ACADEMIC LIBRARY SCENE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND INDIA

Both China and India have started their new phase of development in the 1940s. There has been considerable progress in the field of education in both the countries. But so far as the academic library development is concerned, it appears from available information and statistics, however scanty they are, that China has forged ahead of India. The reasons for this slow development of academic libraries in India are discussed.

The very names of these two countries bring vivid pictures in the mind: ancient civilizations and ironically now developing countries, big chunks of territories, vast and undeveloped resources, huge struggling populace barely at the level of subsistence, one militant the other pacifist, both traditionally and even now predominantly agricultural, one out to prove its prowess through authoritarianism, the other, the world's greatest experiment in democracy, the Great Wall and the Taj Mahal. Both have undergone changes: India since gaining independence in 1947 and China after the communist takeover in 1949.

The libraries in China are intimately related with the political change. The doors of the libraries were thrown open to masses. The central place of books in the process of indoctrination, scientific and technical progress was recognised and the programme of making them efficient tools for these ends was pursued energetically and vigorously. On the other hand, there was phenomenal growth of education in India since independence [1] but paradoxically books and libraries did not get the attention they deserved. N. Nutting [2] was surprised to discover great library awareness among the Chinese people in early 1950s who wanted to know about the developments taking place in the West. J. G. Brewer [3] in a relatively recent study pointed out the libraries' dynamic social force and full use of them in disseminating the Party-line. In this respect it shows a close parallel to the Russian pattern where the printed word is the main instrument of dissemination of information and official doctrines. The main advantage of heavily relying on books as communication media is that they are relatively inexpensive and can be easily controlled whatever is undesirable from the viewpoint of the government can be censored. Secondly, the Chinese wanted to industrialize their country as quickly as possible and first, it was necessary to spread education and scientific and technical knowledge through books to achieve it. This is not to suggest that India did not make any efforts in these directions. It did make some half hearted attempts. But relatively not much could be achieved on account of lack of determination and resources, political instability, Sino-Indian and Indo-Pakistan Wars 1962 and 1965 respectively, corruption, brain drain, a faulty education system which encourages learning by rote and excessive emphasis on final examination, etc. However, India being a non-aligned, democratic and secular country, does not believe in censorship. It does not censor any type of literature (except obscene, subversive and pornographic), ideology, political doctrine, etc., for political ends. It can be regarded as one of the champions of intellectual freedom in that part of Asia which definitely and sharply contrasts it with China.

The libraries in China are under control of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture and Chinese Academy of Sciences.
The academic libraries are under control of Ministry of Education and their main objective is to serve research and pedagogical needs of the colleges and universities. These shared among themselves 44 million volumes [4] in 1958, thanks to the big leap forward movement. G. Raymond Nunn [5] reported in 1966 that the Peking University Library was largest among the university libraries with over two million volumes. The Chinese People's University Library collection had also grown to 1.35 million volumes by 1959. In addition, there are scores of university and hundreds of college and technical training institutes libraries. The three earliest universities in India were established in 1857 - a date marking the Indian Revolution against the British. But these were examining bodies (therefore without libraries) and not residential universities which eventually they did become and the universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras Libraries were established in 1864, 1873 and 1901 respectively [6]. Presently the biggest collection of over 400,000 volumes is held by the Banaras Hindu University Library which is far lower than that of Peking University Library. During 1968-69 India had 83 universities and 3112 colleges [7]. About half of these universities were created between the years 1958 and 1968. [8] It suggests a mushroom growth in the number of academic institutions whose libraries are desperately trying to build up a workable collection. Most of them have less than 100,000 volumes and the older libraries' stock is in the range of 100,000 to 300,000 volumes. Carl M. White [9], in his report on the University of Delhi Library (1965), concluded that evidence was overwhelming that book collections are substandard and do not meet the educational needs of the University. If this is the quality of the collection at the University of Delhi which is regarded a leading library with a collection of 235,000 volumes in 1965, strength of the collections at the smaller and medium sized universities can be anybody's guess. The international exchange of books and learned periodicals is an important channel for acquiring foreign books in China. The reason is that it is both difficult to get or send books there through normal book trade channels on account of various restrictions imposed by the Government of China. The interesting part of the story is that China wants to acquire material from foreign countries which is necessary for its scientific and technical development but, in turn, it does not want to tell others about its own work.

This curious problem was resolved to some extent by the Western libraries, societies and institutions which were interested in acquiring the Chinese materials by insisting on getting reading materials in exchange for their own. Leslie T. C. Kuo [10] reported that, in addition to China purchased Western publications worth more than five millions dollars in 1956 - a figure much more higher than what India or even the Soviet Union spent on import of books and learned periodicals. The picture is entirely different in the case of India. Its scientific, technical, and academic work greatly depends upon the West. Most of these institutions are now working out exchange of publications arrangements with their counterparts in the West. But the pity is that we have not much to offer, for the volume of work is relatively small. However, definite progress has been made in the field of exchange of learned periodicals. Therefore, the libraries acquire most of the books by purchase. But the phrase "financial stringency" has become very common and most dreaded in the field of education in general and libraries in particular in India during the last few years. The worse came in 1966 with the devaluation of the Indian rupee (roughly to the tune of fifty per cent) in terms of foreign exchange. The world of Indian scholarship heavily depends upon works in the English language (historical reasons) and consequently academic libraries expend roughly seventy to ninety per cent of their book budgets on imports. The indifference of the state and Central governments and educational administrators was exposed when the grants for books were not proportionately increased. The result was that the libraries did not have the capacity in the post-devaluation period to purchase what they were acquiring (which was not adequate) before devaluation. And it would not be wrong to say that these libraries are still recovering from the shock. No wonder if the Indian economy and industrialization is taking off at snail's pace!

The main difficulty lies in inadequate expenditure on libraries by the universities and proportionately lower allocation of grants for books, periodicals, staff, etc. The Library Committee of the University Grants Commission (1965) [11] recommended that Rupees 15/ (roughly over $ 3.00) per student and Rupees 200/ (roughly over $ 40.00) per teacher and research fellow should be spent on the libraries. A special initial library grant should also be provided in the case of a new university or
college. The Education Commission (1966) in its report [12] concluded that the present position of expenditure on books and periodicals was not satisfactory. It urged drawing up of an integrated plan of library development taking into consideration anticipated increases in enrollment, the school-wise distribution of the students, opening of new subject departments, fields of specialization, research projects, etc. Its most important single recommendation was that no new university, college or department should be set up without taking into account its library needs in terms of staff, books, journals, space, etc. The Commission also reported that five universities expanded on libraries less than one per cent, thirty-four between one and five per cent and four only more than five per cent of their total budget. It recommended that Rupees 25/ (roughly over $ 5.00) per student and Rupees 300/ (roughly over $ 60.00) per teacher or a minimum of 6.5 per cent of the total budget of the college of university should be spent on the libraries. However, this expenditure can also be raised up to ten per cent of the total budget of a new institution. The study should at least be traced back to 1948-49, if not earlier, when the University Education Commission [13] headed by no less a person than Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, scholar and former President of India, stressed the need for good libraries in universities and colleges and recommended that the latter should work up to an optimum of 6.25 per cent of the total budget or Rupees 40/ (roughly over $ 8.00) per student as the annual grant for their libraries. These recommendations are yet to be accepted. The Seminar of College Librarians in Rajasthan (1967) [14] felt that even if these recommendations are accepted, of which there is little hope in future, it is a meagre amount to buy costly foreign books and learned periodicals in the current post-devaluation period. J. L. Sardana [15] reports that though the recurring expenditure on libraries in universities and colleges increased from about Rupees 6.5 millions (well over $ 1.00 million) in 1955-56 to Rupees 17 millions (over $ 3.4 millions) by the end of 1961-62, it was only 1.5-2.3 per cent of the total expenditure on the universities and colleges. And the expenditure on libraries was Rupees 24/ (roughly $ 3.00 in post-devaluation period) per head by 1966. As against this, there are indications that the Chinese Government is providing adequate money for libraries, e.g., the Chinese People's University Library had only about 60,000 volumes in 1949 but the collection grew rapidly to 1.35 million volumes by 1959 and the staff compiled over one hundred catalogues. Leslie T. C. Kuo [16] found that although there is still a scarcity of materials in some fields of research work, library facilities in general have been reported to be adequate.

The centralization of control and operations is a characteristic feature of the Chinese library system. It has given rise to a pattern of library service where different types of libraries form a network in order to coordinate their efforts to yield maximum results. A Library Committee consisting of ten members under the Science and Technology Commission of the State Council was formed in 1957 to coordinate the ordering of foreign literature, chalk out a scheme of subject specialization, prepare a blue print of bibliographic information services and in general for coordinating and improving services of leading libraries to scientific research. Chi Cheng [17] reported in 1959 that the National Library of Peking and the Library of the People's University, Peking are cooperating in centralized cataloguing programme for new books. Another cooperative venture in the offing was the compilation of the National Union Catalogue at the National Library of Peking. J. Szebenyi-Sigmond [18] is of the view that great attention is paid to the bibliographical work and individual libraries are assigned with set bibliographical responsibilities, e.g., Nanking University Library, reports A. Refikov [19], prepares a Union Catalogue of Foreign Journals in the holdings of the Chinese libraries. Though the international book exchange centres are the National Library, Peking and the Chinese Academy of Sciences Library, it is believed that the Peking University Library [20] acts as a clearing house on behalf of the academic libraries' needs for exchange materials. It seems that it not only channelizes all requests or demands to the former two institutions but also coordinates subject specialization in the academic libraries. The publication of catalogues is another area of cooperative enterprise. These make research materials or sources more widely known and assist in the planned development of collections. On the other hand, the Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre, New Delhi is acting as a clearing house of scientific and technical information. But cooperation and coordination

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among academic libraries is almost unknown. There are hardly any schemes of subject specialization, production of a union catalogue, international exchange programme, etc. Often the individual libraries do publish catalogues of important collections held by them, enter into exchange arrangements of learned periodicals from foreign institutions or learned societies, occasionally lend or borrow a book or two within the country on inter-library loan (that, too, without the help of a union catalogue on hit or miss principle), but, by and large, these efforts are uncoordinated and barely manage to leave a few bubbles on the calm sea of Indian librarianship.

Another problem of the Indian academic librarianship is scant use of libraries - books, periodicals, etc., by the undergraduate students. Carl M. White [21] found that an average University of Delhi student was using about eight books as against 60-75 books a year used by his counterpart in the USA. The Head Librarian, University of Bombay in an interview with Bernard J. Toney [22] told that only about ten per cent of the undergraduate students use the library. A.P. Srivastava [23] believes that an average Indian university student devotes less than one hour a day to study beyond class room attendance vis-a-vis students studying for 20-30 hours a week in the Western countries. The answer must be sought, as alluded to earlier, in the wrong emphases in the educational system. Although not much data are available on the use of libraries by students in China, yet it can reasonably be said that the thronged Chinese libraries indicate heavy use. The people are more book conscious or show greater library awareness. A great many cooperative movements were launched and new targets for library service have been set and achieved in China. However, the freedom to read and explore whatever one wishes to, seems to be severely curtailed, for even lending of books is coordinated with pedagogical work of the schools.

Some of the other Indian academic library problems are: tradition of appointing faculty members as honorary librarians over and above the professional librarian, thereby the latter is forced to work under a scholar-layman (who may not know much about the art of librarianship) and take directions from him not only on policy matters but on day-to-day routine work. Lester Asheim [24] hit hard on the reluctance and indifference shown by the educational-administrators to accept the very idea of a professional (trained) librarian. This negative attitude prevented the college and university librarians from having proper status vis-a-vis faculty. Morris A. Gelfand [25] was of the view that this lack of administrative support and understanding is a major impediment in improving academic library services - and certainly it is. However, the Indian library profession and schools took up the challenge during the last two decades and were able to show that competent, qualified people were available and ready to take up, if given a chance, library responsibilities of higher order. It is heartening to note that the scene is gradually changing. The University Grants Commission (UGC) [26] recommended in 1965 that the practice of appointing honorary librarians should be abolished. Earlier in the 1960s the UGC brought about many reforms in the status, salary, and qualifications of academic librarians and John R. Russell [27] while attending the First Seminar of Indian University Librarians (1966) sensed the gratitude of the academic libraries towards the UGC. These looked to it for increasing support in the future, not only in financing, but also in upholding and enforcing high standards for academic libraries. But money is hard to find in India and cuts in the educational and library grants could not be prevented in spite of best efforts of the UGC and Ministry of Education. Most probably this is the reason behind heavy dependence of Indian libraries on gifts of books from individuals, foundations and organisations. Bernard J. Toney [28] reported that the University of Bombay received as much as 45 per cent of its acquisitions in 1964-65 in the form of gifts. The Indian academic librarians solicit gifts and grants, often from abroad, to augment their collections. In addition to numerous less known sources, these have received books as gift from the British Council, Asia Foundation, New Delhi (closed down on account of accusations of Central Intelligence Agency, USA involvement), under Wheat-loan Programme of the USA, American Cultural Centres, etc.

The school libraries play an important role in the formative years of a child's life. If the habit of using libraries or going to books as sources of information and recreation is inculcated in the childhood we can be rest assured that the child will continue to use them throughout his life. It seems that China is working on these lines but in India the indiffer-
ence of school authorities towards libraries is a matter of concern and the library profession in the country has taken up the issue but without much success. Roughly 200 million children out of a population of over 730 millions are attending elementary and secondary schools in China. The education is free and seems to be compulsory and numerous school libraries are scattered all over the huge territory of China. Various cooperative movements launched from time to time led to the establishment of a great number of elementary and middle schools in vast chunks of rural areas. J. G. Brewer [29] reported that the schools had their own libraries containing books suitable to children. In addition, each class had a small library.

However, only 70 million children out of a total population of 523 millions attend the schools in India. The elementary education is free in schools run by government, district and municipal boards. But it is not free in schools run by private organizations though these get grants from the government. Only 62 per cent of children in age bracket 6-11 years and 22 per cent in age bracket 12-14 years are enrolled in the schools though the latter’s number has increased to 725,000 in recent years. [30] But it seems that this number is not enough to cover vast rural and backward areas where a child may have to walk two to four miles to reach the nearest school. The goal of compulsory elementary education by 1981 has been set by the Government of India. The school libraries are not run by trained librarians. Generally a teacher is in charge of libraries. He often considers it another burden and looks after it in his spare time, i.e., if he can find some. The result is the pathetic condition of libraries in the schools. They have been described as small stagnating pools of books. In short, the Indian school libraries suffer from financial difficulties, poor collections, lack of suitable reading materials for children in the regional languages and, not the least, callous negligence of teachers and management. However, the English medium private schools mostly run by the Christian missionary organisations do have good collections of books suitable for children. These books in English are largely imported from Western countries. But the number of such schools is very small and these are concentrated in cities. Moreover, only the children of the upper, upper-middle and at most middle class parents can afford to attend these on account of their exorbitant fees.

This, in short, is the picture of academic libraries in the two countries. Although there is shortage of data about the Chinese developments, yet it is not difficult to surmise that it is clearly ahead of India in this field. It is true that the latter has many problems but so had the Chinese. India represents many values which are cherished in the so-called Free world. And much is at stake to inspire it some day from its deep slumber. I can only wish and pray that day would come soon, for we have a very long and difficult road ahead.

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References


[23] SRIVASTAVA, A P: "University Librarianship in India". In Development of Libraries in New India (New Delhi, 1965), p. 239.


[26] See 11, p. 69.


[28] See 22.
