

# ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY<sup>★</sup>

For any inauguration you start by saying that you are extraordinarily pleased to be here to inaugurate. I would like to submit this time that I really feel very happy to do so.

For most of my scientific career, I have worked in one of such buildings as this namely, the library. In the later part of my career, I have been totally dependent on another area i.e. the system studies. It is often said in England that changes in cabinet are decided in the clubs. I suspect that scientific findings are first conceived in the libraries. In my career as a scientist, I found library not only a place of inspiration, a place for originating ideas, but also a place to run away from routine jobs and various kinds of disturbances. There has always been an unsatiable desire to get absorbed amongst the books and journals. If you have not visited library for a week you feel that you have missed some journal in your discipline. This is something like not seeing Sunday movie on television. You start getting upset and worried. Before you know where you are, you are constantly in the library opening the magazines from the mailbag before the librarian gets a chance to open them. Sometimes librarians are nice, they tell you that you are doing a librarian's job, but you get on with all this. Librarians themselves can be great sources of inspiration.

One of the difficulties we face in our country is the lack of proper scientific and technological environment, a kind of sustained culture in the pursuit of science & technology. Secondly we are too poor to afford many good laboratories. But all these things to an extent are made up by excellent libraries with rich collection of journals, books, magazines, monographs and various other facilities that go with information dissemination. They take you away for some time from miserable surroundings and transfer you to some of the outstanding contributions of great scientists and you feel to be in a blissful environment. It is this that makes the difference

between a good and a poor research laboratory. One has only to read memoirs of Feynman or even J Oppenheimer to know how much the existence of good library facilities at Princeton University determine many of their creative contributions, specially in elementary particles.

In our case, we had a disadvantage. The libraries were originally scattered in a number of buildings and the persons who were posted to libraries initially were the persons who did not want to be there in the first place. Often they felt that you were disturbing them. If you rush up to ask for a book, you really have offended them. It was mainly because of the fact that we have not given the libraries the importance we ought to have given to them. But I am happy that at last we have got a building and that Defence Science Library has shown signs of a great deal of reinvigoration. The Defence Science Journal has come up well and some of the special issues are also becoming important and relevant.

DESIDOC has been a great source of help personally to me, whenever I needed a reference or information. Unfortunately, *South Block is too far for me to rush in here to look at the journals, much as I would like to do.* People are helpful to me by providing this kind of information. But what I liked more was the fact that they not only provide information but are happy in sharing it. Often I found them saying that you asked for this reference, but have you checked up this reference which is much better? I am very grateful to them for this. All these activities you can perform only when you have a good building and also the facilities. To an extent, I think, in every country, libraries are breaking in their feet, breaking in their foundations. We are now suffering in an age of information pollution, i.e., too much of information, too much of it, some of the information is patently wrong, and there is too much of it.

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★ Speech delivered by Dr. V.S. Arunachalam, SA to RM, at the inauguration of New Building of DESIDOC and ISSA on 02 August 1988.

We may have to consider how we can use the information effectively and store it. From the stock of books we have to go in for miniaturisation of information, may be to laser disk or microfiche, etc., as we cannot accommodate all books and journals, howsoever big the buildings may be. They would occupy the whole campus. Some of these are unpalatable decisions because we would like to see huge volume of journals in our library. But what is going to happen is, instead you will see a small computer terminal telling you it is available on a laser disk. I think we ought to be prepared for this.

Also, we find that many of our colleagues do not go to the library. At one stage, in Defence Metallurgical Laboratory, Hyderabad, I used to look into the list as to how many of them have borrowed books at the week end. Many of my

colleagues came to know of it and suddenly everybody started getting the books issued on Fridays, and promptly returning the same on Mondays. But gradually we have to persuade them, because a great deal of information can be useful and we can avoid duplication. It can help us to leapfrog, but there is also a danger that we go on reading but not be creative enough. I think, this kind of risk we ought to take.

I hope that the new building of DESIDOC would provide them an opportunity to see how a modern library ought to be. More than anything else we have to see how they can reduce the dimensions, so that the library can become versatile.

I have great pleasure in inaugurating this building.

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We can be knowledgeable with other men's knowledge, but we cannot be wise  
with other men's wisdom.

— Michel de Montaigne