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## THE RISE AND FALL OF SAPRU HOUSE LIBRARY

S. ANSARI\*

The imposing teak wood main doors of Sapru House Library now remain locked from inside. Readers wishing to look for some literature have to walk through a side gallery, from behind the staircase to the Auditorium, to reach the reading room. The reading room itself wears a deserted look. The day I visited the library, there was no one in the reading room, save two persons. Both were lowly employees of the Library, one of whom was warming up his lunch box against a room heater near the entrance.

It was not always so with Sapru House Library. There was a time when the Reading Room was bursting to its brims with readers. On certain days, one had often to wait for a while, before one could get a seat in the reading hall. Its readership constituted who's who of Delhi's academics, nay, India's social scientists. The doyens of Indian journalism could be spotted in the library any evening.

It was in the winter months of 1943 when some 40 distinguished public men gathered in the premises of the Federation of Indian Chambers of

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Commerce and Industry to establish an independent centre. A provisional Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the noted jurist, drafted rules and regulations and the Indian Council of World Affairs was registered under the Societies Act 1861 on March 31, 1945. The famous Asian Relations Conference of 1947 was sponsored by the Council. The Sapru House, the present headquarters of the ICWA, were occupied by the Council in June 1956. Among its objectives, the Council was "to develop a body of informed opinion on world affairs, and India's relations thereto through study, research, discussion, lectures, exchange of ideas and information etc., with other bodies in India and abroad engaged in similar activities". The Library of the Council had a modest beginning with 17 volumes of RIIA: *Survey of International Affairs* gifted to the Council by the Chatham House, London. If the size of collection is any measure of greatness of a library, Sapru House Library could never be counted even among the modestly big libraries. For even on the eve of partition of its collection in 1970, it had a total stock of only 1,20,000 books. What made the library great was the quality of collection and the level of service. It was these two things which made it a beehive of academicians from near and far, from India and from other countries of the world. Within a short span of a few years of its establishment the Library became a depository library for documents of UN and its agencies. The library started acquiring, in original or on microfilm, old files of world class newspapers viz. *The New York Times*, *The Time*, *Japan Times*, *Japan Official Gazettes*, *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *A1-Ahram (Egypt)*, *A1-Amal (Beirut)*, *Le Monde*, *Globe and Mail* etc. The years of fifties and sixties witnessed the zenith of cold war and access to literature from countries behind the so called "Iron Curtain" became difficult. Sapru House Library was the only place where *Survey of China Mainland Press*, *American Universities Field Staff Reports* and press releases of *Hsinhua News Agency* were available.

The event that proved a turning point in the growth of Sapru House Library was the setting up of the Indian School of International Studies in 1955. The School which was originally affiliated to the Delhi University became a deemed to be university in 1961. It was established "to organise teaching and research on international relations and world affairs, to promote regional studies, more specially on Asian countries and to train students in methods of research and in scientific study of the subject".

With Prof. A. Appadorai, a one-time secretary to the Bandung Conference, the Council served as an informal wing of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Govt. of India. Visiting dignitaries made it a point to address ICWA. Dag Hammarskjold, Edgar Heath, Philip Noel-Baker, Alexi Kosigin could be heard in the spacious auditorium of the Council. Such visits benefitted the library a great deal, in that, official documents, the one category of literature very difficult to come by through commercial channel, started pouring in, and enabled the Library to conceive and bring out two very valuable reference tools-- *Documents on Asian Affairs* and *Select articles on current affairs*. The two publications were soon joined by *India and World Affairs: An annual bibliography*.

A small but dedicated team of library staff under the dynamic leadership of its youthful librarian Girja Kumar and with Ranganathan's philosophy of aggressive librarianship shaped by the Five Laws of Library Science:

Books are for use,  
Every reader his/her book  
Every book its reader  
Save the time of the reader, and  
Library is a growing organism,

helped provide access to the rich collection of research material built up in

the library to all those who visited its precinct; soon the library organised a press clipping section where clippings collected from 15 to 20 newspapers - Indian and foreign - were grouped by subjects. The files provided a cross section of opinion on world events. The *Human Relations Area Files* acquired by the library proved very useful for background information. The doors of the reading room were open through out the year - except three national holidays - from 9 in the morning to 8 in the night.

While the sense of direction of the founding fathers of both the ICWA and the ISIS, the dedication of the staff and the availability of basic research material, were important factors in making the library a unique place of ressearch, its life blood was the research activities undertaken by the ICWA under various projects, and research work of the faculty members and students of the School. No library can develop in a vacuum no matter what amount of financial resources are pumped in for acquiring literature. Similarly even the most dedicated staff will find it difficult to give its best if no users are there nagging in day-in day-out for relevant research material for their project.

This fact has been amply confirmed by the rise and fall of the Sapru House Library. Between 1945 to 1969 the library functioned as one unit with one librarian and one Chairman of the Library Committee. To its patrons it was not the library of the ICWA or library of the ISIS but only Sapru House Library. The fatal hand of destiny struck it in 1969 when the ISIS merged in Jawahar Lal Nehru University and its faculty and research scholars moved to the suburb of Qutub Minar 8 to 10 k. m. away from Sapru House. Between 1955 to 1970 many more research organisations had come up in the field of social sciences, and the Council had to vie with many more organisations for financial support from the funding agencies

for its various projects. Its research activities were coming to a grinding halt. Consequently all efforts of Chandra Reddy Committee or Chagla Committee to develop a mechanism whereby Library collection could be made accessible to the school scholars failed to revive it. Ultimately Ganguli Committee gave a formula to divide the collection between the two co-owners - the ICWA and ISIS, nay, the JNU.

The Council locked out its doors to its erstwhile co-partner and today its library presents a picture of forelorn place where readers drop in only if they find no seat in the adjacent canteen. The Council is still receiving valuable research material from various agencies from all over the world. But the absence of research activity in the Council and denial of service to the research community from other centres has affected its financial base negatively leading to reduction in size and in quality of staff in the library, which in its turn affects the library service. The user of a library are its best public relations agency. Once the readers cease to use or are prevented from use no amount of richness in collection, can turn a place into a library.

#### Notes

Sho Kuwajima

History of libraries in India is full of diversity. The Dwarkadas Library started in Lahore in the 1920s (now located in Chandigarh) by Lala Lajpat Rai, once 'Extremist', along with the liberal atmosphere of the Punjab National College, trained up many young intellectuals and revolutionaries like Sardar Baghat Singh (1907-1931) who was hanged. In Kerala where literacy rate is 89.8 % in 1991 Census, the explanation for this high rate literacy cannot be complete without referring to the history

of the library movement which involved many Malayali (language of Kerala) writers. The work of S. R. Ranganathan (1892-1972), the first Librarian of the University of Madras, who formulated Five Laws of Library Science, is well known in the world.

Sapru House Library which is situated in New Delhi also occupies a remarkable place as it provided exceedingly useful facilities to the Indian and foreign scholars as the centre of the international studies in India of the 1960s. It had an open atmosphere which was inconceivable in Japan of those days, and was ready to respond to the needs of these scholars by making an area-wise classification and adopting other positive methods.

The development of India's Foreign Policy and the growth of this Library went side by side in the 1950s and 1960s.

Mr. S. Ansari worked in the heyday of this Library. Later, he joined Jamia Millia Islamia as the Chief Librarian of Dr. Zakir Husain Library and put this University Library on a firm basis.