

HISTORY OF
DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SYSTEM
1922--2025

The Delhi University Library began in 1922 with a collection of mere 1380 gift books. During the first decade of its existence it functioned from shifting locales. In 1933 it managed to get a relatively stable space, viz. the 'Dance Hall' of the Old Viceregal Lodge (the present office of the Vice-Chancellor). Sir Maurice Gwyer, Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1938 to 1950 was instrumental in the blossoming of the Library in its new locale. Under his care, it was transformed into "a place as well of beauty as of learning". One of the early benefactors of the library was Shri G.D. Birla.

The Library moved to its present locale in the heart of the Campus on December 01, 1958. Prior to the appointment of a formal librarian, the entire collection was looked after by a "Library Committee" (amongst some of its office bearers were noted historians Professor I.H.Qureshi, Dr.T.G.P.Spear and Scientist Professor D.S. Kothari) and Honorary Librarians. Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, father of the Modern Library Science movement in India (then Librarian of University of Madras) and Professor S. Das Gupta, the first Librarian (1942-66) were the moving spirits behind its constant upgradation in the University apparatus.

During this early phase of the Library up to about 1960, four significant strides were taken in four altogether different fields. The Law Faculty Library, established in 1924, became a pioneer in legal education in the country. The forties witnessed the emergence of libraries of the Central Institute of Education (CIE, now called Department of Education), Department of Modern European Languages (MEL) and the renowned Delhi School of Economics (DSE). Inaugurating the CIE on December 19, 1947, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's first Education Minister visualized it as a research centre that would turn out 'model' teachers for schools and be a 'beacon light for training institutions of the country'. Over the years, library of the Institute has played a complementary role in achieving this noble objective. Library of the MEL Department has been the hub of magnificent collection of books and periodicals on European Languages, culture and literary studies since 1948. (Recently, this Library has been segmented into two: (i) the Pablo Neruda Library, named after the Chilean Poet-Laureate, houses the collection of the Department of Germanic and Romance Studies, and (ii) the Library of the Slavonic & Finno Ugrian Studies, which is located in the South Campus).

The Library of the DSE, better known as the Ratan Tata Library (RTL) began in 1949. In the last more than fifty years, it has not only become a partial depository of publications of the United Nations and several other International Organisations (30,000 such publications are available) but has also developed a phenomenal collection of 40,000 documents of the Central and State Governments, including Reports of various Committees and Commissions. The RTL is not confined to Economics. Since the 1960s, Departments of Sociology, Geography and Commerce, too, have become its integral components.

The decade of the 1960s was noticeable for a new trend in the growth of the Delhi University Library. Starting with the Faculty of Music and Fine Arts, several Departmental libraries took roots in Faculties of Arts, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Science, and Management Studies. Between 1962 and 1965 all major departments in the Science Faculty developed their separate collections. Some of these have, in more recent years, grown as nuclei of Advanced Centres (CARPA, CARB, CARC- for Physics & Astrophysics, Botany and Chemistry respectively). The Faculty of Mathematics, established in 1963, also started its own collection which has been growing steadily since then. The incorporation of the Departments of Statistics, Operational Research, and Computer Science within the Faculty (now designated as Mathematical Sciences) has further widened the scope of its holdings. The Library of the Department of Chinese & Japanese Studies (because of the addition of Korean studies, the Department has been renamed as East Asian Studies in 2004) was started in 1967. Before the close of the decade, the Faculty of Management Studies also established its own library in 1969.

The 1970s were marked by certain meanderings. At one level, access to the Central Library was closed for the undergraduate students. But at another level, four Zonal Libraries located in the four cardinal directions and spanning over the entire length and breadth of the city of Delhi (but outside the Main Campus) were created for such students. Presently, only the South Zone Library is functioning --- the rest were closed between 1998 and 2003. Libraries of the two Law Centres and that of the University of Delhi South Campus were also initiated in the 1970s.

Major structural transformation of the Delhi University Library took place in the early 1980s. Between 1981 and 1985 different degrees of financial and administrative decentralization resulted in the emergence of the Central Reference Library (CRL), South Campus Library, Central Science Library(CSL), Arts Library, RTL and Law Library as we know them today. However, the Delhi University Library System (DULS), of which these libraries are integral parts, continues to be headed by the University Librarian.

In the last two decades the DULS has also taken initiatives to create a few specialized libraries and focus on newer academic disciplines. A library for the visually challenged scholars (Braille Library) has within it an Audio Book Research Centre with nearly 300 cassettes. During the Platinum Jubilee Year of the Delhi University, a separate Audio-Visual Library was added to the CRL. 450 educational video cassettes of high academic quality covering various academic disciplines were acquired in 1998-99 from agencies such as UGC sponsored Consortium for Educational Communication, IGNOU, Sahitya Academy and Tata Institute of Social Sciences. The Library of the Faculty of Music & Fine Arts treasures 1800 gramophone records in addition to substantive non-book audio-video material. The South Campus Library is taking keen interest in areas of applied sciences such as Plant Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, Biophysics, Microbiology and Operational Research. Similarly, the Central Science Library in the Main Campus is specially sensitive to the needs of the Ambedkar Centre for Biomedical Research, and Departments of Agrochemicals & Pest Management and Environmental Science. Keeping pace with the times, libraries of the Women Studies and Development Centre and the Non-Collegiate Women's Education Board have also grown within the DULS.

The DULS is largely funded by the University Grants Commission. Occasionally, a few libraries have also received some endowment funds through the Government of India. Donations from individuals or private trusts, such as that of Ratan Tata, are not too frequent and are often forthcoming only for specific purpose. To illustrate, the Ratan Tata Trust contributed towards the building of the RTL and later its annexe as well. In 1992 the Government of Netherlands, as part of its world wide effort in international cooperation, bestowed a benefaction of Dutch Guilders 80,000/- including an endowment of Dutch Guilders 43,750/- (App.Rs.9,50,000/-) for establishing a fully airconditioned "Professor Sukhamoy Chakravarty Study Room" in RTL in memory of the internationally renowned Professor. Barring the CSL, whose annual grant for both books and periodicals is little over two crores, even the relatively bigger libraries (CRL, RTL, Arts and the South Campus) receive grants ranging between Rupees twenty and fifty lakhs only. Most other libraries of the DULS function with extremely meagre resources—their funds generally range between Rs. 50,000/- and 5,00,000/-

Shockingly scant financial resources become all the more glaring when the profile of users of the DULS is kept in view. In addition to taking care of the requirements of nearly 30,000 postgraduate students, the System is also catering to the research needs of nearly 7000 teachers and over 5000 research scholars (working for their M.Phil/ Ph.D. Degrees) belonging to over 40 departments.

Further, many libraries of the DULS have also been serving hundreds of bonafide research scholars from different parts of India and abroad. However, the Faculties of Medical Sciences, Technology and of Ayurvedic and Unani Medicine remain outside the coverage of the DULS.

The Present holdings of the DULS include:

- (a) Over 14,04,000 volumes.
- (b) Regular subscription for about 2000 journals. Approximately 4000 journals are available online through Campus-Wide Networking operational in the CSL.
- (c) Over 13,000 Ph.D Theses. The Library brings out a volume entitled 'Doctoral Research' every year on the eve of the Annual Convocation. It gives Abstracts of Theses on which degrees are conferred at the Convocation.
- (d) Over 13,000 M.Phil Dissertations.
- (e) Nearly 700 manuscripts of which Sanskrit and Persian account for 480 and 153 respectively. There are a few in Arabic, Urdu and Pushto as well.

The Library possesses invaluable books such as Foster's Glossary/ Vocabulary, published in 1799, the complete set of the Proceedings of the Royal Society from 1688 onwards, the Greenwich Observations from the early 19th century, the Catalogue of the British Museum in 250 volumes and the Catalogue of the Library of Congress in 300 volumes.

Looking beyond the Centenary

Notwithstanding the aforesaid survey of the horizontal spread of the DULS, extending all over the city and comprising as many as 34 libraries (listed at the end), the System has indeed a long way to go for scaling some notable heights. Inspired by an instinct of self-analysis and introspection, Dr. C.D.Deshmukh, former Vice-Chancellor (1962-67) had invited Dr. Carl M. White, a renowned American Librarian in 1965 to conduct a survey of the Delhi University Libraries. Even after more than 40 years of the existence of the Delhi University, Dr. White was constrained to note :

"The hard fact to be faced is that the University of Delhi inherited an educational tradition which treated the library as a conventional but useless accessory".

The year 2022 would mark the Centenary of both University of Delhi and its Library System. The DULS must set the goal of becoming a library of the 21st century. A plan worked out for a decade (1978-88) had underlined: "The DULS needs to develop and serve on the lines of the norms of some major universities of the world... where library systems play the role of an 'Academic Workshop' in research and higher learning". Nearly two decades have elapsed since then and yet the goal looks more of a mirage.

The automation and computerization of the system started in 1999 is yet to take off in a meaningful manner. Most of the libraries of the system have not taken even preliminary steps in this direction. Development of the Union Catalogue Division which was expected to record and show the location of all books journals and other materials in various libraries of the system needs to be operationalised through computerization of all libraries within the DULS. We must also move in the direction of mechanization of book-shelving, book tracking and stock-taking.

Except at the RTL, and to a very limited extent at the East Asian Studies Library, there is hardly any documentation of periodicals being done elsewhere ---- not even in the CRL. Acquisition of readily available databases will have to be expedited but it would also require buttressing through regular documentation and bibliographic services by competent and professionally trained personnel.

The present building, originally conceived as the Central Library of the University, has now been reduced to Central Reference Library. And yet, the available physical space is woefully inadequate. Aesthetics have been sacrificed to artificially create stacking structures. Indeed, paucity of space is being felt by almost all libraries of the DULS. The world over, big and functional libraries create 'Depository Libraries' which house old, rare and less used publications that can be recalled on special request. While this is an absolutely immediate need, the DULS in 2025 must have an elegant space of at least 2 million square feet.

Finally, Library in the capital city of the linguistically varied and rich country and which also happens to be the library of country's premier university, should be looking forward for a full-fledged library of Indian Languages, specially classical languages (Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Arabic and Persian).

Libraries under the Delhi University Library System

(Listed in an alphabetical order)

Audio Book Research Centre
African Studies
Arts Library
Botany Department
Braille
Campus Law Library
Central Reference Library
Central Science Library
Chemistry Department
Computer Centre
Computer Science
East Asian Studies
Education Department
English Department
Germanic & Romance Studies
History Department
Law Centre-I
Law Centre-II
Library & Information Science
Linguistics Department
Management Studies
Mathematical Sciences
Music & Fine Arts
Non-Collegiate Women Education Board
Philosophy Department
Physics & Astrophysics
Ratan Tata Library
Slavonic & Finno Ugrian Studies
S.P.Jain Centre of Management
Social Work Department
South Campus
South Zone Undergraduate Library
Women Studies and Development Centre
Zoology Department

