

Library News

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NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SRI LANKA

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When I was first asked by UNESCO in Paris, that part of the United Nations which deals with Education, Science and Culture, whether I would come to Sri Lanka to advise on the design of a National Library, I naturally said 'yes'. I said 'yes' for personal reasons because I had been here many years before and had most pleasurable memories of the Island. But I also said 'yes' because it was a project which to my mind was extremely important.

I was surprised that when I mentioned to my friends that I would be going to Colombo, that they posed a number of questions as to why I was going. Since I arrived in the country I have had similar questions. I believe the attitude to problems is not so different in different places. Let me tell you what these questions were and to try to suggest what my answers are.

The first, and not entirely unexpected, was, 'is there really a need for a National Library, and specially for a National Library in a developing country where the weight of the problems in general must surely be overwhelming?' The answer which I gave was this: That it seems especially in a developing country that there was a need for a National Library. In any period and particularly in the present period of rapid social, economic and therefore cultural change of society, it is vital that the records and history and culture of that society are preserved for the future. Unless we do that we are forsaking not only the past but the present and depriving the people of the future of the ability to understand their history. It would seem to me criminal negligence to pay so little attention to a problem that is as pressing as the economic problems of any country, for any country really does not live by its economic life alone. I think therefore that the sooner we establish institutions of this kind, particularly in a culturally highly developed country like Sri Lanka, the more we would be doing for our future history.

The second question was really a rather similar one in the sense that it was a variation of this theme: Granted that there is a need for a National Library at some stage in the development of a country, generally at the moment there must surely be a greater need elsewhere to devote the likely cost involved in setting up not only the building but also the organisation that goes with it. Again let me tell you what my feelings are. It seems to me that any one who is talking about economy is on the whole talking about money. In plain terms he is talking about poverty. But as I think we have long discovered not only in the developed world but also in developing countries, poverty is not only a matter of money. It is a matter of resource control, and resource covers a much wider field than economy and money alone. It is a common fact that in the latter part of the 20th century information is a vital resource, as vital as money itself; but what I would like to add is that it had always been a vital resource. Those in society who knew about magic were able to control others and acquire resources, power and indeed money. In other societies literacy was a powerful source of control and through their simple ability to manipulate information, communities and nations were able to acquire control. Or more recently the mere fact that certain nations knew how to navigate and had the compass and gunpowder they were able to acquire colonial power and vast resources throughout the world. It seems to me today we are exactly in the same position where unless a nation is actually able to have at its fingertips a great range of information resource, it will not survive culturally as I said in the beginning, and it will also not survive economically nor will it be able to exert the influence and have the standing in the world which it deserves. But I think there is another aspect to the whole idea of library which relates to this. We have in places like Britain, America and other parts of the world, libraries as great warehouses of information, passive warehouses of information, in which if you wanted to know something you could go and ask, and find the book, manuscript

or some other source, and were given it in order to use it. In other circumstances it would be important however for libraries to be not only the storehouses of accumulated world knowledge but actually to be the disseminators of that knowledge to make people aware of what is around in the world, so that information, whether it came from Sri Lanka or any other part of the world, is available to the people, and to all the people of the country. The third question which I was asked and which I find extremely fascinating was: why a library - in the sense of, why books? In the latter part of the 20th century, as there are surely other media of communication, more immediate media of communication than the printed word - would it not be better to spend money on setting up a television service, let us say, in Sri Lanka, or extend the broadcasting system. The answer to them I think is complex. Part of it is simple though.

Clearly setting up a television service would be immeasurably more expensive than setting up a National Library: there is just no comparison in the cost between the two. But there is a more fundamental fact. Different media ought to perform different functions. The great virtue in any printed book or, printed material, is that it is available to a reader, any kind of user in the future, at the time in which he decides that he wants that information. It is always there. He could check the source, he could use it for a future or further argument, and it is up to him to know what is in it and to be able to criticise what has been said before. If you however want to check up whether I am talking nonsense or sense, it will be extremely difficult for you to find out and to construct a new argument which counters the one I am putting forward. It seems to be therefore absolutely critical, and specially again critical in developing countries, that this information resource should be stored and should be available for a future which none of us can forecast; always to be able to decide how to use it and what to do with it eventually. Now I hope you agree with the kind of argument that I am trying to put forward. You may not or there may

be other, indeed, more important reasons as to why there should be a National Library in Sri Lanka on a site in Colombo, and I hope this kind of discussions will go on. But, however many discussions there are, I trust that the project will come to fruition. I have had great fun and enjoyment being here and designing such a library on behalf of the Ceylon National Library Services Board. But, the point is not whether I have had fun or not, but that eventually there should be a building, even more important that there should be an institution, a viable, active, institution - storing and disseminating knowledge, and most important of all, that there should be people who are continuously and usefully using that information now and in the long distant future which none of us know about.

Michael Brawne,
Unesco Expert in Library Building.

TOWARDS A BETTER UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SERVICE

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Provision of up to date library materials for study and research is the primary concern of the University Libraries. This task, in many respects, is undeniably challenging and may present problems.

The phenomenon often referred to as 'information explosion' has obvious repercussions on library provision at universities. The sum of human knowledge is increasing, at a much faster pace than any thing mankind has ever known. In all branches of knowledge, particularly in Science more and more library materials are being published at a rate that libraries find it difficult to acquire single handed.

The countries in the Third World are confronted with added problems arising from pruning library budgets at a time when the cost of library materials is rising steadily. Smaller countries speaking non international languages are further overburdened by the pressing need to build up comprehensive library resources in foreign international languages. Sri Lanka may be cited as a living example of a country suffering from all drawbacks and disadvantages innumeraed above.

In many countries all over the world, library co-operation has progressively been used to combat the effects of 'information explosion' and the new circumstances they are facing today. Although we in Sri Lanka have been continuously concerned over the difficulties of comprehensive coverage of foreign materials, rising cost of library materials and the growing demand of the readers, little effort has so far been made to use library co-operation as a means of rectifying the present situation.

Although library co-operation is no panacea for all library problems, it can certainly be used as a means of improving the library services of a country by judiciously using the library funds for the maximum benefit of the readers.

In many countries co-operation among libraries has been developed in the areas such as book and periodical acquisitions, processing of library materials including cataloguing, classification and binding, provision of library materials with the minimum of hardship to readers, common storage systems and many other similar library routines where collective efforts can bring about a better service to the readers. Among these processes most commonly known one is inter-library lending. The full benefits of this fairly simple facility are yet to be explored in our country.

Why is that a healthy library co-operation has not developed at least among the university libraries in our country (now 6 in number), let alone the other special libraries in Sri Lanka. Let us analyse our facts.

It has often been quoted that the library is the central organ in any university and the character and the efficiency of a university can best be gauged by its treatment of its central organ - the library. Unfortunately, university libraries have not been considered as such in Sri Lanka.

During the course of the development of University of Ceylon into six different campuses, architects of the new universities were preoccupied in setting up the new institutions of higher education, but seem to have paid relatively less attention to the establishment of library services on a sound footing. When a new university was established, often the rule was to set up a makeshift library, with whatever materials available at the time. In 1971, when the Jayaratne Committee recommended 'a single university structure' with different campuses, it is unfortunate that they did not make any recommendation towards co-ordinating the resources of the university libraries. During the next five years attempts were made to use the one university structure often as an excuse to shift parts of well-established libraries to build up new libraries. Such moves have not only been a threat to the character of the existing libraries, but also

have resulted in straining the good relations among university libraries.

To put the matters back on a correct footing it is absolutely essential to recognise the individuality of all the university libraries in our country. In the words of the illustrious scholar Ranganathan, libraries are growing organisms and their personality should be respected and improved. It has to be recognised that no part of a library can be broken and taken away without damaging its personality and character. It is in this environment that the cordial relations among the university libraries can be re-established and maintained.

Library co-operation will thrive only in an atmosphere of cordial relations among libraries. Friendship and understanding opens up new possibilities of helping each other and embarking on co-operation schemes for the benefit of each other.

Liberal exchange of library materials based on an effective union catalogue, embarking on a subject specialisation scheme, a scheme to minimise duplication and maximise the benefits of periodical publications, a scheme to build up a comprehensive collection of foreign materials are some of the projects which can be undertaken by means of library co-operation. If we are to use the Danish library experience for our own advantage (Denmark is about $\frac{2}{3}$ the size of Sri Lanka) such co-operation can be further progressively extended to include all special and academic libraries in the country, thereby building up a strong network of libraries for the use of the academics of Sri Lanka.

Library co-operation can also be extended to help setting up a new University Library. In a friendly atmosphere, the other libraries can offer professional and technical help in their initial work, and be of further assistance by offering duplicates of library materials which can be spared from the existing collections. Offering books and other materials on long-term inter-library loan is another way by which an

established library can be of assistance to a new library. Materials thus received can be used in the new library during their initial difficult days until their stocks are improved. Peradeniya University Library being the oldest of the six libraries, has helped the other newly established libraries in all these ways at some stage or other, but unfortunately such help has always been observed as a one way process and not been considered a model for further library co-operation.

Tremendous expansion of higher education in the past two decades has been a general phenomenon in South and South East Asia. Sri Lanka also has had its full share of expansion in higher education and the process is still going on. Recently the Minister of Education has indicated the possibility of opening up new university campuses. It is most appropriate to say that we should learn from our university library experience in the past and use it for the betterment of the future, rather than limiting ourselves to the narrow confines of practices established in the colonial times.

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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Libraries are indispensable institutions for human welfare and progress. Information and education which constitute a basic requirement for economic and social development are the two fields the libraries can play a positive role in any country. "While it is true to say that libraries have an important role to play in all countries, their importance increases in an under-developed country.

This is because in an under-developed country the persistent need for rapid economic and social advance presents itself a formidable problem and hence the entire institutional set-up including libraries, is expected to play a dynamic role for economic growth and social progress. The existence of various institutions, economic and cultural, can only be justified, so long as they make positive contribution forwards economic and social progress of the people.

In an advance economy libraries may be regarded as an end-product of the economic and social progress evolved to meet the cultural needs of a matured economy. But in an under-developed country libraries along with other institutions like universities, technical colleges, research centres, banks and other allied financial institutions are required in the very process of economic development and social progress.

Comparatively speaking there is more leisure in a developed country for people, as a result of past economic development and libraries can afford to remain as mere cultural centres, providing means to spend that leisure and prosperity profitably. In an under-developed country the position is somewhat different. In the economic sense leisure is not total time available but the time left over after producing a sufficient amount of goods and services for the achievement of a comfortable living.

In this sense there is very little leisure in under-developed countries, as most of the time available must be utilised for productive purposes, to break what growth economists call "the vicious circle of poverty" that exists in most of these countries. Therefore in

addition to being mere cultural centres catering to a leisured class, libraries along with other institutions must ensure that the time and the effort of the people are not wasted but put to some productive use.

The significant role that libraries, especially public libraries have to play in an under-developed country must be reflected in the composition, organisation, and stock of materials available. The development motive must come to the forefront of a public library policy just as much in a banking institution in an underdeveloped economy. Though it is important to make this clear distinction between the libraries in a developed country and in an under-developed country, one cannot however say that a library in a developed country has a negative role to play.

Even a developed country must sustain a sufficient rate of economic growth to keep pace with the rise of population and the standard of living. Moreover, when there is an urgency for accelerated growth in economic and the government and the people are wedded to a policy of economic growthmanship, libraries in developed countries too assume greater responsibilities other than being mere cultural institutions.

In short therefore, wherever, there is a pressing need for economic expansion and social progress libraries must assume greater responsibilities and be more dynamic in their mission.

The fact that libraries are important agencies for economic and social progress is not a new concept. Economic history of Great Britain and the United States of America offers a number of instances where mechanic institutions were established to provide books and lectures for working men.

As early as 1849 a National Committee on Public Libraries in England reported that such libraries should possess books on industries of their particular cities since

such collection would produce great advantage not only in imparting general instruction but also in promoting the extension of commerce and manufacture of the town.

Eight years later in the United States of America a group of young men in Boston endorsed the creation of a Public library "as destroy of class distinctions, sectional antagonism and international ill-will". This novel idea immediately captured the imagination of the highest rungs of commercial men in Boston. As the industrial progress ran its course, more and more people were interested in the development of libraries.

In 1977 a British Committee recommended that the library of every trade centre, should increase its supply of scientific and technical books and periodicals for study and research. As the process of economic development proceeds science and technology have an increasingly greater use and libraries must meet this requirement.

Besides this, libraries must provide special section where up to date geographical information, industrial data, financial information, tariffs, foreign exchange and bank information are regularly supplied to the needy.

Mr. Paul Hoffman of the United Nations Special Fund acknowledge the contribution that libraries make for economic development in the following words: "Industry, like other segments of our national life, owes much to the libraries of the nation and to those who work to keep our library facilities expanding and improving".

Mervyn Herath

Former Consultant, UNESCO Regional Centre for Book Development in Asia, Karachi.

(Head of the Publication Division - Marga Institute)

DIRECTORY OF MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL
IN SRI LANKA

A Directory of qualified/trained Management Personnel in the Government Sector including State Corporation and Boards is being compiled by the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs in collaboration with the Director of National Library Services.

The Directory will embody such basic bio-data as names, education, qualifications, training, posts held, experience, speciality, addresses etc. of the persons concerned, arranged under recognised special areas of Management Technology.

The Directory besides being a "Who's who" in Management will serve as a data-base for ascertaining the quantum of Managerial expertise available and/or necessary in various fields of activity and help determine what further planning and organisation is required to eliminate prevailing imbalances, if any.

COMMONWEALTH NATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHIES
AN ANNOTATED DIRECTORY

The information division of the Commonwealth secretariat in London announced earlier this year the publication of the Directory as part of its book development programme. This 100 page work bring together for the first time information about national and other bibliographies produced in the Commonwealth countries. The entries are grouped under an alphabetical listing of countries, and information for each includes title, frequency of issue, scope, contents, arrangement, indexes cataloguing and price, and the address from which the bibliography may be obtained.

The Directory will be of service to libraries that wish to bring upto date their collections of Commonwealth Bibliographies and expand their holdings of Commonwealth material. It will also be of assistance to individuals and institutions interested in obtaining information about the rapidly expanding publishing out put from Commonwealth developing countries. (News letter 11-1977)

Training in National Library Work

Miss P.B. Chitra Swarnalatha, Library section, Ceylon National Library Services Board, returned to Sri Lanka recently after successfully completing a three month training course at the National Library of Singapore. She has obtained specialised training in all branches of the National Library. The scholarship was awarded by the Colombo plan.

Dr. E.M. Wijerama's Private Library Donated to the National Library of Sri Lanka

Dr. E.M. Wijerama, No. 7, Horton place, Colombo 7 has donated his private library to the Sri Lanka National Library Collection. Dr. Wijerama's collection contains a large number of books and periodicals on Ceylon history, Archeology, Buddhism and medicine, some of which are very rare and valuable.

These materials are now safely deposited at the Sri Lanka National Library Services Board premises.

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