.

### 33 EFFECT ON USERS

The bewildering effect of the physical size of a massive collection on the users of the library is also a factor to be taken into account. In the open access library there is every need to provide help to the users, whether they be under-graduates or post-graduates, in the selection and location of documents in a massive collection. It is just to avoid the feeling of being at a loss when faced with an extensive collection of all grades of documents that special collections to cater to the needs of students of certain levels of understanding, have been established in some universities. Take for example the Lamont Library in the Harvard University Library. It is a live collection, limited to a maximum of 80,000 books, selected and shelved apart for the use of the under-graduates.

### 34. THE SMALLER LIBRARIES

There are now more than 50 universities in India. Only three of them are over a century old. Quite a few of them have been established during the last two decades. Therefore, the number of volumes in the university library collections varies from 20,000 to 200,000. With the tremendous growth in the number of documents, the new university libraries can hardly hope to build a comprehensive collection. For much of the earlier material they are obliged to draw upon the more comprehensive collections from the older universities.

### 35 CO-OPERATION—THE BEST SOLUTION

The best solution to the problem appears to be inter-library co-operation. Co-operation in acquisition, regional specialisation, exchange and location of reading materials in libraries where they will be most used, establishment of national depositories for the less used materials, etc are some of the ways of extending the nation's library

resources. In the present context, it is futile to think in terms of building several large collections. It is more beneficial to think in terms of providing access to the collections in the several libraries in the country as a whole.

#### **4 Factors which Hamper Growth of Co-operation**

The factors which hamper the growth of co-operation in the building up of collections of reading materials in the university libraries are many and of a varied nature. Some are born of tradition and habit; some are of a psychological nature; others are of an administrative kind; and yet others are based on objections of the users of the library.

#### **41 TRADITION AND HABIT**

Collecting is a tradition and a habit with university libraries. Despite the accelerated rate of addition of new documents there is practically no attempt at withdrawal of the less used volumes. In fact there is practically no effort made to find out the documents which are over-staying the library shelves beyond their period of usefulness. As the collection grows and particularly in view of the tremendous rate of production of new documents, there will be an increasing proportion of less used volumes cluttering the shelves. A business man would think in terms of the Law of Diminishing Returns. He would consider that there is a stage when it is better to spend money on other than just adding and storing books. A stage is reached when it is advantageous to have a few really useful books at hand and provide access to the less used materials available elsewhere. University libraries seem never to reach this stage whether the collection contains 50,000, 100,000 or 1,000,000 volumes.

#### **42 WORSHIP OF NUMBERS**

The larger the collection, the more imposing it is. Hence libraries tend to add more and more to their collection and rarely weed out

any. Libraries view with one another in adding to their stock through purchase, exchange, and gift. In the latter type of acquisition, at times little attention is paid as to the relevance of the material received to the student and faculty needs. But this worship of numbers is not a fault of the librarians only. Professors, deans of faculties, and men at the higher management level are also responsible. I have known of a head of an institution fixing up the salary of his librarian on the basis of the number of volumes, is paying its librarian Rs. 500/- a month. On this basis Library having 15,000 volumes should pay its librarian 1/10 of 500-that is, Rs 50 a month.

#### 43 THE ATTITUDE "WHY-RELY-ON-OTHERS?"

The university librarians, the professors, the deans of faculties and even the readers ask why not build a collection from which the reader can draw the documents required without having to wait to get it on inter-library loan? It is also natural for the men at the higher administrative level to try to be self-dependent and independent. They also question the financial implications of co-operation and of collecting material for use of readers in other libraries. In short, why rely on others and why collect for others?

These questions arise because those who question have not fully realised the benefits of co-operation. However, it should be possible to provide convincing proof of the financial advantage of co-operation. It will involve investigations and collection of data over a period of years. It is questionable whether any library can be self-sufficient in the present context of the scatter of reading material on a subject in a wide variety of documents and the seepage of literature on a subject in documents devoted to entirely different subjects.

#### 44 RELUCTANCE TO INTER-LEND

Any effort at co-operation at the level of acquisition of reading materials will be of no practical value unless there is co-operation at the level of making material available to any reader wherever he may be located. In many cases, there is a reluctance on the part of

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libraries to send materials on inter-library loan. It should not be so. To quote Carlson (2).

"The tacit acceptance of a liberal interlending of books by and among the libraries of our country (USA), has in effect made the resources of our libraries a national, and cultural asset. This has been a tremendous contribution to both the rapid technological advances we have made and our great forward strides in research scholarship. Aiding, as it has, in the publication of more and better books, their free interchange of books is but another of the many evidences of the fruit of work of librarians brings. Once again because librarians do their work well and with vision, as in the free interlending of books, they help significantly in creating more books to be acquired, organised, housed, and delivered for use as needed."

### 45 REGIONAL SPECIALISATION AND CURRICULA

The regional specialisation in the university libraries has to parallel the specialisation in curricula and research in the respective universities. However, there is practically no agreement on specialisation in research or curriculum among the universities. Therefore, specialisation in the university library loses much of its validity and a great deal of duplication of documents is necessary.

### 5 Conclusion

In this country we have not had any extensive co-operative programme among the libraries to realise the benefits of such co-operation. Much of what we can say would be an *a priori* approach to the problem. We can, however, learn from the experiences in other countries where co-operation has been practised on an extensive scale for a fairly long time. We can modify their practices to suit the conditions obtained in India. In any case it is clear that co-operation in the building of library resources will prevent needless duplication ; will relieve shelving space for the new and more often used volumes ; will provide access to the collection of documents in a large number of libraries thereby extending the nation's library resources given the same library grants as it is now. Even the argument that the reader has to wait to get material on inter-library loan, can be met. There need to be no such delay if the research worker and his guide would only plan in advance and give the librarian a list of the documents they would like to consult.



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- (2) Sec 44 Carlson (W H), Mobilisation of existing library resources (Lib trends. 6 ; 1957-58 ; 287).