

that is in us to give without thought of reward, we will receive the thanks of those whom we help; what is more important, we will have the satisfaction of knowing that we have done a job worth doing in good, workmanlike fashion.

THE RAMAKRISHNA LIBRARY

A SMALL LIBRARY IN A SMALLER COLONY IN THE
SUNNY PACIFIC

D. KRISHNAMURTI

'I WANT the measurements of a tennis court. Can you give me the information?' asked an unexpected distinguished visitor on a sunny afternoon. The library has no sports encyclopaedia nor any book on tennis. The visitor, who was a big official in the locality, wanted to lay out a new tennis court in his compound, and he required the correct measurements. He stayed for a few minutes, and was talking to the Chairman of the library managing committee about the needs of the town. In the meantime we were able to locate the information required in one of the few smaller general encyclopaedias in the library. He noted down the information in his diary, and taking our visitor's book, remarked that the existence of this library was one of the reasons which justified Nandi's claim to be the cultural centre of Fiji. He added that he had been hunting for this information for the last few days, and said he was glad to get it in our library.

We get similar enquiries regarding trade, tourism, overseas educational facilities, etc. The enquirers are both from Fiji and beyond. We were able to give them most of the particulars required, and also direct them to proper places for additional information. On two occasions we had to get trade directories from New Zealand and Australia to answer inquiries about some business agency possibilities for Swiss and Canadian products.

BEGINNINGS

This is the first time in the annals of Fiji that a public library has provided such an information service, and pursued it, if necessary, to overseas sources. Previously the few libraries in Fiji have confined themselves to 'education and recreation.'

The Ramakrishna Library was founded in 1928 by Mr. Narayanaswamy Naidu, formerly of Lautoka. He gave a piece of land,

Mr. Krishnamurti is Librarian of the Ramakrishna Library, Nandi, Fiji. He has recently become a member of the NZLA.

a small building and a good collection of books, especially in South Indian languages. The library was then transferred to the then India Sanmarga Ikya Sangam, the premier educational and cultural institution in the islands. After a few years of vigorous activity, it went into oblivion for various reasons.

Sri Swami Rudranada, the President of the Fiji branch of the Ramakrishna mission, made a world tour in 1949-50. He saw the great services the libraries were rendering in western countries, and he then decided to revive this library as a means of mass education. He brought a qualified and experienced librarian from India in 1952. The control of the institution was also transferred from the TISI Sangam to the Mission in the latter part of 1952. An ad hoc committee consisting of leading lawyers, legislators, businessmen, journalists, educators and peasant leaders belonging to different communities inhabiting the colony was formed to assist the work and organisation of the library. The Director of Education was chosen as the patron.

INAUGURATION

The library had to be built up more or less from scratch. Only fewer than a thousand books could be salvaged from the earlier collections, and most of them proved to be books for school children. The original building had also become unsuitable to house a library. New rooms were taken on a rental basis, and strenuous efforts were made to collect and acquire books and publications from 1953. Finally the library was formally inaugurated as a free public library in April 1954 by the Director of Education.

It now has five thousand books, and gets currently more than 350 periodicals. These do not include the several hundreds of pamphlets, administrative reports, etc. It can be said that the library is one of the two largest libraries in the South Pacific Islands. The books have been classified according to the Colon system of classification, and a card catalogue is being prepared. Lack of staff is the principal reason for delay in the completion of the catalogue. Owing to lack of space, the majority of the juvenile books in the library are at present with the local high school on loan. But the library is keeping a few of the important books for children, and also the juvenile periodicals.

SERVICE

When we revived the library, story-telling to the children was a daily feature. This had to be given up due to the increase in the office work.

The library has a 16mm. projector, and instructional films are also screened for public benefit by the chairman of the managing committee (Sri Swami Rudranada). He also screened pictures specially for the students of the local high school in the local theatre as a part of their visual education programme.

Documentaries were borrowed from the big film library with our education department which keeps a good selection of some Commonwealth pictures as well as British documentaries. Pictures

were also borrowed from the Office of the Commissioner for India in Fiji, and Pakistan Information Service, Sydney. The Czechoslovak State Film Unit has presented us with two puppet pictures which are very popular. Three documentaries (one with Hindi commentary) were also sent by them. The Hungarian Film Unit has also sent a documentary about child welfare.

An old van has been converted into a sort of travelling library, but this van is not very serviceable. The library requires a small bookmobile which can take the equipment and accessories necessary for screening films in isolated places. There is also a proposal to start a hospital library service in the near future.

OUR COUNTRY

The percentage of literacy in Fiji is higher than any other country in Asia and Africa except Japan. The standard of English is not inferior. The energy, the time and the money spent on our education will become wasted with most of our people if there is no public library service (especially in a backward colony), by which they can continue their further self-education. And to some extent our library is attempting to answer this need.

The library has not been successful so far in obtaining any grant from the government or the local bodies in the colony. It is difficult in an economically backward colony to obtain munificent donations from the general public as in the United States and other advanced countries. If we have built up the library notwithstanding the above limitations, it is all due to the help of friends and institutions, mainly overseas, who have generously donated books, periodicals and other publications. The Ramakrishna Mission in Fiji has been paying the salaries, rent and other expenses. It is indeed a great burden on them. Apart from lending books to the general public, the students of the local high school are also allowed to borrow books freely from the library under a guarantee from the headmaster of the institution.

The Ramakrishna Library is a Volunteer Education Centre for the United Nations in Fiji. In that capacity, it is furnishing material and information in organizing United Nations Day exhibitions, lectures, etc. The library has also been helpful to the local journals (*Pacific Affairs*, *Jagriti* and *Sangam*) in supplying information. We also make use of the local festivals and fairs when people gather in large numbers for introducing the library to them. But this had to be curtailed as our work increased in other directions.

The library needs publications, education films and modern equipment to serve the public better. Though books on all subjects of human knowledge are welcome, we are specially interested in publications on religion, philosophy, agriculture, health, education, home and cottage industries. English, Fijian and Hindi are the main languages of the colony. Some of the publications which were duplicates were distributed free to other educational institutions in the colony.

Nandi being the air-entrance to Fiji, numbers of distinguished people visit the town in their itinerary in Fiji. We have had the

privilege of receiving some of them in our library; the most distinguished of them were Dr. Julian Huxley, formerly Director-General of UNESCO, and Bishop Poathacumury of Bangalore.

OBJECTIVES

Our objectives, to borrow from the Hawaiian Public Library service, are as follows:

'In common with other progressive libraries, we have accepted as our basic objectives those of information, education and recreation. And because we live in an insular community, made up of people with varied backgrounds and nationalities, we must constantly concern ourselves with the development of these individuals as citizens.

'Today, probably more than at any other time in our history, there is need for an informed populace, a people who can think for themselves. And the public library must accept as its responsibility that of supplying the materials to those citizens who are seeking answers to questions of local, national and international problems.'

REFERENCE TOOLS FOR SMALL LIBRARIES

C. W. TOLLEY

NEW ZEALAND libraries do not now commonly withhold a large section of their stock from circulation and call it a Reference Department. Instead, a small collection of books of a quick reference nature, of varying range and sometimes haphazardly selected, is set apart from the rest of the stock, sometimes so far apart that only explorative readers manage to find them. Without considering the merits or demerits of a separate Reference Department, one can say that the New Zealand practice means that in any library at any one time a number of books potentially useful for reference work could be on issue. It is important that a well-selected group of books useful for handling quick reference inquiries in a small library, be set aside in a clearly visible and accessible place and the public encouraged to use but not to borrow them.

A small library should be able to handle a good proportion of the quick reference inquiries it receives, and there is no need to stress the importance, in terms of goodwill, of a library earning a reputation for being able to satisfy inquirers. It would be rare, indeed, to find a library in which even two or three inquiries for assistance or information were not made every day. Assistance to readers depends on the willingness of readers to ask questions, or

Mr. Tolley is Reference Librarian, Wellington Public Libraries.