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## Chapter 11

# Reference Service

### GENERAL

Reference service forms the penultimate stage in the library's achievement of its ultimate end of cultivating the mental resources of the community.

(16; p214)

*Amulya* actually means *Harmonious integration*. *Seva* means *service*. Thus *Amulya Seva* means *Service leading to harmonious integration*. The two-worded term-of-art *Reference Service* really connotes *Service leading to a harmonious integration of the reader and the book*.

(17; Vol. 2, 1965, p277)

The two factors determining the stages of evolution of reference and documentation service are then:

- Reading Public – that is the extent of literacy and of scholarship; and
- Documents – that is the number of books or macro documents and the number of articles or micro documents produced in a year.

(17; Vol. 2, 1965, p281)

The change in the first parameter-reader-has made intensive reference service as an absolute social necessity.

(17; Vol. 2, 1965, p290)

### COME-MY-FRIEND ATTITUDE

The floor of a library is always believed to be a place of great equality. There we meet at the democratic level of the world of thought and its records. But some readers set this at naught. Our courage in such situations should be drawn from the words of our national poet (Rabindranath Tagore): *Come friend, come my hero, give us courage to serve man even while bearing the brand of infamy from him*. The moral is *no pestering*.

Some one has said, *you must beware of bludgeoning the mind into sensibility*. That is advice worth remembering.

(6; Sec. 333)

### **GENIALITY**

The first requisite to initiate readers is geniality. Next, it goes without saying that the Librarian must have a clear grasp of all that he is expected to initiate them into. He should also be an adept in psychology and in methods of teaching. He must know how to make the initiation absolutely free from boredom; nay, must make it pleasurable. He should know how to charge it with mirth and laughter by telling stories; and indeed the anecdotal aroma of the initiation should be so strong and enduring that readers recall it at the instance of the feeblest association.

(9; Sec. 231)

### **ANALOGY FROM RAMAYANA**

A reference librarian has models for himself in the fourfold picture painted by Valmiki. He must emulate Bharata in hard work sailing on the steam of his own conscience and in knowing thereby every document in the library, so as to make the library yield ten times more result than it would otherwise. This he must do, not for his own private purpose but for the good of others. To be able to live such a life, he must emulate Satrugna in continually controlling the little ego in him. He should emulate Laxmana in serving readers efficiently and without any eye on reward or praise or even a word of approbation. He should emulate Rama in geniality, charm, ease of accessibility, freedom from any sense of prestige, equableness of temper, love and respect for readers, willingness to share their problems, their difficulties, and the joy coming on them with the solution of the problem and, above all, in attaining competence of a high order.

(8; Sec. E35)

### **TAKE MY HAND AND KNOW THE TRUTH**

When the material, technical, and red-tape activity of conducting a library begins to take precedence over the experience of living, sooner or later we shall have to pay in ennui and decadence. Hence the need for introducing a human agency – a *someone* – to redeem everything else by putting them to active use. When the reader comes amidst the library, there must be *someone* to say:

*Take my hand;  
For I have passed this way,  
And know the truth.*

(6; Sec. 312)

## **IDENTIFICATION WITH REFERENCE SERVICE**

Losing oneself in the service of readers is the best form of insuring one's health. Overstaying with readers in the library may look like a task, until one gets into the full swing of enthusiasm for the work. But once one gets into the swing, the mind will easily transcend the limitations of time. Nay, it will find its delight only in one setting, and that is, the setting provided by a library full of books and full of readers feeling fully at home in the confidence that personal help will be forthcoming whenever necessary.

(4; Sec. 3917)

## **PRISTINE PURITY OF REFERENCE SERVICE**

All stain of egoistic choice, of hankering after personal profit, and of self-regarding desire must be extirpated from the reference librarian while effecting contact between reader and book. There must be no demand for fruit and for seeking for reward; the only fruit is the fulfillment of establishing contact between books and readers; the only reward is a constant progression towards the attainment of the ideals set up by the Laws of Library Science. The reference librarian should allow nothing to creep in to stain the purity of the self-giving. His only object in action should be to serve, to fulfill, and to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Sakti in her works. There must be no pride of the instrument, no vanity, no arrogance. The books constitute purusha as Akshara Brahma (Scriptural form of God). The readers constitute Prakriti manifesting itself as Manushya Prakriti (human manifestation of nature).

(1; Sec. E412)

## **TRINITY IN REFERENCE SERVICE**

A library is a trinity made up of books, readers, and staff – particularly the reference staff. We have a library only at the moments of all the three factors standing integrated. The reference staff are the power mediating between reader and book and stimulating integration.

(8; Sec. E41)

## **LIGHT FROM THE VEDAS**

*The reader-guest is supreme to you.*

*Give service with all attention and in all sincerity.*

*Give him service to the entire capacity at your command.*

*Give him service in all modesty and in full freedom from any touch of prestige or ego.*

*Give him service in full measure lest there should be any offence to the Laws of Library Science.*

*Acquire the best of knowledge and information for giving him in your service.*

## ***Reference Service***

This is the import of some of the passages in the Vedas. These passages occur in the Taittiriya-Upanishat.

*(8; Chap. 2)*

### **JOY OF REFERENCE SERVICE**

The joy of the reference librarian should be derived not only from the consciousness that he himself had practically done everything, but from the sight of the dawn of joy in the face of the reader who has been helped to help himself.

*(6; p119)*

### **TEMPO FOR READING IS MOMENTARY**

Save the time of the reader. Save the tempo of the reader. Physical hunger for food is compelling. Physical thirst for water is inexorable. Neither will extinguish itself by its not being attended to. Each will persist through time till satisfied. But mental hunger for books is not compelling in the case of most people. Mental thirst for information is not inexorable in the case of most people. Both of them are fleeting in their nature. They both die out, unless satisfied immediately on their taking shape. No time-lag should come between demand and supply. The tempo for reading is often momentary. It should be harnessed at the very moment. That is the message of the Fourth Law.

*(6; p34)*

### **ENRICHMENT THROUGH REFERENCE SERVICE**

To a reference librarian who really enjoys his work, every contact with an enquirer and pursuit of every new problem provide an additional opportunity for enrichment. It gives a delightful exercise to his flair. It invariably enhances his mastery over reference books. For, the pursuit of a new problem may disclose potentialities which were unnoticed hitherto.

*(6; p122)*

### **FACET ANALYSIS**

Questions of readers are usually wide off the mark. They are often oblique. But the cumulated experience of a reference librarian with a variety of readers, day in and day out, often enables him to think in consonance with the reader. His discipline in facet analysis in classification enables him to break the vague question of a reader into all its relevant facets. He can then work with the reader in finding out the focus in each of the facets. In this way, the question of the reader can take a clearer shape.

*(6; p118)*

## UNDERSTANDING THE READER

It is only a sympathetic, patient, and clever questioning, clothed as conversation, which can clinch the specific subject sought by a reader. Even then, it may happen that a prolonged pursuit, by the method of trial and error, is necessary and that specific subject can be reached only when the right book itself is reached. All this may look fearful, but sincerity to help reader, determination to succeed, and perseverance uncontaminated by indolence or impatience, will provide the reference librarian with the necessary acumen to know what exactly a reader wants and what exact book will satisfy his want.

(6; p118-9)

## OBJECTIVE TIME AND SUBJECTIVE TIME

The Fourth Law distinguishes between subjective time and objective time. When we wait at the airport expecting a dear one from a far-off land, every minute looks like an hour to us. When we are losing ourselves in enjoying something, even an hour runs out as quickly as a minute. If time is hanging on us, each second strikes our consciousness; we become impatient, sour at heart, and restless. If we are kept busily absorbed in some work or thought, time races; but we are composed; we are even surprised that a long period slips out without our realising it. This difference is due to the difference between objective and subjective time. The Fourth Law asks us to save objective time as well as subjective time.

(6; p34)

## EVERY BOOK ITS READER

Every book its reader. The book pleads with the librarian as follows: *I am inert. Of my own accord, I am unable to leap into my reader's hands. My voice is not audible to him. I depend on you for my being taken to my reader or my reader to be taken to me.* Every book left for long on the shelf pining away for its reader, covered with dust, and untouched by readers, would leave a curse on the librarian. It will leave a curse on the library authority too, if it does not provide librarians, adequate in quality and sufficient in number, to find readers for every book.

(6; p31)

## UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE

It is difficult for a librarian to escape being misunderstood or misinterpreted by some reader or other. Sometimes, it leads to an unseemly situation on the floor of the library. It makes one feel miserable. But it is not all one-sided. Probably for every one such mishap, there are hundreds of pleasant experiences. But the scar of misery lasts longer than the feel of a kind touch. A librarian should learn to heal quickly the wound occasionally caused by unreasonable readers. To minimise its recurrence, a librarian will have to be firm. To be firm without offence, to combat the momentary unreasonableness of a reader without losing him as a customer, and to be good, kind, and helpful to readers







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