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# Towards A Meaningful SAARC Summit

**Mrs. Gwen Herath**

*Co-ordinating Secretary for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs*

The rationale for regional cooperation is not difficult to understand. Just as inhabitants of a neighbourhood may get together to pool their resources, so too, it makes sense for neighbouring countries to cooperate in regional development. Moreover, by cooperating with each other they establish better relations among themselves and so create an atmosphere of understanding and good will.

Regional co-operation in the post World War II global context has become wide spread. Perhaps the best known and the most successful has been the European Economic Community (EEC), which began cooperation in a war-devastated western Europe in 1951. Looking at other regions, in Latin America there is the Organisation of American States, in Africa the Organisation of African Unity, in the Middle East the Arab League and in South East Asia, the Association of South East Asian Nations. All these regional organisations were fully functional by the late 1960's.

In the decade of the 1970's however, South Asia remained the exception, as a region that had no institutionalised mechanism to promote cooperation. There were various factors that delayed the spread of regional cooperation to this part of the world. Among them were the legacies of bitterness and distrust inherited consequent to the end of colonial rule. This was also added to by the disparities in land area, population and economic resources of the South Asian countries.

At the same time there were several factors that favoured regional cooperation. The South Asian region is a distinct geographical entity, bordered by the Indian Ocean at one end and the Karakoram and the Himalayan mountain ranges at the other. There were common strands in the cultural and historical heritage of the region, including the fact that all the countries had been either directly ruled by the British or been under

their influence during the colonial era. Moreover, there was a growing realisation that the creation of trust and confidence through regional cooperation would allow the region to concentrate its scarce resources towards growth and development, thus averting the increasing trend towards economic marginalisation.

The credit for initiating moves towards regional co-operation goes to the late President Zia-ur-Rahman of Bangladesh, who in 1980 sent envoys throughout the region proposing that a regional Summit be convened to establish a forum for cooperation in economic, social, cultural, technical and other fields. However, in the context that the South Asian region had not taken this step during the three preceding decades, there was a consensus within the region to move cautiously. Thus the first meeting to discuss the proposal was held not at the level of Heads of State or Government, but at the level of officials, when Sri Lanka convened in April 1981 a meeting of the Foreign Secretaries of the region. The Foreign Secretaries decided to set up feasibility studies for regional co-operation in five areas, i.e. Agriculture, Health and Population Activities, Meteorology, Rural Development and Telecommunications. These areas were carefully selected, on the basis of their obvious common concern to all the countries of the region, thereby excluding potentially contentious matters. At subsequent meetings of the Foreign Secretaries, the areas for study were increased to nine. The idea was to establish a solid base of achievements before taking on areas of possible discord.

In 1983 it was agreed that the activities of the nine areas should be so structured to form an Integrated Programme of Action (IPA). The IPA was intended to focus on both short term activities such as the exchange of data via seminars and workshops and training as well as on the long-term. The long-term included the establishment of regional institutions for training and research the creation/strengthening of linkages among existing national institutions and the strengthening of infra-structural support.

The IPA was approved by the Foreign Ministers of the region when they met in Delhi in August 1983. The nine areas were formally classified as Technical Committees.

The spade work that was done by the Foreign Ministers and the senior officials of the South Asian countries during the period 1981 to 1985, paved the

way for holding the first Summit in Dhaka in December 1985. This Summit saw the formal launching of SAARC with the adoption of the SAARC Charter. The Charter provided for the Heads of State or Government of the SAARC countries to henceforth hold annual Summits. It also envisaged the establishment of a Secretariat.

On the basis of its Charter, SAARC has a three-tiered policy formulation structure. The first is the Standing Committee (of officials) that functions in an advisory capacity to the SAARC Council of Ministers. The Council is responsible for policy formulation and meets twice a year. Its sessions are preceded by the Standing Committee. The third level is the Summit, whereby the Heads of State or Government, add the authority of the highest levels of administration within the member countries to the process of regional cooperation.

With the passage of time the number of Technical Committees of SAARC has increased from nine in 1983 to thirteen. You would be interested to know that although the United Nations began looking at the issue of women and the development process only in 1975, when the UN Decade for the Development of Women was launched, this subject received the attention of the South Asian leaders right from the inception of SAARC. At the Dhaka Summit it was emphasised that programmes and projects should be devised to ensure the active participation of women in development. The SAARC Council of Ministers in August 1986 accordingly decided to set up a Technical Committee on this subject. The aim of this Committee has been to sensitize policy makers, stimulate reflection and discussion and create public awareness. SAARC has held two Ministerial meetings on Women in Development, one in India in May 1986 and the other in Pakistan in June 1990. Conscious of the need to safeguard a particularly vulnerable segment of the population, SAARC observed 1990 as the "SAARC Year of the Girl Child" and at the Male Summit that same year it decided to designate the Years 1991 to 2000 as the "SAARC Decade of the Girl Child."

The activities of the Technical Committee on Women in Development have been facilitated by the creation of a Women's cell in the SAARC Secretariat that coordinates the programmes among SAARC countries.

Although I mentioned that at the outset SAARC decided to avoid potentially contentious issues, it became apparent soon after the institutionalisation of SAARC, that for regional cooperation to become meaningful, more complex subjects had to be faced. For instance at the heart of any cooperative process are the issues related to trade and finance. In 1987, the Kathmandu Summit commissioned a study on the possibility of regional co-operation in trade, manufactures and services. Given the nature of the subject, completion of the study necessarily took time. When the SAARC Council of Ministers met in Male in July this year, the study was ready and so the Ministers were able to approve its recommendations in principle. The study has proposed a series of measures, such as the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers within the region, the standardisation of documentation and customs procedure, the setting up of joint ventures for manufacturers, the creation of mechanisms for financial payments, etc.

The SAARC region has a vast market of over a billion people, which is accompanied by a talented pool of skilled man-power that can cater to its requirements. The commencement of trade and financial co-operation within SAARC therefore cannot but lead to a spread of economic progress throughout the region.

It is however a truism that economic progress cannot be achieved without peace and stability. Within the last decade South Asia has increasingly been wracked by violent acts of terrorism. On the basis of an initiative taken by President J. R. Jayewardene at the Dhaka Summit in 1985, SAARC agreed to study the problem of terrorism and its impact on the security and the stability of the region. The meetings that SAARC held over the next two years on this subject culminated in the signing in 1987 of the SAARC Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. The Convention works on the principle of extradite or prosecute. If a person wanted for a terrorist offence in one country has fled to another SAARC country, then the latter country has the obligation of either sending that person back to the country where he is wanted or of prosecuting him. The intention is that there should be no safe haven for terrorist offenders anywhere within the SAARC region. Member countries may need to enact specific national legislation to meet their obligations under the Convention. For instance at present in most countries the courts can try offences

committed only within the territory of that country. Enabling legislation is needed to grant them extra-territorial jurisdiction. Upto now only 3 countries, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka have enacted the necessary legislation. It is expected that the other countries will enact legislation at an early date, thereby making the convention a forceful weapon against terrorism in South Asia.

Another issue SAARC has faced is the environment. As we are all aware, the environment is no respecter of national boundaries or identities. Environmentally damaging policies in one country can cause harm not only to that country but to others as well. The converse is equally valid. Our region including our own country has of recent had to meet more than its fair share of natural disasters. The Colombo Summit will have before it the recommendations of a SAARC Study on the Protection and Preservation of the Environment that was commissioned in 1987.

As we move towards the Sixth SAARC Summit from November 7-9 in Colombo this year, it is natural that there should be speculation on its outcome. It would be reasonable to believe that the Summit would want to take stock of what has been achieved and identify areas for improvement. SAARC is yet in a period of consolidation and there has been some thinking on improving its work methods, by reducing overlap, unnecessary formalities, etc. I believe the Summit would also be anxious to strengthen the process of regional co-operation, by taking specific implementation measures in respect of the major cooperative areas it has undertaken, such as trade and finance, and the environment.

In this run-up period to the Colombo Summit, His Excellency President R. Premadasa has also taken an initiative, that would be a major contribution from Sri Lanka towards the SAARC process. All the SAARC countries face constraints of resources, and so if are to pursue SAARC objectives only at the inter-governmental level, we have to recognise that the impact is bound to be limited. The vision of H. E. the President is that parallel to the Summit it would be possible to promote exchanges and contacts among professional groups academics, those engaged in commerce, journalists, non-governmental organizations, etc., of the South Asian region. Efforts are already underway by Sri Lankan associations, with encouragement by the government, to meet with their regional counterparts in Colombo and map out strategies for future cooperations.

I believe that in your own field, the National Library Services Board, will be holding a Book exhibition relating to the SAARC region. Books not only help to share information. They also bring peoples together, by enabling them to share with others their cultures and experiences. The contribution that the publishing industry and those in related spheres can make to regional understanding and friendship is immense.

The primary objective of SAARC, in the words of its Charter is "to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life". We, as concerned citizens and professionals of the region, have an obligation to assist the national governments in this noble task.

(This Paper presented at the National Library Lecture Series on 31.07.1991.)

# National Library of Bangladesh

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The National Library under the Directorate of Archives and Libraries is functioning as the Bangladesh National Library from 1972 after the emergence of Bangladesh in a hired house. The National Library shifted its materials to its own new building at Sher-e Bangla Nagar, Agargaon at the end of 1985. The total space of the New National Library Building is 105,000 square feet, with a stack block of seven stories, the East, West and South blocks are three stories high. The total cost of the building is 792.30 lakhs.

Under the Copyright Act (Amendment Act 1974 LIV of 1974) all the publishers, departments, institutions (govt. and private) of Bangladesh are depositing their publications to the National Library of Bangladesh and other depository libraries, such as Khulna, Chittagong and Rajshahi Public Libraries.

## Organisation

The National Library branch has the following sections; Acquisition, Processing, Reference, Reading Room, Stacks, Compilation of Bibliography, other Documentary works, Book exchange, Exhibition, Library Training and Administration.

## Acquisition

The National Library of Bangladesh started its acquisition role from zero. It has acquired about 90,000 books, 2,000 bound volumes of newspapers and periodicals, 600 maps and nearly 5,000 titles of local newspapers and periodicals are coming to the library.

The sources of its acquisition are as follows. (a) Copyright Act, (b) Purchase, (c) Donation and (d) Exchange. The Library collections are currently

divided into the following sections: (a) Books in mother language, (b) Books in languages other than mother language, (c) Science and Technology, (d) Newspapers and periodicals in languages other than mother language, (e) Newspapers and periodicals in Bengali language, (f) Special collections, such as maps, private collections (g) Liberation struggle records and oriental manuscripts.

## Functions and Objectives

The present functions of the National Library are to collect, disseminate and preserve all kinds of books, govt. publications, serials, etc. published in Bangladesh; to compile and publish Bangladesh National Bibliography. It has compiled and published National Bibliographies from 1972 to 1979. Bibliographies for 1980 to 1982 are in print and Bibliographies for 1983 to 1985 (Combined) are being compiled. From 1986 it has set to work for monthly bibliographical list. It is compiling and publishing the article index of daily national Bengali and English newspapers regularly. It has compiled and edited the Directory of publishers (1972-1985) and the Directory of Bangladesh Public Libraries is in print. Other planned documentation works are also in progress.

The National Library of Bangladesh has the following objectives, such as, it should be the premier library of the nation playing the key role of leadership in over all library and information system of Bangladesh; it must be the medium for all cooperative and coordinating efforts in the library and information science field and so on.

In short the National Library of Bangladesh wants to be the channel for the nation to discharge its library obligations and responsibilities both to the citizens of the country and the international community. It also wants to play a pivotal role in social education and to be an indispensable one in the modern information oriented society.

The National Library of Bangladesh is a member of the IFLA (International Federation of Library Association).

# National Library of Bhutan

## Role and Function

Rev. LOPON PEMALA

Director, National Library of Bhutan

### I. Background

As an integral part of the overall national policy of preservation and promotion of the country's cultural and religious heritage, the National Library of Bhutan was established in 1967 with the objective of collecting and preserving ancient, Bhutanese and Tibetan literature and scriptures depicting religion, culture, history and traditions.

Faithful to its primary vocation and mission, continuous efforts have been made in order to build up a comprehensive collection of both national and foreign materials in order to preserve them for posterity and make them relevant to the promotion of national identity.

### II. New complex

The Library worked out of various temporary premises until 1984, year in which it moved into its own permanent accommodation. The new National Library complex in purely traditional Bhutanese style comprises two buildings; a two storeyed office-cum-reading room and an imposing four storeyed stack building which follows the architectural style of the *dbu rtse* (central tower) of Bhutanese *rdzong* (fortress-monastery).

The peculiar feature of the stack building is that it is designed as a *lha khang* (temple), most appropriate for the storage of religious scriptures. In fact, a *lha khang* has always the three kinds of representation of the Buddha, that is physical (*sku*), verbal (*gsung*) and mental (*thugs*). Of these three, it goes without saying that the verbal aspect which is represented by books and wood-blocks for printing is the most important for the *lha khang* of the National Library. The mental aspect is also represented by the Eight Stupas (*Bde gshegs mchod rten brgyad*) which are placed in the altar of the ground floor. The physical aspect is represented by statues and wall-paintings in the altar which is placed on each floor.

The altar of the top floor houses the main statue of the Buddha and other smaller statues in the style of One Thousand Buddha (*Sangs rgyas stong sku*.)

On the wall of the altar of the second floor, the Buddha of the Three Times (*Dus gsum sangs rgyas*) are painted and in front the statues of the Rigs gsum mgon po: Jam dpal dbyangs, Phyag na rdo rje and Spyan ras gzigs are placed.

On the first floor, while the Tshe lha rnam gsum: Tshe dpag med, Gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma and Sgrol ma dkar po are painted on the wall, the three statues in front represent Guru Rin po che Padmasambhava, Padma gling pa (1450-1521) and Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594-1651).

On the ground floor, behind the Eight Stupas already mentioned, five lamas of the Kagyupa sect are depicted. They are in chronological order: Mar pa (1012-1097), Mi la ras pa (1040-1123), Dwags po lha rje Sgam po pa (1079-1153), Gtsang pa rgya ras (1161-1211) and Pha jo 'Brug sgom zhig po (1184-1251).

These paintings and statues which represent the main deities and figures of the Bhutanese Buddhism are extremely interesting from both historical and iconographical point of view.

### III. Activities

The National Library is currently undertaking three main activities which are (1) acquisition and cataloguing, (2) microfilming, (3) publication and (4) research.

#### (1) Acquisition and cataloguing

Since its establishment, the National Library has been endeavouring to build up a systematic and comprehensive collection of ancient manuscripts and xylographs through three different ways; purchase, exchange and gift. Although purchase remains the most important method, the other two contribute also to enrich the collection. For example, the National Library acquired in 1978, in exchange with the Reiyukai Library (actually the International Institute for Buddhist Studies), Tokyo, the Tibetan Buddhist Canon (Kanjur and Tanjur) of the Peking edition and the Complete Works of Sakyapa Masters. On the other hand, over several years, Mr. E. G. Smith, Field Director, Library of Congress, New Delhi (actually posted in Jakarta), generously donated to the National Library more than 800 volumes of current Tibetan reprints published in India. As a result,

the National Library is actually the richest depository of national literature in Bhutan. The actual collection is approximately as follows :

Bhutanese and Tibetan manuscripts	161 vols
Bhutanese and Tibetan xylographs	721 vols
Bhutanese and Tibetan books in other forms	7,118 vols
Foreign books (mainly in English)	1,590 vols
Archival materials	40 nos
Periodicals (in English, Tibetan and Dzongkha)	50 titles
Wood-block (for printing)	8,413 nos
Metal-blocks (for printing)	5,703 nos

The collection of xylographic blocks constitute one of the unique features of our library. In olden days the xylography was the only mode of printing in Bhutan. The country being extremely rich in woods suitable for the xylography, this art has flourished in Bhutan for several hundred years and numerous wood-blocks have been carved in different parts of the country. Unfortunately because of repeated fires which destroyed the country's cultural and religious heritages, many wood-blocks were burnt. Further new methods of printing have been introduced in recent years and the centuries old art of xylography is rapidly declining if not disappearing. Under these circumstances, the National Library started the collection of wood-blocks for preservation. The blocks which are kept in poor condition in different monasteries and temples are transferred to the National Library for storage and restoration. On the other hand, in order to uphold the art of xylography, the National Library started a xylographic section to undertake new xylographic editions. To give only one example, the National Library has almost finished a new xylographic edition of the Complete Works of Padma dkar po (1527-1594), one of the most venerated monk-scholars of the Drukpa School of Mahayana Buddhism. This edition in eleven volumes comprises nearly eight thousand blocks.

Preparation of card catalogues of the collection begun in 1984 and is progressing steadily but slowly. It is due to the shortage of trained staff on one hand and to the peculiar and complex character of our national traditional literature on the other hand. Bhutanese and Tibetan authors are often known by their title or some other descriptive name, so it is necessary to make added entries under the name commonly used. Another complicating factor is that in the Bhutanese and Tibetan literature, the title by which a particular work is commo-

only known may be quite different from the title which is written on the title page of the book. Consequently a long preparatory research and a thorough knowledge of the literature are required in order to provide the necessary added entries for author and title.

Until now there had been no satisfactory subject classification system for Bhutanese and Tibetan literature. Taking into consideration other systems used for the literature in other languages, the National Library in collaboration with scholars both national and foreign, is working out a system which will be most suitable for our national literature which is predominantly religious.

The National Library is trying to collect not only ancient and old materials of the past but also current national publications which are increasing substantially. However, as there is at present no legal deposit system in Bhutan, the coverage is relatively low. We intend to introduce in near future an appropriate measure by law or under other arrangement, in order to overcome this shortcoming and compile and publish annually the national bibliography. For the time being, the National Library, in collaboration with the Antiques Preservation Department, is undertaking a survey of the national literary heritage of the past and compilation of a bibliography thereof.

## (2) Microfilming

Under the UNDP sponsored project, the National Library acquired a full set of the microfilming equipment (camera, auto-processor, microfilm-fiche readers and reader-printer). The objective of this project is to microfilm for preservation old and rare books, archives and documents which form a part of the national cultural and religious heritage. Under the actual circumstances, it is not feasible or appropriate to acquire and store all relevant materials centrally in the National Library and the most effective and appropriate measure to preserve them for posterity is to microfilm them. Until now, about 125 reels (78,789 exposures) of microfilm have been taken.

Further the installation of the microfilming system in the National Library shall enable Bhutan to collaborate with other countries in the exchange and resource sharing programme of library materials. The National Library shall also be able to acquire and utilize in the form of microfilm and microfiche materials which are of historical and cultural interest but are not yet available in the country. A large number of historical



materials and texts which Bhutan holds are on the contrary unknown outside the country and such titles can be also microfilmed and exchange with co-operating institutions abroad.

### (3) Publication

A particular emphasis is put on the publication (by offset, movable type, metal block or xylography). In fact among the rich collection already accumulated in the National Library, there are many texts of extreme importance but of difficult access because of their rarity. This is why the National Library started the publication of most important and needed titles for the promotion of culture and religion which is vital in this particular period of social and cultural transition in our country. The main works already published include the following.

—The Seven Treasures (*Mdzod bdun*) of Klong chen Rab 'byam pa (1308-1368).

The most important writing of the great scholar of the Rnying ma pa School of Mahayana Buddhism. By metal-blocks.

—The Complete Works of Padma dkar po.

As stated previously, this eleven-volume work has been printed in the traditional way, using wood-blocks newly carved in Bhutan and India.

—The Large Sutra of Perfection of Wisdom ('*Bum*).

This twelve-volume work was reproduced in Delhi by offset, from the Lhasa xylographic edition.

Some of the books published are printed on Bhutanese handmade paper. This paper is extremely durable and texts printed on it will last 200-300 years with normal use, while those printed on modern paper might last only few years before the leaves begin to disintegrate from frequent handling.

### (4) Research

Last but not least is the research. To give only one example, the Director has been engaged since almost a decade in the compilation of the History of Bhutan. After a careful and meticulous examination and confrontation of all the available materials both national and foreign, the compilation is now in its final stage. It will be published both in Choekey (classical religious language) and English.

# The Indian National Library

**Prof. Ashin Das Gupta**

*Director, National Library, Calcutta*

The Indian National Library traces its ancestry back to the Calcutta Public Library which was founded in 1836. This ancestor of the Library being public library for the Calcuttans bought light reading but being run by highly placed and serious-minded people, it also built up an important collection of research material. In 1903 Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, merged the collection of the Calcutta Public Library with that of the Imperial Secretariat Library to establish the Imperial Library. What he said at the time has been the guiding factor in the Library's collection building. In his words, "The general idea of the whole Library is that it would contain all the books that have been written about India in popular tongues with such additions as are required to make it a good all-round library of standard works of reference." The Imperial Library consistently followed this policy of acquisition and as we shall see later, tried to utilise the Copyright Act of 1867, although fruitlessly, to build up an Indian collection.

The Imperial Library by an Act of Parliament became the National Library in 1948 and the Constitution of India at its Commencement (1950) declared the National Library as an institution of national importance. There is no further legislative underpinning for this Library, but as I shall try to indicate, there are a number of legislative enactments with which the Library is now concerned in building up its collection. But the collection building of the Indian National Library based basically upon the central idea of Lord Curzon was reformulated in independent India to include books and journals on India in any language published any where in the world. Further, the Library acquires books by Indian authors published abroad and all standard books on African and Asian countries. Besides, there is an emphasis on India's immediate neighbours and on the acquisition of all Indian material retrospectively wherever they may be found in the repositories of the world. Needless to say, this emphasis of the Indian National Library that it intends to be the largest

reference library of Indian material is supplemented by its collection of standard general reference works in the humanities and social sciences. You will recall that we have an ancestry in the Calcutta Public Library and to a limited extent the Indian National Library still carries its public library functions.

This collection which we have inherited and which has now passed the two million mark and which we are developing as basically a collection on India is to be importantly supplemented by material of Indian interests in countries outside India as also the literature of India's neighbouring countries. It is very important to understand that books in languages which in India are Indian languages are regularly produced in several countries outside India. We wish to acquire, for example, everything that is published in Bengali in Bangladesh, everything that is published in Urdu in Pakistan and everything that is published in Tamil in Malaysia and Sri Lanka or for that matter in Fiji. This is an integral part of the collection development programme of the Indian National Library and would call for a careful sharing of resources amongst several countries in India's neighbourhood and also in the general area which we represent. I would add to this that a large amount of material in the shape of Sanskrit manuscripts, Buddhist scriptures or the Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in non-Indian language; lies scattered in the repositories of our neighbouring countries. It is very much a part of the National Library's effort to obtain what copies we may of such material and collect them in the Indian National Library. I need hardly add that India remains interested in the official documentation of its neighbours in South Asia and in South-East Asia and would like to acquire selectively both in this field as well as in the field of humanities and social sciences in these countries.

As I said earlier the Indian National Library has no legal enactments behind it other than the Act which changed the name of the Imperial Library into that of National Library and the mention made of it as an institution of national importance in the Constitution of India. It functions as of now as an integral part of the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Human Resources of the Government of India and it is totally funded by that government. Under the Delivery of Books Act, 1954, the National Library receives one copy of each publication produced in India and publishers are required to send one copy each to the Connemara Public Library in Madras, the Central Library, Bombay,

and the Delhi Public Library. Books received under the Act at the National Library are made over in the first instance to the Central Reference Library, a sister organization, based at the National Library premises, for the purpose of producing the Indian National Bibliography, before they are made available at the Library.

There are two other legal enactments through which such delivery of books is made in India. There is the old Press and Registration Act of 1867 and there is the Copyright Act of 1957. The old act was brought in partly as a police measure by the then British administration to keep an eye on what was being printed in India. The printers are obliged under this Act to supply one or more copies of everything they print to the registration authority designated by each Indian state. These states are the successors of the British Indian provinces. But earlier the British Indian Government had delivered one copy of each Indian book to the British Museum and another to the India Office Library in London as well. The Imperial Library, especially when Mr. Chapman was the librarian in 1914, brought up the question whether the Imperial Library should receive a copy of each Indian publication under the Act of 1867 along with the two British Libraries and the provinces. It is interesting to reflect that Chapman at that distant date already envisaged the establishment of four Indian copyright libraries and he said that no book under the Act should go out of the country. But none of that happened at the time and the result was that apart from its police function, the Act deposited copies of Indian books throughout the period 1867 to 1947 in British libraries while the Imperial Library bought what it could. This Act is now used by the Governments of the Indian states for their local library networks. The copyright act, on the other hand, is very little used. Authors may under the Act deposit a copy of their book with the Registrar of copyrights and claim copyright in it. But this is not compulsory and in any event an author automatically has copyright in his book if not parted with deliberately.

The three legislative enactments, the Press Act of 1867, the Delivery of Books Act, 1954, and the Copyright Act of 1957, are to some extent overlapping and together they produce a strain upon the publishing industry. These are therefore under review at the moment and may be suitably altered to support the Indian library system without being unfair to printers, authors and publishers. Major attention in this context is given to the Delivery

of Books Act as that supplies the books for preservation of the Indian Cultural heritage. The Indian National Bibliography is also dependent upon the receipts under this Act. The limitations discovered in the working of this measure so far therefore merit our serious scrutiny.

The principal problem with the Act is that it is impossible to say what percentage of books actually published in India in a year is in fact being delivered to the National Library because of this legal compulsion. Since no reliable figures for national book production are obtainable, even the most scaring estimate of the pessimist cannot be contested. We are all aware that the Indian National Bibliography misses a certain part of the annual outturn but we do not know how much that is. The National Library has so far relied exclusively on the statistics of receipts under the Act but is now engaged in setting up a Monitoring Cell for National Book Production involving a large cross section of libraries government agencies and the publishing industry.

Even then not much hope of approximating closely to the actual figure can be entertained. This is because the sector which can be effectively approached is that of metropolitan and official publishing which in any case, is responding well already. The publishing done in small country towns, books brought out by the authors themselves away from any organized publishing network and ephemeral publications are the hardest to locate. Indian society is not as well organized and unitary as most countries in the west and one of the penalties of this somewhat realxed existence may be a long slow climb to any kind of national statistics, more prominently statistics about the nation's books.

Efforts at improvement include specially steps to ease the pressure upon the publishers and make such deliveries appear in their own interest. Among measures recommended for the consideration of the Government of India is that of freeing the publishers from paying postage on such deliveries to the National Library. I understand that owing to restrictions of international postal conventions, postage in such cases cannot be waived, but arrangements can be made for postage on receipt at the receiving end. The burden upon the publisher may also be lessened by decreasing the number of copies to be delivered which can be done by rationalizing the structure of the three acts and also by sharing the task of preserving the national heritage among the four recipient libraries under the Act. The Government of India have also recently appointed an agency for the allotment of ISBN to Indian books. It may take

some time but once the benefit of it is grasped by the industry one more useful source of book-statistics will have been discovered.

The Indian National Bibliography which with a few gaps, has been published continuously since 1958, suffers from the limitations of legal deposit. The task of this bibliography is further complicated by the fact that it lists books in fourteen major Indian languages and the controversy whether it is better to have a high-priced romanized version centrally produced, or language bibliographies produced in the area concerned and easily available to the Indian user, is still unresolved. The compromise that the Central Reference Library now attempts to work is that language bibliographies will be produced along with the Roman version and when the area concerned lags behind the Central Reference Library itself will have to step in. That Library has also now broken free of the Government presses which found this complicated production unattractive and is relying on its own photo-offset machine to compose the text for printing. The bibliography is now a monthly and the early months of 1985 are already available.

The bibliography is yet to be computerized and I understand that efforts are actively being made for a multi-lingual system. Very recently the Computer Maintenance Corporation has announced the commissioning of a three-language micro-processor which will store information in English and any two Indian languages. The I.N.B. will also be examining keenly any proposed software to see whether the transliteration is adequate and I believe is now of the opinion that no adequate system exists to take care of the kind and quantity of lettering it wants.

It seems to me that we shall be going over to a computerized bibliography of the Indian language books with some known imperfections but hopefully in a manner that the imperfection can be gradually worked off. The central anxiety at the moment is that the different libraries and other organizations, all anxious to computerize their holdings as soon as possible, may not opt for mutually incompatible systems.

Before I elaborate further the importance of this point, let me explain that the Indian National Library is undertaking a project for a National Union Catalogue of library materials in humanities and social sciences

during the seventh plan period and hopes to cover the major libraries in at least some of the subjects concerned by the end of the plan. Along with the current National Bibliography, this retrospective catalogue will also be fed into the computer. And we are working towards the day when we shall be able to say whether a book is available or not in Indian libraries by searching in a central facility. It is critical for any such project that mutual compatibility of computer systems exists as between the libraries participating in an eventual indonet.

While such bibliographical exercises and the modernization process occupy much of the Library's attention its central pre-occupation continues to be with the problem of preservation. The battle for saving the printed word in tropical and semi-tropical climes is one which many of us are waging unceasingly. In a country like India the dimensions of this problem is immense and we have lost half-a-century or so already in the race. Advanced methods of preservation, storage and retrieval, as developed say in the United States, exercise a natural fascination for librarians in countries like ours. For many of us however the immediate problem is one of elementary preservation from dust and heat. At a repository like the National Library such an effort can be made with some assurance of eventual success, but much of the Indian heritage is crumbling to dust in little-known collections and uncared-for offices. In that connection the programme of an organization like the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage should certainly be mentioned. The INTACH does not act on its own but through established entities like the National Library which it assists in furthering plans for preservation. The Library at the moment is concerting programmes with INTACH for a wide ranging micro-filming of material relating to the history of the city of Calcutta in repositories like the library and record office of the Calcutta High Court, the Calcutta Corporation and the Calcutta Port Trust. Needless to say that rare books in the collections of smaller but historical libraries will also form part of the same collecting drive.

I suspect that as this drive for preservation gathers momentum the scope of the National Union Catalogue will expand faster than we think and a considerable measure of flexibility will have to be built into it. This suspicion brings me eventually to the point that I wished above all to make to you, and I shall indeed be happy

if you give it serious thought. There are, obviously many imperfections in the Indian bibliographical effort and we have a long way to go before we can offer you a computerized and up-to-date bibliography of the Indian holdings. But from what I have said you will appreciate that serious efforts are being made to that end. You will also have noticed that Indian interest do not stop at Indian frontiers just as your libraries also reach out to us. There is a strong case for pulling some of our efforts together. For one thing the Indian National Bibliography can, with your support, expand into a Bibliography for South Asia. This will not mean that the Indian National Bibliography will cease to exist; it only means that there will be a larger version incorporating data from the larger region. Equally, this will not mean the cessation of any other national bibliography of the area only that there will be a version where the corporate effort will gather the bibliographies under one format.

This, I believe, can only be done under the aegis of an organization like the UNESCO and with the collaboration of the national committees concerned. But this meeting may well do some of the groundwork necessary for that purpose. We shall obviously need a Committee for South Asian Bibliography and it will have to explore the specific problems which may arise and the possibilities of sharing this and other resources through a central computer facility. We may begin modestly and with only a few concrete items in terms of a regional bibliography but the possibilities of such a co-operative effort are immense.

This kind of working together may solve a problem which all of us face in some degree or other. Ever since I took up my responsibilities at the National Library in Calcutta, I have been depressed to discover how difficult it is to contact our neighbours and with what relative ease one can reach across to the western world. The channels of book trade, to mention only the most obvious thing, are so arranged that Calcutta finds it difficult to buy books published in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, obtaining them much of the time through London. The cultural exchange programmes as between the neighbours are woefully underdeveloped. India finds it easier to contact Burma via Australia and similarly Indonesian book-lists are best obtained for us in Canberra. Everyone will acknowledge in this context the important work done by the American Library of Congress in circulating Bibliographical information of our region. If we start with a simple bibliographical project. It may be that we shall be able to open broader channels of communication.

This brings me to the last thing I wish you to consider. There are a large number of items in the repositories of each of our countries which others may wish to copy and preserve. I have already spoken of Sanskrit texts and Buddhist scriptures India will be keen to collect. The cooperative effort I have in mind may also help us locate such items and facilitate their duplication. This of course, may not be covered by the normal run of current and retrospective bibliographies but a wider attempt to cover manuscripts and art objects may well grow out of it. What I am suggesting is a modest and a concrete beginning but a beginning with wider hopes.

# Diffusion of Knowledge in the Maldives

## An Historical Overview

Mr. Hassan Ahmed Maniku

Aristotle once said: "Speech is the representation of the experiences of the mind, and writing is the representation of speech." To this, if we had a right to add, we may add: "Reading is the reception of the experiences so represented, without having to experiment them personally." But the definition of reading given to us by modern scientists is a little different from this. It is the ability of student "in identifying and recognising printed or written symbols that stimulate the recall of familiar concepts."<sup>1</sup>

Maldives being a society that live on the myriad of islands in the centre of the Indian Ocean devised ways of passing on the experiences gained from one generation to the next and beyond, in the same familiar way that the rest of the world did by writing, done by the senior generation and by reading, done by the junior generation in this very unique island-culture of ours the means of communicating with each other were limited. Our highways were the seas, which were not always calm and safe. Our beat of the drum did not reach very far, if the winds were not very helpful. Our conch-shell could only be heard within the confines of the small Island circle only. But the written word, though scribbled on the coconut leaf reached its destination unaltered and conveyed what was to be conveyed far more efficiently than all other methods, even long after the writer has passed away. Therefore writing that word at the forwarding point and reading that message at the receiving end became something the society had to accept as an indispensability.

The very fact that Dhivehi has a script proves that the language was written and read. We know from artefacts unearthed in various parts of the country which have inscriptions on them that the language had a written form from very ancient times. Though some of these have already been read by linguists they are yet to be investigated by archaeologists. The late

H. C. P. Bell was one of the first to work on a scientific basis in this "absolutely unworked field" when he came on the archaeological expedition in 1922.<sup>2</sup> The oldest writing yet deciphered is the Isdhoo Loamaafaanu dating to the year 1194 AD. Though a language spoken by comparatively few in number, Dhivehi has a written history with its own palaeography and grammar. At this stage we may note that Dhivehi writing has had three distinctive periods and forms. The earliest is called EVEYLAA script. This is the earliest we know of and the time when its use began is obscure to us. The script used in Isdhoo Loamaafaanu is EVEYLAA. Then came the alphabet of the middle period which is called DHIVES script, which was an adaptation from the earlier one. The earliest known writing in DHIVES script is Bodu Galu Miskithu Loamaafaanu which was written in 1356-57 AD.<sup>3</sup> DHIVES script gave way to the modern script called THAANA, which unlike the two preceding ones was written from right to left. The earliest known THAANA script that we know of is on the door post of a mosque on the island of Keditheemu in Shaviyani Atoll.<sup>3</sup> The date given here is 1008 AH (which correspond to 1599 AD). The following remark is sufficient to establish the antiquity and independence of Dhivehi as a language. "While the orthography, grammar and syntax the document (i.e. Isdhoo Loamaafaanu) agrees with old Sinhalese, the vocabulary is of a more heterogenous nature. A large majority of words could be traced to Sinhalese, or their Sinhalese equivalents could be found. In the *birudha* portion, and also scattered in the document are many Sanskrit words too. Then there is a large number of words which can be considered as confined to Dhivehi or used in particular Dhivehi meanings (e.g. athelhu, athpathpaagu, dragadu, varuvaa, maavaruvaa, mudhalu, beesvai and so forth). Some Sanskrit words are also used in meanings peculiar to Dhivehi (e.g. dheyvathain, dharma, veera, samsaara). In addition, there is a good number of words of Arabic (and some Persian) origin especially in the expression of religious concepts and practices (e.g. sheriaathu, shadhiaa, shadhath, sunnath mumbaru, dhunie, kiaamath, ramadhaan, masdhidu and so forth).<sup>4</sup> The late Professor D. E. Hettiarachchi says "Regarding Maldivian, judging from the specimens preserved to us, there seem to be several strata in the language because in Maldivian most of the words belong to the new Indo-Aryan phase. Thus, judging from the linguistic evidence you (i.e. the Maldivians) seem to have preserved some old strata. Most of the Maldivian, unless you come across newer inscriptions in your writing, all belong to the new Indo-Aryan

stage.”<sup>5</sup>) The fact that Dhivehi had a writing system that closely resembled contemporary Sinhala of the twelfth century does little to make Dhivehi an off-shoot of Sinhala. As Dr. M. W. Sugathapala de Silva of University of York says “It should not be forgotten, however, that the Sinhalese script of the tenth century was a mixture of Sinhalese Brahmi and Pallava Grantha both of which belong to the southern branch of the Brahmi writing system. This, in fact, is the explanation for the greater resemblance there is between Sinhalese and South Indian scripts than between the Sinhalese script and the scripts in North India. If, on account of this relationship, one assumes a South Indian orientation in both Sinhalese and Maldivian scripts, the Sinhalese origin hypothesis does not need to be accepted unchallenged. In this case, it may be conjectured, as an alternative, that the earliest available Maldivian script was a direct descendant of the Southern script.”<sup>6</sup> As to the efficiency of THAANA as a writing system we have Dr. M. W. Sugathapala de Silva again: “Thana presents us with perhaps the most scientific alphabet in South Asia.”<sup>7</sup>

Linguistic evidence is still preserved in Dhivehi to show that Buddhism along with its places of learning and highly developed philosophy existed in the Maldives in very early times. Isdhoo Loamaafaanu refers to the destruction of “the monastery erected previously on Isdhoo by the infidel kings, uprooted the image and destroyed it and having brought the ordained priests of the community of monks belonging to this monastery all together to Male’ and beheaded them.”<sup>8</sup> Still we have words like VEYRU (for vihaara, the houses presented to the Buddha for the use of the Sangha; or Buddhist retreat or monastery), HAVITHTHA, HA-ITHA and HAIY-THELI (for Chaitya, tumulus raised over the dead or the rock-hewn temples), USTHUBU (for Stupa, burial mound of earth, later cased in brick, containing the ashes or relics of an important person), and DHAAGABA (for Dagaba, relic cavity), preserved in the language as names for archaeological sites.

At no time of our history Maldives faced an uncertainty over the language of the country, either vernacular or official. There never was a segment of the Maldivian society which spoke a different tongue or did not accept the Dhivehi language as their own language. In fact, Dhivehi has all along been a binding force that held the Maldivian people as an integral nation.

Efforts to keep the torch of learning alight has always received due place in the Maldivian society. It has always been one of the prime concerns of the kings and queens who ruled the Maldives from the earliest times. There were a few extraordinary rulers who made teaching and spread of knowledge one of their main aims. Notable among them were Sultan Ghazi Muhammed Thakurufaanu (1573–1585 AD). When he started his brilliant reign, there were but few men of learning. “There chanced to return to Male’ from Hadramut (Yemen) Shaikh Muhammed Jamaluddin, a Maldivian who had acquired his learning in the time of Sultan Hassan Shirazi VIII (1528–1549 AD). This Shaikh was received by the Sultan with greater honours than ever before showered on any learned Maldivian. The Shaikh, being a recluse, was unwilling to remain at Male’, caring neither for riches nor to mix with the world. He obtained permission to retire to Vadho Island (Huvadhoo Atoll) : where he died full of years and honour, leaving many pupils by whom the faith of Islam was greatly spread.”<sup>9</sup> Though none of his written works are extant, the Maldives can be proud of the number of luminaries that lighted our skies under his guidance. Almost all the great scholars after him trace their line of learning to him. Next we have Sultan Ibrahim Iskandhar I (1848–1887 AD), to whom goes the credit of setting up the first formal institute of teaching in the Maldives. “The Sultan went to Hajj in the twentieth year of his reign, 1087. AH (1667–68 AD). On his return he erected the Dorori (Portico) to the Hukuru Miskiy, and allotted salary to Masters for teaching children the Quran, & c.”<sup>10</sup> Sultan Muhammed Muhiuddin al-Adhil (1691–1692 AD), though ruled for a very brief period, was one of the rulers who spread learning among the Maldivians. “He was greatly attached to religion and learning. Shaikh Hassan Thajuddin was promptly recalled from exile, and a residence, with an allowance of 50 Lari (silver) a month, given to him. Thereafter many important religious and civil ordinances were promulgated by the Sultan.”<sup>11</sup> He established the tradition of a public admonition on the sixth day of the month of Rajab on all aspects of good behaviour and observance of the right. This continued until very recent times.

Lieuts. Young and Christopher who visited as surveyors and spent sometime in the Maldives wrote: “Children of both sexes are required to read the Quran through under the tuition of priests of the inferior order; and their lesson is begun very early at three years of age.”<sup>11</sup>

Coming to more modern times note must be taken of the services rendered to education in general and Maldivian literature in particular by the late Mr. Amin Didi. He ushered in a period of change in every aspect of Maldivian life. This resulted in a rekindling of the dormant nationalism. Though the prime teaching institution of Majeedhiyya School was founded in 1927, while Mr. Amin Didi was still a student abroad, it was he who gave it the dynamic force which elevated it to the status which it enjoy today. He also was responsible for promoting the education of girls in the Maldives.

Great writers, poets and orators we had many at all times. They all helped in their own way to give us the knowledge and awakening that we enjoy today. In the field of Dhivehi literature figures like Edudhuru Umar Maafaiy Thakurufaanu, Huraa Maaradha Kaleygefaanu, Badeyri Hassan Manikufaanu, Shaikh Muhammed Jamaaludhdheen (Najbu Thuththu), Huiy Ali Didi, Shaikh Hussain Salahudhdheen, Shaikh Hussain Afeefudhdheen, Shaikh Abdullah Jalaaludhdheen, the Late Mr. Ahmed Kaamil Didi, Shaikh Ibrahim Rushdhee, shaikh Malim Moosa Kaleyfaanu, the Late Mr. Muhammed Ismail Didi, Shaikh Muahmed Jameel and the Late Mr. Ibrahim Shihaab must be remembered for their extensive contributions.

The printing press, though introduced to the Maldives in more recent times played a key role in the dissemination knowledge. The first printing in the Maldives was not done in Male, but on Meedhoo island in Addu. That press was wholly owned and operated by the late Ibrahim Baha-udhdheen (popularly called Fadiyaaru Thakurufaanuge Dhon Maniku). The first printing was done in the year 1891.<sup>12</sup> He died on on 4 July 1932 in Addu Atoll Meedhoo. First printing in Male was done at Mathba'athuth Ameeriyya, using the same machinery that were used at Meedhoo, and which were endowed by their original owner. We do not know the exact date of that first printing. But in my possession there are some pieces of beautiful Arabic calligraphy done by the late Mr. Adam Ahmed Naseer Maniku dated Jumadhil Aakhira 1345 AH (which correspond to December 1926-January 1927), which were printed at this press.

Then came the establishment of a Maldivian Government Press. As the Government Press the first material printed was the newly proclaimed constitution of the Maldives. This first written constitution was promulgated in the Maldives on 22 December 1932. The end

of the Government Press came on 8 December 1970, when its name was Printing Division under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Since then printing in the Maldives has remained mainly in private hands. As a private enterprise the most successful has been Novelty Press.

Looking briefly at the history of journalism in the Maldives, we have little to be proud of. In its history, journalism in the Maldives has not yet passed its formative period. We still have not established for ourselves a clear identity of our own and a philosophy for our journalism. Though well over half a century has passed since the first printed journal appeared, we still have not been able to make a firm stand with a commitment to the readers upholding the principles of objectivity and impartiality. If an unbiased research is under taken among the readers, this could be one reason why they dismiss our journalistic reporting as being not serious. Another very relevant question that we may ask here is "Are we dwelling on the quality of sensation in our reporting?" All over the world press thrives to a great extent on reporting sensation-malicious or gracious.

Libraries play an important role in promoting the habit of reading and diffusing knowledge. Our library (The National Library of Maldives) though comparatively small has seen better days than this and enjoyed a more patrician membership. But it is heartening to see more and more of the younger generation among our membes. Our library was founded on 12 July 1945. Since then it has been continuously engaged in promoting the reading habit sometimes under extremely difficult conditions. We could claim for ourselves the proud title of being the national library, as we are the oldest and most universal institution of its kind in the Maldives.

Maldives has been a country with a very high literacy rate, even from very old times. Admonishing the population to learn was something done frequently by the government. Facilities existed even on the remotest island to learn the language, read the Quran and acquire a knowledge in the rudiments of Islam. The following table gives us a good picture of this:

Literacy rate in the Maldives :<sup>13</sup>

Year	%	Year	%
1921	49.0	1982	83.9
1931	60.7	1983	86.6
1974	63.6	1986	93.2
1977	70.5		



Compared with regional countries, the Maldivians are not on the lower rungs of the ladder. The following figures illustrate this :

Adult literacy rate (1985 estimates):<sup>14</sup>

Country	%
Afghanistan:	.. 23.7
Bangladesh:	.. 33.1
India:	.. 43.5
Indonesia:	.. 74.1
Malaysia:	.. 73.
Nepal:	.. 25.6
Pakistan:	.. 29.6
Philippines:	.. 85.7
Singapore:	.. 86.1
Sri Lanka:	.. 87.1
Thailand:	.. 91.0

The high literacy rate is ample evidence that the Maldives had a reading public even in the days past. Another phenomenon, noticeable in the Maldives is the very high female literacy rate. Taking just a few years this point is shown :

Female literacy in the Maldives:

Year	Male	Female
1911	.. 46.8	.. 44.0 <sup>(15)</sup>
1921	.. 53.0	.. 45.0 <sup>(16)</sup>
1931	.. 64.0	.. 57.0 <sup>(16)</sup>
1977	.. 70.3	.. 70.8

In the Maldives learning was not confined to any particular island or region. But it seems the two southern-most atolls had a preponderance in numbers of learned men that they could claim as their own. There are many reasons for this, the chief among them being the sedentary and non-migratory ways of their lives, as a result of their being more dependent on the land and were quite self-sufficient economically. It is also likely that they had contacts with the outside

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world—most probably with south east Asia—independent of the rest of the country through yet an unknown trade route used by sea-farers in crossing the Indian Ocean at a point further south. This may have produced an atmosphere more conducive to learning and teaching.

It becomes our duty, as worthy descendants of deserving forefathers to uphold the torch of learning that they handed down ablaze. If we are to do this in the tradition that our ancestors did, it becomes our task to be more vigilant and cautious. Our microcosmic culture is threatened from every side. We must devise and enforce means of protecting it. Let me suggest just a few of many things that come at random to my mind:

- (a) Make more reading material available.
- (b) Make libraries or reading rooms more accessible to the public by having more of it all over the country.
- (c) Stress the importance of reading as supplementary to presentations on radio and TV.
- (d) Inculcate the habit of reading in the young by giving them more interesting reading material relevant to their culture and environment, especially picture books.
- (e) Provide real incentives to those engaged in producing all types of books and other reading material.
- (f) Production of the small quantities of material required by our libraries and the general public may be an economic disadvantage in this world of mass production. But this could be buffered by making the requirements of the printer less expensive.
- (g) Attack at the very foundation of illiteracy and through this establish the habit of reading. This must come through the spread of universal primary education.

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# National Library Services in Nepal

**Mr. Madhusudan Sharma Subedi**

*Chairman, National Library of Nepal.*

## Introduction

Nepal is a sovereign independent land-locked Himalayan kingdom where hill area covers 83% of the total land. Only 17% of the land in the terrain is cultivable. Despite this fact, agriculture has been predominantly the occupation of 93% of the population. Similarly Nepal has at present more than 70% illiterate people, which is in itself a handicap to the pace of development. To remove this shortcoming, HMG is endeavouring to provide free education and text books up to primary level. But schools alone do not provide broad knowledge, library also plays a vital role in this direction.

Keeping in view this fact and the growing favourable trends in the field of education the then government of Nepal with its limited resources established a library of national level in 1955 after buying the personal collection of Pt. Hem Raj Pandey.

The collections then consisted of thirty-four thousand books in eleven different languages. At present this library has a collection of 75 thousand publications on different subjects and languages.

This library has been housed at Harihar Bhawan. The present house is not easily accessible and there is no more space to be had when the library grows and expands. The Government realises this problem and is in need of a separate building at a suitable site. The library is, so far busy in its preliminary works of accessioning its initial, stock organizing the stock and other functions. It has limited trained staff, modern equipment and facilities. It's a matter of satisfaction to us to be able to possess a National Library in Nepal. The purpose behind the establishment of this library is to facilitate government officials, planners, social scientists and people in general the various research papers and

other latest publications in their respective core. But this library was a reference library of planners and government officials until 1962. It was not providing service to the general people. Thus its very purpose was defeated. However it was opened to the general public from 1962 only.

## Mode of Collection

Now, I would like to inform you in brief the procedure aspect of our library. The National Library of Nepal is going to acquire the privilege of copyright. Under this privilege, the National Library will receive two copies of any reading material published for the general public in any part of the country. One copy will be for reserve collection and the other for the readers to use. This system of sending new publications is already in practice even without the privilege of copyright. In fact the National Library is regarded as the proper place for the deposition of all publications of the government. Beside this, it also collects copies of every material published in foreign countries on Nepal. The library also collects foreign books of national importance on different subjects. In this way the National Library has both the collections of national and foreign literature. But we have to learn more from this distinguished gathering regarding other modes of collection.

## Bibliography

As the bibliography has a greater importance to the readers as well as other patrons in respect of his publications of the country, fresh initiations have to be undertaken in the publication of bibliography. The bibliography to be published as such would be considered to be a valuable reference tool to libraries at home and abroad. But we have certain constraints in introducing this project. Lack of professionally trained manpower is one of them in addition to financial hindrances.

## International Loan

Again, planners, social scientists and research workers in Nepal want to consult different publications of their relative field. The National Library cannot afford to have them all due to various reasons. At the same time national interest demands that the spirit of such workers should not be frustrated. Here arises the question of establishing a healthy system of international loan and borrowing. Publication of bibliography by each nation and regular circulation abroad helps a lot in this direction. And the National Library is the only

appropriate body to handle this business. As inter-library loan and borrowing is essential its terms and conditions must be decided to which not only the quick service but also the security of the publication is insured.

### **International Exchange**

There is a growing tendency among nations to have their publications mutually exchanged. The proper agency for this is the National Library. The library must obtain a number of government publications for exchange purposes. The reciprocal exchange of official publications with the publication of foreign countries and international bodies will greatly help to acquire foreign publications on different subjects UNESCO has been doing useful services in this direction.

### **Service to the Legislative Body and others**

The National Library should act as a central source of information to the government. For this the library should be in a position to provide most up to date information and meet reference needs to the intellectuals honourable members of the legislative body and planning commission. Under the able leadership of His Majesty

the King, National Library of Nepal is progressing to that level of efficiency. Yet we need a lot of guidance and help from UNESCO and other friendly countries.

### **Staffing Problem**

For the effective and efficient operation of the library both professional and non professional staff are needed. They should be headed by the persons of profound professional knowledge. At present the library does not have adequate trained hands. To have additional trained hands governments of this region and UNESCO should offer more scholarships to our young graduates and medium level manpower in the field of library science. The library too, when it gets qualified persons in its staff, should conduct a regular refresher course for the lower level and medium level manpower available both within and outside the government.

The National Library needs physical facilities as well for its proper functioning. HMG alone is not in a position to provide grants to the National Library for this purpose. We urge that UNESCO and the friendly countries help Nepal as far as possible. I hope UNESCO members, host country and distinguished delegates will give serious consideration in this direction.

# Education and Manpower Development in Pakistan

Mr. A. H. Akhtar

*Director, National Library of Pakistan*

## Background

Pakistan emerged on the map of the world as an independent sovereign state in August, 1947 as a result of the division of the British Indian Empire. With an area of 307,374 sq. miles, Pakistan has a population of nearly 93 million (1984) estimates out of which 27% are literates. The land of Pakistan is rich in cultural traditions. Half a dozen civilizations have flourished here and left their marks. Historically, this is one of the most ancient lands known to man. The history of territories now constituting Pakistan can be traced back to at least 2500 years before Christ, when a highly developed civilization flourished in the Indus Valley areas. The people of Pakistan are culturally homogeneous being mostly Muslims. While Urdu, the national language, is spoken throughout the country, English is extensively used in official and commercial circles and in the cities. The other Pakistani languages are Sindhi, Punjabi, Pushto, Baluchi, Saraiki, etc. Roughly 2500 titles are printed and published every year.

## Library Environment

Great civilizations owe much of their present status to books and libraries; for it is almost impossible to separate civilization and culture from literary heritage, preservation of which necessitates the existence of libraries. Pakistan's long history and ancient civilization too, implies the presence of books, writings and libraries in the background. The love for books among the people of this country can be traced back as far as the 6th Century A.D. when paper was used in Gilgit and other Northern areas. Likewise the library idea here had its roots long ago in the clay seals of Mohenjodaro (2500-1500 B.C.) and in the form of inscriptions on stone pillars and rocks excavated at many places in the country.

Scholarship, books and librarianship are closely interrelated. Islam with its firm commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual development have a natural affinity to books and libraries. Throughout the Muslim rule, the academic, literary and research activities were patronized by the Government and great libraries boomed everywhere. The management and organization of these libraries during the Moghul period attained very high standards. The libraries were noted for their fine buildings, furniture, book stocks, organization and services. Librarians were held in high esteem in the society. Unfortunately, the treasures accumulated over a period of nearly one thousand years are no more available in our existing libraries and we now only read about these libraries through accounts written by historians or in the memoirs of those who were lucky enough to use them. During the British rule, new patterns found place in all walks of life, including education. A number of educational institutions, learned societies and libraries were established during this period. In this setting, the library development in Pakistan took place simultaneously with the progress of education. The libraries established in the process of the educational reforms in British India are still today the leading libraries in the country. Among them are the Punjab Public Library (1884) and Punjab University Library (1908).

The post-war period has brought in its wake tremendous changes and developments in almost all countries of the world. A number of countries have achieved independence and democratic institutions have been established. The people of these countries have a great desire to improve their social and economic conditions through quality education and research. To achieve this objective the need for better library service has been recognized in these countries. The recognition of the important role of books and libraries in national development has resulted in the establishment and expansion of various kinds of libraries. In Pakistan too, a number of libraries have been established and currently, there are over 1,100 libraries of all kinds. Efforts are also being made to establish a nation-wide public library system at all levels.

## Library Education

The education of librarianship during Islamic era, like other arts and sciences was experimental and traditional that is to say one learned it at work. Knowledge was transferred from generation to generation: from the old to the young, from fathers to sons and

from masters to apprentices. The early librarians were intellectuals and scholars of repute whose main job was the preservation of available records. The post-war developments have also left an impact on the philosophy of librarianship. The traditional methods of training through personal contacts, in-service training and apprenticeship, etc., have been replaced by systematic instruction in the theories and methods of librarianship. It was in 1915 that the first university-based library course in the whole of the then British Empire was started at the University of the Punjab at Lahore. Also called the First Library School of the East, this school was started by no less a person than the librarian of the University of Pennsylvania. Asa Don Dickinson. A certificate course in Library Science of four months duration was instituted for working librarians, both graduates and under-graduates, and its curriculum including Cataloguing, Classification, Bibliography Book Selection, Library Administration, and viva voce. From 1928 this course was restricted to graduates. The course, however, did not survive and the school came to close in 1947. Thus when Pakistan came into being on August 14, 1947, there was no library school in existence. In 1950, however, the Punjab Library School was revived and the course was granted the graduate status in 1956. In 1956, a post-graduate Diploma Course in Library Science was instituted at the University of Karachi. From 1962, it was raised to a two-year programme leading to M.A. in Library Science. In 1967, a Ph.D. programme in library science was also started at the Karachi University.

The establishment of the Library School at Karachi University made a tremendous impact on library development in the country. As a result, the Pakistan Library Association came into being and a number of schools of librarianship were started on other university campuses. At present postgraduate library science courses of one and two years duration leading to the award of Diploma in Library Science and M.A. in Library Science are being run by the six universities, namely, Karachi, Punjab, Sind, Peshawar, Baluchistan and Islamic University at Bahawalpur. The contents and quantity of these courses, however, vary from university to university. The introduction of reforms in the educational system of the country after 1970 also necessitated changes in the field of librarianship. In 1979, University Grants Commission appointed a Curriculum Revision Committee for Library Science which was entrusted with the task of preparing a

uniform core programme for preparing librarians and documentalists to meet the new challenges in this field. The Committee comprising the Chairman and senior teachers of all the library schools in Pakistan and senior most librarians of the country made a detailed study of the curricula of a large number of library schools throughout the world and recommended a curricula appropriate to the local library needs and to answer the knock of modern library technology in Pakistan. The revised syllabus approved by the Committee in 1980 includes the following courses. The titles of degrees were also changed.

**(a) Bachelor of Library Science (BLS)**

(Also called Diploma in Library Science)

**First Semester**

- (1) History of Books and Libraries.
- (2) Building Library Collections.
- (3) Bibliographic Control and Organization.
- (4) Introduction to Classification.
- (5) Introduction to Cataloguing.
- (6) Principles of Administration and Management.

**Second Semester**

- (7) Library and Society.
- (8) Reference Resources and Services.
- (9) Bibliographic Methods and Procedures.
- (10) Applied Classification.
- (11) Applied Cataloguing.
- (12) Library operations.

**(b) M.A. in Library and Information Science**

(Also called M.A. in Library Science)

**First Semester**

- (1) Literature of Social Sciences and Humanities, OR Literature of Islam.
- (2) Library Resources.
- (3) Comparative Classification.
- (4) Public Libraries, or Library Service to Business & Industry, or Academic Libraries, or Library Services to Children. or Special Libraries and Documentation Centres, or Communication, Mass Media and Libraries, or Oriental Librarianship.
- (5) Information Storage and Retrieval.
- (6) Research Methodology.

## Second Semester

- (7) Literature of Science and Technology, *or* Literature of Pakistan.
- (8) Public Documents, *or* Indexing and Abstracting
- (9) Cataloguing of Special Materials.
- (10) Library Legislation and Public Library Systems *or* School Librarianship, *or* Medical Librarianship, *or* Agricultural Librarianship, *or* Rare Books Manuscripts & Special Collections *or* Library Automation, *or* Comparative and International Librarianship, *or*, Audio-visual Materials & Services, *or* Law Librarianship, *or* Archives Management.
- (11) Data Processing in Libraries, *or* Information Networks, Data Banks & Systems.
- (12) Planning of Library and Information Services, *or* Library Buildings and Equipment, *or* Thesis (By selection)

The two years Doctoral Degree Programme in Library Science at the Karachi University requires an M.A. Library Science. Programme consists of guided research a doctoral dissertation and viva voce. The objectives of the course are to prepare librarians for specialized professional work in all areas of library and information science, including administrative and supervisory activities on a high level.

In addition to post-graduate courses in library science, provincial and regional library associations conduct Certificate Course in Librarianship designed for sub-professional library workers. The duration of this course varied from four to six months and is taught by part-time teachers. The entrants are mostly matriculates or have studied upto Intermediate level. The curricula of these courses lacks systematized planning and there are hardly any text books available in local languages.

The NATIS Programme has placed a great emphasis on initiating the users education programmes. Most recently, the subject of library science has been introduced in Pakistan as an optional subject at the under graduate level in a few selected educational institutions. The course contents, however, are contrary to the concept of user education and lay emphasis on management of libraries. The course includes the major part of curricula taught at the post-graduate level at the universities.

## Library Manpower

The success of any type of library service largely depends on the quantity, and, more importantly, on the quality of staff. Looking at the various types of libraries and different areas in the field of library work we find the following three groups of staff required for library services :

- (a) Personnel responsible for research in design, control and development of a library system.
- (b) Personnel directly required for the control or execution of library and information processes and functions, and
- (c) Personnel supporting the work of those described in (b) above, i.e., operational, executive, technological, as well as management, administrative and secretarial work.

A general valid classification of personnel for library services in limited and difficult to establish in view of the different terminology and traditions. The Unesco Inter-Governmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library, and Archives infrastructures held in 1974 gives the following categories of personnel for library services:

### (i) Heads of Services and Specialists:

These are managers and administrators at the highest level in system and networks; subject specialists in charge of major collections of services; specialists responsible for designing and developing information systems.

### (ii) Professional Staff :

The library professional staff have traditionally been graduates in the subject with an academic background and some years of experience.

### (iii) Assistants for Technical Assistance:

These are non-graduates, often holders of diploma from middle level institutions and are intermediate level staff usually responsible for routine tasks.

Of all problems facing the library planners in a developing country like Pakistan, that of trained staff is the most crucial because the time lag between the identification of the need and its satisfaction is the longest. Nevertheless, planning is

absolutely necessary nowadays if wastage of skilled manpower or lack of it when it is required is to be reduced to a minimum. The imbalances often occur when estimates are on the basis of little, or inaccurate, information. The projection of requirements for a number of years ahead is difficult unless staffing and salary structure and other conditions of service for the profession are firmly established at the national level.

Until recently, the position of suitable manpower required for various types of libraries in Pakistan was not very encouraging. The social and salary status of professional librarians was poor and their pay scales very inconsistent. Suitably educated, trained, dedicated and imaginative personnel required for the profession were not coming forth. There was great imbalance between the professional staff and non-professional staff. To rectify this situation, the Federal Government, for the first time, dealt with the question of status and pay scales of librarians in the New Education Policy of 1972. It was stated that "In order to promote the library movement in the country, it will be necessary to establish, properly trained and salaried cadres of librarians, both for educational and public libraries. Librarians will be placed on similar salary scales as the teachers and/or lecturers of the institutions to which they are appointed." Pursuant to this provision of the Education Policy professional librarians working in the universities, colleges and schools have since been equated with the teachers provided the librarians possess similar qualifications and experience. The pay scales, qualifications and experience required for librarians under the Federal Government have recently been (August 1985) standardised and rationalised. The pay-scales for sub-professional staff of assistants level range between B-9 to B-12 of National Pay Scales. The professional group of Librarians, Bibliographers, Documentatists, Research Officers, Planning Officers and Editors of the national bibliography have been granted B-16 to B-18. Similarly, the heads of services and National Librarians have been placed in B-19 and B-20. The plight of librarians working in public

libraries, however, needs improvement. For this purpose a detailed report on public library services and the proposed setting up of a national system of public libraries, prepared by a Group of expert librarians, is under consideration of the Federal Government. The Group has proposed a separate service cadre, called Public Library Services with provision for promotion to higher grades. It has been further recommended that the presently available training facilities at the universities should be properly designed for the preparation of public librarians and to meet the expanded manpower needs in the future. Similarly, the courses being offered at sub-professional level by various library associations need a good deal of streamlining and review and academic control. The Federal Ministry of Education have been authorized to evaluate the contents of the privately run library courses and to prepare a standard course at the national level and also register such bodies who would like to conduct this course. It will be observed that a good deal has been achieved in the field of library education for various levels of library manpower requirements. The salaries and services conditions of librarians have been greatly improved and brought at par with service structure of educated manpower in the country.

Presently, there is hardly any employment problem of trained librarians in Pakistan. According to a rough estimate the six universities have so far produced about 2,500 trained librarians and 5,000 additional hands are required to work in the existing 1,100 libraries, 4,276 secondary schools and the proposed 300 new public libraries. However, to forecast the future requirements of librarians on sounder basis there is an urgent need to introduce effective manpower planning practices at the national level in all the developing countries. There is also an urgent need for initiating a study of the library training programmes in countries of our region for our mutual benefit and to determine equivalence of certificates and degrees being offered in the field of library science.

# Standards for School and Public Libraries with Special Reference to Sri Lanka

Mr. Upali Amarasiri

Director, National Library of Sri Lanka

At the outset I wish to thank the organisers of the seminar, specially Ms. Nethsinghe for inviting me to present a paper on the subject of 'Standards for School and Public Libraries'. I have taken the liberty to slightly modify the topic by adding 'with Special Reference to Sri Lanka'. This has been added because in my opinion it is important to discuss this subject in the Sri Lankan context. I am certain that the organisers would have had the same thinking in mind, when organising this valuable academic exercise.

Before venturing onto elaborate on the subject proper, I shall attempt to define the term "Library Standards". The South African Library Standards in my view give a comprehensive and rational definition to the subject. I quote '(Standards are) *an ideal, a model procedure, a measure for appraisal, a stimulus for future development and improvement, an instrument to assist decision and action in planning and administration of library service.*' 'IFLA Standards for Public Libraries' published in 1973, which has virtually become a hand book of all library planners says, I quote *Guidance as to the levels of provision needed to maintain an efficient Public Library Service.*" These definitions illustrate that library standards assist in the development of the library field. This is common to standards in any field, as standards assist in developing the relevant field. It not only shows the way to proceed, it is also an ideal to follow in order to achieve higher targets. It is well known that Library Standards have been of tremendous service towards library development all over the world. Whether they be American Library Association Standards for USA or PNG Library Board Standards for Papua New Guinea. their contribution towards the development of this field has been and continues to be remarkable.

The responsibility of formulating library standards is shouldered by various authorities. The normal practice is for the Professional Association in the country to take the leading role in carrying out this important task. Library Associations in USA, UK and a number of developed and developing countries have already formulated standards for their respective countries. The Government Library authorities too e.g. Ministries, Departments, Library Boards, Authorities and National Libraries also take an active part in this exercise.

Library Standards can be broadly divided into two categories. Of these the quantitative standards include guidelines which are able to measure the important physical aspects of the library service. These would include the size of the library building, facilities for users, size of the collection, annual budget, among others. The other category emphasises the concept of service and the articulation of objectives.

Both these categories have their own strong points. Quantitative standards are easier to implement and the parameters can be measured. Specially the library authorities, e.g. Local Government officials, relevant Ministry officials, etc., who do not have much knowledge of services rendered, can grasp the quantitative aspects. While quantitative standards are indeed important, the service aspect should not be forgotten. This is emphasised by the other type of standards. At present library standards stress both quantitative and service areas.

## Library Standards in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lanka Library Association, during its 32 years of existence has not been able to formulate library standards for Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka National Library Services Board made several half hearted attempts at formulating standards for the public and school library fields over the years but has met without much success. In 1981 the Board suggested, Library Standards for Technical Institution Libraries in Sri Lanka, which can be considered an important contribution towards formulation of library standards in Sri Lanka.

Consequent to the inauguration of the National Library of Sri Lanka in 1990, development of a National Library Plan has received high priority of the Board. Formulation of standards for public and school libraries were identified as an important component of this exercise. In July 1990, two months after the opening



of the National Library, a committee was appointed for this purpose. After careful deliberations lasting over a period of five months the committee submitted the report which included their recommendations. The SLNLSB has accepted these recommendations with minor modifications.

In addition to the enthusiasm of the officials in the new National Library, there are other reasons too, which led to this important event of formulation of public and school library standards. The Public Administration Circular No. 47/89 of 1989 issued by the Ministry of Public Administration, entrusted new powers and responsibilities to the National Library Services Board. The Board was empowered to grade school, public and department libraries. Since this is closely linked with the grading of librarians, there is a great demand from all sectors to grade or upgrade their respective libraries. In order to perform the task of successfully grading libraries it became necessary to formulate library standards.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, these standards are an integral part of the nation wide library development plan of the National Library Board. The time allotted to me for this paper does not permit a detailed discussion about the plan. It suffices to say that the new library plan is an attempt at organising the library service in accordance with the political and administrative changes that have taken place in the country during the past couple of years.

The Provincial Councils and the decentralised administration system have replaced the traditional centralised administration of the country. The provincial council authorities will be advised by the National Library on how to organise the library services in their respective provinces. These proposed standards will provide part of the guidelines. Provincial Councils at higher level and Pradeshiya Sabhas at grass root level will be responsible for administering the public and school library sectors of the country. Presently there is tremendous enthusiasm among political leaders and officials at these levels. We as library planners must endeavour to make use of the new system as well as the enthusiasm of the new leaders to organise the library system in a systematic and meaningful way.

## Public Library Standards

Both quantitative and service aspects have been included in the present Public Library Standards. Library building, size of the collection, number of staff and annual budget are some of the quantitative aspects included in the standards. Organisation of the collection, library services including extension services, information dissemination activities are some of the service activities mentioned in the standards.

Some of the main quantitative Standards of the Public Library sector are as follows :

	<i>Supra Grade</i>	<i>Grade I</i>	<i>Grade II</i>	<i>Grade III</i>
Library Building	7,500 sq.ft.	2500 Sq. ft.	1000 sq. ft.	600 sq.ft
Collection	50,000 vols.	25,000 vols.	10,000 vols.	3,000 vols.
Annual Budget	1,500,000 (Rs.)	2,50,000 (Rs.)	50,000 (Rs.)	20,000 (Rs.)

In certain areas these standards are far below internationally accepted standards. In formulating the above the committee has taken into consideration the present situation in Sri Lankan libraries. The National Library Services Board conducted a nation-wide library survey and published the findings in District Library Survey Reports. These reports reveal the present library situation in the country. For example, in the Moneragala District the largest public library building is the Bible Public Library which is only 1250 sq.ft. and the smallest one is Dombagahawela Public Library with 300 sq.ft. The average size of a public library in the district is 600 sq. ft.

Under these circumstances the committee was of the opinion that at the initial stage the standards should be realistic and not be too high. There is no use in introducing standards if they cannot be achieved. As all of you are aware financial difficulties have been the biggest obstacle to the development of the Public Library Service. In the standards mentioned above adequate financial provisions have been guaranteed to libraries.

In the service sector the standards stressed that the library collection should be organised in a systematic manner and proper services should be provided. The most unfortunate aspect of the public library service is that some of the librarians do not even catalogue or classify their collections, which as all of you are aware is a basic requirement when maintaining a library. This is most unfortunate because most of the Public Libraries are manned by qualified personnel. Hereafter the librarians will have to perform their professional duties in a proper and adequate manner. It is important to realise that the standards act as a compulsion not only to library authorities but to librarians as well.

### School Libraries

The following quantitative standards have been introduced in school libraries.

	<i>Grade I</i>	<i>Grade II</i>	<i>Grade III</i>
Library Building Space	1,600	800	400
	sq.ft.	sq.ft.	sq.ft.
Collection	7,500 vols.	5,000 vols.	1,500 vols.
Budget	Rs. 50/-	Rs. 30/-	Rs. 25/-
	per pupil	per pupil	per pupil

In the past, school libraries suffered heavily owing to lack of funds. Very few schools were able to allocate adequate funds for the school libraries. The committee suggested the allocation of funds based on the student population. Now even small schools will be able to have some form of a library service. At present only 1/3 of the 10,000 schools have library services. we hope we may be able to substantially increase the number of school libraries during the next few years.

There are other factors which will help develop the school library service. For example the government intends to introduce a School Development Fund and a

School Board for each school. These two steps will have very favourable effects on improving school libraries.

The School Library Standards suggest that all the school libraries should have professionally qualified librarians. This clause is also included in the Public Library sector. But as you are aware, this can be considered a rather revolutionary clause where school libraries are concerned. We have been having an ongoing battle with the authorities, to increase the cadre of full time librarians in the school sector, but have not met with any significant results. In 1989 when the SLNLSB suggested, that at least the National Schools should have qualified librarians, the government accepted it in principle.

Our present strategy is to exert pressure on Provincial Council and Pradeshiya Sabha authorities and on proposed School Boards to recruit professional librarians to school libraries. When National Standards emphasise that every school should have a professional librarian, the authorities will endeavour to satisfy the requirement. If they are unable to pick out a librarian from the main cadre, they can employ a librarian whose salary is met from the school fund.

It is my opinion that these standards signify a turning point in the Public and School Library Services in Sri Lanka. This will hopefully be a tremendous boost to the development of the two biggest library sectors of the country. These standards will be reviewed once every two years. We expect that there will be widespread professional discussions on the proposed standard. As this is the first attempt there may be deficiencies which could be remedied reaching a consensus of opinion.

(This paper presented at the Seminar on Public and School Libraries organised by the Sri Lanka Library Association on 23.03.1991.)

# Oral Traditions of Sri Lanka

*SAARC Workshop on Preservation of  
Oral Traditions in Pakistan  
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## 1. Introduction

1.1 Oral Traditions serve as useful sources to supplement the historical evidence and literature of a country. Transmitted by word of mouth and thus preserved for generations, these traditions are of great value to understand the history of a nation. The utilization of oral traditions to supplement the present knowledge of history is a comparatively new concept to most countries. In the Sri Lankan context, however there is great antiquity to this practice as evinced from a study of the main historical sources pertaining to the island's history.

1.2 The Mahavamsa or the great chronicle compiled in Pali in the 5th century A.D. covers the period from the date of the arrival of Aryan settlers in the year 543 B.C. right up to the end of the reign of King Mahanama 406—428 A.C. Its sources provide students of history with a classic example of how traditions transmitted in oral form had been made use of in the compilation of a historical chronicle<sup>1</sup>. Several traditions popularly known as "Atthakathas" (commentaries) too provided the source material to build up a continuous historical record of the excellence of Mahawamsa. Numerous references occur as to how the anecdotes dealing mainly with the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka were preserved in the memories of Buddhist elders till the time of the fourth Buddhist Council and how these were codified and committed into

written form along with the Pali scriptures of the canon which hitherto also had been preserved by word of mouth.<sup>2</sup>

1.3 The development of historical literature and the utilization of the varying traditions which came to be recorded in books is described in the following terms:

"Thus from the original nucleus arose a corpus of historical tradition which was faithfully preserved in the important viharas of the time. Since it was a growing body of material, the tradition differed from vihara to vihara. These were for a long time handed down by word of mouth. To facilitate this process, and to fix the main traditions, part of this was versified and part preserved in what have come to be called 'memory verses', which are a string of nouns connecting the main trend of a story. What lies in between was added by the narrator. It was in the style of the old Akhyana poetry of ancient India, part verse, part prose. According to accepted tradition, these records as well as the canon and the commentaries were first written down in the time of Vattagamani Abhaya, in the first century B.C. Though after this time the nucleus of the tradition was fixed, new stories, legends, traditions and anecdotes were being constantly added on, some from the hand of the narrator, and some after they gained currency by repetition."<sup>3</sup>

1.4 This tradition has been continued and the continuation of the Mahawamsa which is titled as Culavamsa can be seen from the chapters added on during subsequent centuries on four different occasions. This chronicle which was available till recently to cover the period up to 1935 A.D. has since been extended to cover Sri Lanka's history up to 1956. What is important is that along with the written sources various traditions available in oral form had played a vital role in the compilation of this chronicle which is a unique document by virtue of its credibility. Apart from this main chronicle, there had been a very rich historical literature dealing with the shrines sacred to Buddhism, historical anecdotes, ballads containing inferences, popular verses that had influenced by the oral traditions of the contemporary period. Many of these accounts still exist in oral form.

## 2. Inherent potential

2.1 With this brief introduction, it may be pertinent to consider the salient findings of a study known as the 'Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP)' conducted under the sponsorship of the General Information Programme of UNESCO, 1986.<sup>4</sup>

### "2.2 Oral Tradition"

Oral tradition, like oral history, has a variety of uses. While controversy may rage as to its validity, reliability, authenticity, and usefulness, it must nevertheless be considered as one of the basic sources for the writing of history. As with oral history, it is being used to broaden recorded accounts of the identities and pasts of communities and for other purposes such as film documentaries and illustrated lectures.

Oral tradition is acknowledged to have a paramount value in those societies which have become literate only in recent times, and where, therefore, the history and culture of the societies have had to be transmitted through the generations by word of mouth. In societies which have been literate for a long time, oral tradition is still useful in documenting those aspects that were never recorded on paper. No written documentation can ever be fully reflective of every facet of society. Certain aspects will always remain undocumented. Oral tradition is thus useful in filling the gaps that are bound to exist within the written documentary record.

Countries that for long periods of their history have been under the dominion of a foreign power place a high value on their oral tradition once they attain independence and nationhood. As noted earlier, such countries consider that they inherited a documentary record that is incomplete and imbalanced, that was meant to be no more than a catalogue of the life and deeds of the colonial masters. Oral tradition is therefore seen as an answer to a reconstruction of the history and culture of the indigenous population. The gathering of the traditions is also seen as urgent in view of the rapid changes taking place in those countries as well as because of the ongoing disappearance through death of those who have been well-versed in the traditions.

The very act of recording is however transforming oral traditions. Once recorded they can no longer be considered as purely and exclusively oral forms. The indigenous oral form may become influenced by the recorded and perhaps written forms of the same or similar traditions. Some claimants in chieftainship disputes have invoked the written transcripts of oral genealogies collected by oral historians, claiming that the written forms should be considered superior to the surviving oral forms. Oral traditions will continue to exist, however, because even where there are records, not everyone can have access to the written record. Of necessity, a great deal will continue to be transmitted by word of mouth."<sup>5</sup>

These observations are quite appropriate to SAARC member countries including Sri Lanka and provide the necessary guideline for a fruitful discussion on the availability of oral tradition, their limitations, recording by making use of new technologies and the future of oral traditions even after proper documentation.

## 3. Availability of oral traditions

3.1 Sri Lanka has a script going back to the 3rd century B.C. and therefore falls within the category of a literate nation from that very early period. Nevertheless in view of the limitations imposed on the written tradition before the introduction of the printing press during the 18th century by the Dutch, a good percentage of the wisdom of the nation was preserved in oral form. The prestigious writings however, were available in the form of ola leaf manuscripts. There had been an attempt to stratify the written material, pride of place being given to Buddhist scriptures, commentaries on them, literary works on the life and virtues of the Buddha and the mainstream of the country's history as recorded in the great chronicle referred to.

3.2 Part of Sri Lanka was also subject to foreign rule from 1505 to 1815 and the entire country fell into the hands of the British in 1815 which resulted in the country becoming a colony of the British Empire. The country gained nationhood in the year 1948. The impact of foreign rule is felt in the cultural life of the community and left its imprint even in the oral tradition.

3.3 The country is also being subject to rapid changes affecting the oral traditions and therefore it is imperative that steps be taken to document the oral traditions which is now faced with the threat of complete disappearance. The Government of Sri Lanka is mindful of the urgency to resuscitate the rich heritage available in the oral tradition and has launched a programme through the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Intellectual Property Act, No. 52 of 1979 has fixed the legal responsibility on the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in the protection of the folklore which has a direct relationship with the preservation of oral traditions.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Classification

4.1 In the field of oral traditions, several studies have been conducted during the last few decades by competent scholars. Out of these the study by Jan Vansina is considered to be a comprehensive discussion of this subject and the typology evolved by him is recommended for adoption to examine oral traditions of other countries.<sup>7</sup> In a table drawn up by Vansina, the typology of oral traditions is arranged in the following manner:

#### 4.2 The typology of oral traditions.

A Category	B Sub-category	C Types
I. Formulae		Titles Slogans Didactic formulae Ritual formulae
II. Poetry	Official Private	Historical Panegyric Religious Personal
III. Lists		Place-names Personal names
IV. Tales	Historical Didactic	General Local Family Aetiological myths Artistic Personal memories
V. Commentaries	Legal Auxiliary Sporadic	Precedents Explanatory Occasional comments

#### 5. Formulae

5.1 Formula appears to be a popular form of oral tradition available in most countries. This is true of Sri Lanka too. There is a very rich heritage which can be classified as formulae used in the day to day life to invoke the blessings of divine powers to achieve special privileges. This is forming part of the popular beliefs, rituals and cults which may have remote connections with the main philosophy enunciated in Buddhism and other religions.<sup>8</sup>

5.2 For instance Vansina mentions in his typology of certain stereotype phrases used in special circumstances such as to drive away the rain.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that in Sri Lanka, which depends heavily on tank-fed irrigation for agriculture, similar traditions were observed to safeguard the tanks. Quite similar to the African practice explained by Vansina divine intervention is sought in a moment of a catastrophe such as the impending breach of a tank bund due to excessive rain; the ritual is conspicuous because of its formulae sung by the lay priest in the village. The invocation is a simple and a short one. Divine intervention is sought to protect the tank bund from a breach as the sluice cannot cope with the excessive flow of water resulting from heavy rain. The deities are mentioned by name, their supernatural powers are mentioned. Such acts like providing additional strength to the bund as if it has been reinforced with iron mesh are solicited from deities. The prayer ends that the deities would be subject to ridicule if the request is not granted and a breach of the bund occurs.

5.3 The ceremony which precedes the chanting of the invocation includes the fixing of a stick at the centre point of the tank bund by the village lay priest tying a coin to this stick cleaned with saffron water in a piece of white cloth and the offerings of selected varieties of flowers. Strange enough to this day villagers believe that if the invocation is properly made, the calamity can be averted.<sup>10</sup>

5.4 Examples can be given for the other sub-items such as titles and slogans. But majority of the oral traditions are related to didactic and ritual formulae. In the category of didactic formulae village elders retain in their memories clues to the effect in the form of their utterances. They rejoice in elaborating on them by narrating each of the anecdotes

with such clues. They are very often related to moral norms of the society and are heavily influenced by the ethics of religion. For instance a saying like “Kala kala de pala pala de” which means every action has a reaction may be connected to a moral norm such as “you reap what you sow”. Incidentally there is a Buddhist norm which is directly connected with this saying.<sup>11</sup> Didactic formulae are common to all societies. A saying like “Gilemalet ata datasuddo” meaning there are people with pure white teeth in Gilemale implies that there are men of exceptional behaviour among those are indiscreet. The village Gilemale is well known for an abundant growth of beetle and the majority of the villagers chew beetle thereby discolouring their teeth. This usage has a social significance in that it speaks of men of rare character.<sup>12</sup>

5.5 Exorcist beliefs forming part of the popular cults have sustained the practice of ritual formulae. The rituals are not taught openly, secrecy being maintained by imparting such knowledge only to selected students making sure that the form and content are preserved, lest the desired effect of exorcism would not be achieved. Even in these ritual formulae historical allusions on religious and cultural events are very common.

## 6. Poetry

6.1 There exists a very rich heritage of oral tradition in the form of folk poetry, the beginnings of which, can be traced back to the time of the first settlement of Sri Lanka. The authorship of this poetry is unknown, but the subject, form and content retain inherent qualities to facilitate memorising for easy transmission. The folk poetry in Sri Lanka is rich in content in that it covers the many facets of the life of the community such as their occupational habits, their aspirations, attitudes towards life, death and re-birth. These poem are prevalent among villagers and are meant to be recited in public and therefore the aesthetic demands of the listeners are adequately catered to in the use of the phraseology and the manner of recital. With regard to the form, majority of these verses is four-lined compositions which gained popularity from about the 15th century in Sri Lanka. However, the concepts contained there in can be traced to much earlier periods thereby making it possible to fix an antiquarian value to this rich oral tradition.

6.2 The folk poetry of Sri Lanka can quite correctly be described as the pulse of the nation. In this category are found interesting historical ballads and panegyrics and personal poetry. A tradition of religious poetry which had emerged from the early times is available in the form of popular ballads and single verses for the religious edification and the serene joy of the pious. A close study of some of these categories if attempted would show their affinities with events of great antiquity and sometimes have a bearing on the history of thought of the nation.

6.3 Vansina for instance mentions about lullabies in New Zealand containing historical allusions.<sup>13</sup> As a result of a recent survey, nearly 300 folk poems used as lullabies were discovered. Several of them contain historical allusions suggestive of various races that have migrated to Sri Lanka from the Indian continent.<sup>14</sup> Hundreds of folk songs dealing with traditional games too have also been discovered. Some of the games seem to have had their origins in foreign lands. For instance the traditional account of “olindakeliya” indicates its connections with Bangladesh.<sup>15</sup> Well planned in-depth studies should be undertaken after a comprehensive documentation programme is completed.

## 7. Place names

7.1 Traditional accounts of place names, village settlements, boundaries of various units of administrative territorial divisions, etc., retained in the memories of village elders present facinating information which can be analysed by historians, sociologists and linguists. Derivations of place names discussed in this traditional lore compared with the historical data contained in accepted historical documents would be a fruitful experience.

7.2 The class of ola manuscripts titled “Kadaimpot” (boundary books) and “Vittipot” (anecdotes) present a rich store of information on the study of place names.<sup>16</sup> Boundary ballads known as “Kadaim kavi” are even more popular than boundary books and form a significant segment of the folklore of Sri Lanka. Verses of unknown authorship dealing with village names, boundaries, territorial divisions and their history cultural tastes of the people can be classed as a unique oral tradition still available in Sri Lanka.<sup>17</sup> Popular etymologies of place names contained in them present a second

stream of historical knowledge that should be studied to decide on links if any with the accepted interpretations.

7.3 It is worthwhile considering an example to illustrate this point. According to the Mahawamsa, the ancient chronicle, Mahiyangana is a place associated with the Buddha's first visit to Sri Lanka. Tradition has that a shrine came up shortly after his visit on this spot in the 6th century B.C. and records that the place was sanctified by the Buddha and his hair relics were enshrined in the Stupa that was erected. The term Mahiyangana has been coined by the chronicler by translating the Sinhala terms Bim-tenna into Pali. "Bim" meaning earth (Pali "mahi") "tenna" meaning plane (Pali, "angana") gave rise to this place name Mahiyangana.<sup>18</sup> After this the original Sinhala term had gone out of use. In the 14th century A.D. a new word Miyuguna was coined as a Sinhalese rendering of the Pali term Mahiyangana.<sup>19</sup> It appears that the original Sinhalese term has been forgotten completely by then. In the oral tradition which came into the usage during the contemporary period, the traditional historians gave a completely new interpretation to the term Mahiyangana. This tradition recounts handing over of hair relics by the Lord Buddha to the deity Saman with the request 'O deity honour them'. Mayyan is a colloquial word which denotes respect. Since the Buddha wanted the hair relics to be respected "mayyan" (mayim is another colloquial word to connote the same meaning), this place was known as Mahiyangana.<sup>20</sup> These local etymologies contain sociological information having a bearing on the traditional beliefs and aspirations of the people.

7.4 Numerous interesting devices had been adopted to deal with place names. Folk poems in the form of riddles available in Sri Lanka present a popular oral tradition relating to place names. The English rendering one such poem will read as follows :

"Name of a village in eight letters, it is made up of;  
Three words combined, this place name is formed.  
Name of a king at the beginning and that of a  
monastery at the end;  
Behold my friend would you venture to interpret  
it"

The place name meant by this verse is that of Tissamaharama an ancient centre of Buddhism in the remote south of Sri Lanka. The components described in the verse could be found in the word that emanates from it. There are eight Sinhala letters in it which can be separated into three words. The first portion Tissa indicates the name of a king while the second portion Maharamaya means a great monastery.<sup>21</sup>

## 8. Tales

8.1 Written in prose in narrative form, folk tales constitute a very high percentage of the oral tradition of Sri Lanka. As is common with most other countries, the main aim of these tales had been to instruct, edify, give pleasure or to vindicate rights. They could be classified into sub-categories such as historical, didactic artistic and personal tales. Only a very small percentage of these tales has been recorded so far and the bulk of it is still being retained in the memories of the elders. The Buddhist stories dealing with previous births of the Bodhisatva, tales pertaining to historical personalities as recorded in the chronicles have provided great inspiration to the people from very early times to the present day.<sup>22</sup>

8.2 Among the historical tales are anecdotes with historical substance dealing with lesser known facts about historical personalities of the country. Couched in simple language, these folk tales provide additional inspiration to the people and village audiences listening to them are not uncommon. With the spread of powerful media folk tales are no longer becoming popular and the persons retaining them in their memories are also disappearing very fast due to old age and death. Certain attempts have been made during the last 150 years to record some of them and to translate them into English. But due to the vastness of the tales available and the failure to adopt a programme of recording of such tales on a scientific basis, the progress made so far cannot be considered satisfactory. The assistance of the Ford Foundation is sought to launch a programme to record the tales and a response is awaited.

## 9. Personal memories

Valuable traditional information could be had from the personal memories of outstanding individuals who had some role to play in the administration,

economic and cultural life of the community. There are quite a large number of political leaders and retired public servants who possess valuable personal memories about the main events in the political, social and cultural life of the country during the past few decades. The Department of National Archives has initiated documenting their memories. The recordings so far done have yielded commendable results and in course of time, the information so obtain would be very valuable supplemental information to the main core of historical evidence available thereat.<sup>23</sup> Mention could also be made of the Historical Manuscripts Commission appointed during the days of the colonial administration in 1931 and functioned actively till late 1950's. Valuable historical documents in private possession have been unearthed by this Commission and the bulletins issued indicate the rich heritage that would otherwise have been lost if not for the initiative taken by it.<sup>24</sup>

## 10. Arts and crafts

10.1 The traditional knowledge about various arts and crafts initially introduced to the country by the Aryan settlers and developed within the country is retained in many instances in oral form. The canons and books pertaining to these arts and crafts are meant for limited circulation. They deal mainly with the important aspects, while bulk of the knowledge is being handed down by word of mouth.

10.2 This could be seen in such arts like painting which is one of the popular form of art in the country. While on the one hand it may be possible to trace links of the traditional painters living in Sri Lanka with their ancestors who had originally accompanied the Bo-tree in the third century B.C. as craftsmen of various guilds, it is also true of them that their traditional knowledge is still preserved in oral form.<sup>25</sup> It is rather unfortunate that some of the craftsmen still cherish the idea of retaining only for themselves the top secrets of their arts and crafts and pass it down to a selected student and that too during their last stages. A methodology will have to be evolved to approach these artists and craftsmen in order to obtain for posterity hitherto unwritten traditions to disseminate such knowledge and to rely on the traditional skills for the furtherance of these arts.

## 11. Involvement of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs

11.1 The responsibility has now been placed on the Ministry of Cultural Affairs for the methodical protection of oral traditions which include the recording, analysis and dissemination of this heritage.

11.2 In the field of folk poetry, commendable progress has been made to collect the folk songs still preserved in the memories of village elders. A programme launched in 1984 and continued in the subsequent year resulted in the collection of nearly 20,000 folk songs hitherto unpublished. A total collection of 44,000 songs were received as entries for the competition.<sup>26</sup> In order to encourage the retention of the talents to recite folk songs in the traditional style and an annual competition organised at two levels namely, District and islandwide is being conducted from 1985 and will be an annual feature in the future.

11.3 A survey of talented folklorists has been conducted on a district basis. They are being approached to tape their voice cuts adopting international practices. Recording in five administrative districts have been completed and the tapes are now preserved in the National Archives. This will be continued till all the districts are covered and the verses so recorded will be made use of for training students in the recital of folk songs, folk dancing and for research purposes including the composing of new music.

The Department of National Archives, Sri Lanka has been interested in the study of oral history and oral traditions for the last ten years. Several interviews have been held with informed personalities on these aspects, some relating to religious shrines, linguistic studies and political development of the country in the recent years. Roberts Oral History Projects which involved the recording of the reminiscences of selected political leaders and ex-members of the Ceylon Civil Service is considered a comprehensive survey undertaken by a private scholar. These interviews have been conducted in Britain from 1966 to 1969 and the material so collected is considered unique and gives a fascinating and rare insight into colonial Ceylon, in particular to the Ceylon Civil Service.<sup>26</sup>



## 12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The oral tradition in Sri Lanka should be viewed from two angles. There is an urgent need to implement a programme of activities to document the island's older tradition in oral form, before the modernisation process wipes it out. This will ensure the preservation objectives. This approach may be suitable to other member countries of SAARC as well.
- 12.2 The memories of informed persons such as retired politicians, public servants and outstanding citizens, etc., should be recorded and their experiences compared with known historical information. To achieve the best results a suitable methodology should be adopted for this purpose and a planned programme followed with a time schedule. This will indeed enhance the present knowledge about the

island's political history, social commercial and economic development to supplement the present understanding on these subjects.

- 12.3 The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has already had positive response for the few experiments so far launched for the documentation of the oral tradition in the country. The people themselves have been responding positively by making their knowledge available to the field workers engaged in the task. The National Archives which department scheduled under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs is alive to the task and is prepared to undertake more responsibilities to expand its activities regarding oral traditions. This rich heritage of the country will undoubtedly furnish new information to supplement the written historical documents available in the archives and will certainly help to supplement the present knowledge on historical and sociological studies in Sri Lanka.

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10. The author of this paper discovered this ritual in the course of his official duties in the district of Matale in 1958.
11. Compare with the admonition attributed to the Buddha YA DISAM VAPATE BIJAM TA DISAM HARATE PALAM - meaning 'You reap as you sow'.
12. Sayings of this nature help to develop the moral values.
13. Oral Tradition by Jan Vansina, pg. 189.
14. The baby is made to sleep by describing the ferocious outlook of the foreigner who will kidnap young one.
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20. For a discussion of this term vide A Critical Study of Kada-im-pot by Dr. H. A. P. Abeyawardana, pg. 173.
21. The author of this paper discovered this folk poem from the District of Ratnapura in 1963 in the course of his research.
22. Several studies including recording on paper of these stories publishing in the original language and translating into English had been done. Henry Parker is one such scholar who displayed a keen interest.
23. R. A. M. P. Study pg. 76—Report of an interview with the Portuguese speaking community in Puttalam by Dr. M. H. Goonetillake, 1983 - Interview with High Priest of Seruwila Temple, Eastern Province, etc.
24. The Bulletins of the Historical Manuscripts Commission and the four interim reports furnish valuable information of the traditions preserved by the private individuals and organisations.
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26. The Cultural Ministry is taking steps to publish 8 volumes to cover a wide range of subjects making use of this material.



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**SAARC BOOK FAIR**  
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The sixth SAARC Heads of State meeting will be held in Colombo at the end of this year. The National Library of Sri Lanka will hold an International Book Fair in connection with this historical events. This issue of Library News is devoted exclusively to the National Library activities of the SAARC countries.

The nine articles presented in this issue provide an on-depth view of the activities of the information handling systems at national level.

Continuous technological advances in the processing, storing, retrieving and disseminating of information are described by the Heads of National Libraries on the SAARC countries.

- Editor -

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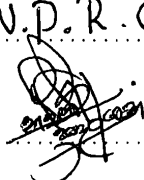
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