

## EDITORIAL

### **THE PLACE OF LIBRARIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: A SAGA OF NEGLECT & LACK OF COMMITMENT**

*Education & libraries along with library-sources are inseparable as they together serve the purpose of dissemination of knowledge- a fact that was established from the birth of human civilization. The character of libraries evolved through the progress of our civilization, assumed new dimensions & occupied paramount importance since the days of ancient civilizations. Libraries, in whatever form they may be, are the repositories of knowledge, experience & experiments that are bequeathed to the posterity. Thus in the endless quest for knowledge & truth & also the progress of human civilization the collection of manuscripts, books & journals in a library play invaluable roles. Library as an institution of knowledge dissemination will always remain important. In the domain of higher education the services of libraries as aid to study & education have proved to be sine qua non. Libraries help students form the habit of independent reading & thinking.*

*The state of affairs in library facilities in our country is far from satisfactory. Let us look at the historical perspective to highlight the fact that the situation is not created suddenly, rather it is a logical development emanating from long neglect & lack of commitment. The irony is that there are umpteen numbers of Committees & commissions made very valuable recommendations. There are very little progress; of course there are some islands of quality libraries in institutions, but they are only a few. In view of the massive progress of ICT & its roles as aids to library both content wise & management, the picture in most institutions is unbelievably poor. In an era when we are concerned about quality in higher education we, the AIFUCTO, have been raising various issues with the libraries in a sustained manner. We like to note some such things in this editorial.*

*In India, the libraries existed in ancient, Buddhist & medieval periods, well before printing of book started, in the form of store of manuscripts & they found large number of avid readers. During the British regime, the development of institution libraries as well as public libraries began. But the growth & condition of libraries was not at all satisfactory; in 1917, Calcutta University Education Commission found that in many colleges the library was not treated as essential instruments for teaching-learning improvement. It is interesting to note that the Commission suggested several measures to strengthen the library system. Several other committees & commissions also dwelt on the issues of library development. They rightly suggested that the students & teachers should be given training for proper use of libraries along with increasing grants to libraries.*

*After independence, a number of commissions very correctly took up the matter and made many suggestions. Radhakrishnan (1948-49) Commission strongly recommended the expansion of library services as the libraries provide necessary tools to the teachers as teaching is a cooperative enterprise. The Ranganathan (1957) Committee made a very extensive survey of the library facilities in universities & colleges across the country, organized discussion sessions & made valuable suggestions to the UGC like giving grants for books & journals, the quantum of grants to be determined by the number of students & teachers-research scholars of the institutions. In many ways the recommendations were of far reaching impact on the development of academic libraries in India in the later periods. The Kothary Commission (1964-66) recommendations for the development of libraries marked another important stage in the development of library facilities. The Commission was shocked to note that the recommendations of Radhakrishnan were not implemented. Also it was revealed that the expenditure for library facilities was utterly inadequate. The Commission presented a very disappointing picture of library facilities in India.*

The situation has not improved much since then, as most of the colleges & many universities do not have proper facilities to meet the needs of students & teachers. This low standard of facilities is a big hindrance to quality education. Still now library budgets are extremely inadequate, and even such amounts are not available on a regular & timely basis. Not only the number of books is insufficient but often books having new editions cannot be purchased for paucity of funds. There are inadequate infrastructures; many colleges lack reading rooms. There are colleges where libraries are either not open every day or remain open for limited hours, students are not encouraged to borrow text or reference books. The habit of reading books is the casualty only. It is an irony that when we are talking of quality of education, our libraries which are so important for acquiring knowledge, are languishing.

There are states in India where no posts of librarians are sanctioned and the structure and facilities named as library are only mockery of the term. Even in the states where there are posts of librarians, qualified librarians are not appointed. Recent experience is that in many institutions the posts of librarians are vacant while in some others the number of librarians has been reduced. Though the UGC clearly termed the librarian as an academic staff, in many instances they are bracketed with the non-teaching staff and also denied the UGC pay scales and career advancement facilities. The MHRD & the UGC have accepted AIFUCTO demand of complete parity between librarians, DPEs & teachers, we have experienced blatant violations of this basic principle. The MHRD has declared the parity but the UGC, while declaring librarians as academic staff, often treat them with discriminations. The librarians must not be deprived of the opportunities available to the teachers. We still find the UGC orders discriminatory to the librarians. The AIFUCTO must remain vigilant so that the injustice perpetrated by the MHRD/UGC in the past does not occur again.

It is most disturbing that many state governments do not contribute any fund towards the development of libraries. This, in many states, entirely depends on the UGC grants which are insufficient & inadequate to meet the requirements of the vast explosion in the field of knowledge.

In a technology driven world, the role of library & library sources has assumed great importance. The universities & some self financing rich institutions having funds update their libraries through e-books, online journals & other IT facilities. But those institutions which have no funds of their own cannot do that & the UGC networking is beyond their access.

We should also point out that many studies, as well our field studies, show that our institutional libraries sometimes are under utilized. Low use or non-use amounts to wastage of facilities and are unacceptable. The teachers have a responsibility to motivate the students to use library facilities wherever it is available. This less than optimum use are often used to cut the library budgets. We may take the lesson from the Commission of the British regime: there should be orientation & training of students so that they learn how to use & also understand the importance of using library for their career building. Teachers along with the library staff & administration should try to understand such underutilization & then take appropriate measure to rectify the faults and improve the situation.

There should be internal library committees in every institution involving all stake holders-the administration, librarians, teachers, researchers, non-academic staff & students to suggest ways & measures to make libraries most useful & productive.

Finally, the importance of library & library -sources in fostering research in all disciplines needs to be stressed with state & central governments. With new generations of teachers who are IT savvy, building library facilities to extend all help in the realm of library & library resources is the need of the hour. The neglect & lack of commitment must come to an end & a proper library policy at the national level must be implemented. The AIFUCTO with its all India presence will cooperate fully in such an exercise.