CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The British left India in 1947, but they left a valuable legacy behind: an undeniable yet enduring impact of the British culture on ours. Macaulay made his language ours, with the result that many Indians feel more at home in English than in our own language. Apart from the language, there was one more thing the British gifted to India - the British Council. Britain had come back to India when the British Council office and libraries were first set up in India in 1948.

The British Council is Britain’s principal agency for the conduct of cultural relations overseas. Its aim is to promote an enduring understanding and appreciation of Britain in other countries. The Council does this by providing access to British thought, experience and achievement across the cultural spectrum, but notably in education, science and technology, the arts and fields which are important in international development. The tool chosen for this mission has been a network of libraries and their impact on Indian life has been tremendous, thus proving that libraries have a significant and powerful role especially when the emphasis is on making more effective use of the cultural, educational and research capital accumulated in them.

1.0 Relevance of the Study

In modern societies libraries are particularly important as a means of ensuring that all citizens have access to the knowledge and culture they wish. It is extremely important to organize access to their material: this has a role to play in realizing citizenship and without such services; society cannot be democratic, open and transparent. By providing equal opportunity to all in accessing information, libraries in a way promote democracy and equality as well. They are meeting point for many processes and phenomena relating to the information society and as it becomes more common for knowledge to be conveyed through networks, the role of libraries in providing access to knowledge changes, but does not decline. A library network remains a potential resource for it ensures that library users can obtain what they need from any other library if it is unavailable at their local library. Networks operate
beyond the limits of research libraries and public libraries and also internationally, especially through interlibrary lending, providing access to one another’s collections.

But to libraries themselves, the significance of networking goes beyond interlibrary lending. They can also disseminate their expertise and thus improve their own work. The Internet has opened up new possibilities, particularly as regards access to bibliographical and local information. It is even possible to ask colleagues elsewhere for assistance in solving individual difficult questions concerning information services. The growth of co-operation between countries in recent years has accentuated the importance of this dimension. In short, libraries operate most effectively as a network, virtually making the world a global village.

The role of such networked libraries in promoting higher education in developing countries is multi-dimensional: they have to provide quality information and quick access to information, manage information, educate the users and also facilitate teaching and learning. The network is to act as an intermediary between scientific information and users, and it has to develop innovative facilities to meet this end. In a country like India, which has 293 universities and university-level institutions, over 13,000 colleges, about 7.5 million students and over 3,50,000 teachers\(^1\), such libraries play a key role in satisfying the ever-increasing demand, supplementing and supporting the work done by the university libraries.

At the same time the importance and relevance of academic libraries, especially in the context of higher education can never be underestimated. The main responsibility of teachers in a university is teaching and research and as for students, it is more a process of learning and self-study with classroom instructions forming only a part of the educational process. It is here that the libraries come to the help of the students: “One of the problems of higher education today, which apparently defies a solution, is how best to enable the student to acquire the increased quantum of knowledge without extending the total period of higher education. This has rendered the traditional teaching methods and total reliance of the students on class-room lectures obsolete. What is called for in this situation is the provision of facilities for self-study by the students to a much larger extent than hitherto by the establishment of equipped libraries and their closer integration with the teaching programme.”\(^2\)

**Radhakrishnan Commission** also stresses the importance of libraries in higher education: “Teaching is a co-operative enterprise. Teachers must have the necessary tools for teaching purposes in the shape of libraries and laboratories and
also the right type of students. The library is the heart of all the university’s work, directly so as regards its research work, and indirectly as regards its educational work. Scientific research needs a library as well as its laboratories while for humanities research; the library is both the library and laboratory in one. Training in higher branches of learning and research is mainly a question of learning how to use the tools and if the library tools are not there how can the student learn to use them? This shows that libraries and librarians are as much involved in the teaching and learning process as the teaching departments and faculties. The Kothari Commission (1964-1966) also supports the views of Radhakrishnan Commission as regards the academic role to be played by the librarian as well: “A collection of books, even a collection of good books, does not constitute a ‘library’. Given enthusiastic teachers who teach with books and librarians who can co-operate with them in converting the library into an intellectual workshop, even comparatively small collection of sensitively chosen books may work wonders in the life of students.”

Library does the same job as is done by a teacher, though in a different way: “Modern education expects a teacher to initiate the students in the new vistas of the universe of knowledge. The students are to explore further and give final shape to what has been presented already. The search begins with the close of the first phase of learning, that is, the classroom lecturing. It is in the library that the second, the more vital phase of learning, takes place.”

Ranganathan lucidly explains the second phase of learning thus: “In the library, each student has the freedom to grow at his own speed and along his own lines, to his own fullness, with the help of books just suited to him under the guidance of the teacher and the librarian.” Three major American Associations - The Association of College and Research Libraries, the Association of American Colleges and the Association of University Professors - voice similar thoughts jointly: “Librarians perform a teaching and research role in as much as they instruct students formally and informally and advise and assert faculty in their scholarly pursuits.” Academic libraries and librarians are thus equal partners in the educational system.

Even in ancient India, well-stocked and well-maintained libraries supported the functioning of the universities. Nalanda can be cited as an instance. But the
universities in the British India were conceived on traditional lines and were merely affiliating and examining bodies without teaching and research functions. As a result, the need and importance of an organized library system was neither felt nor visualized at that time. Whatever small or unorganized book collections of the universities were entirely neglected and in spite of the constitution and recommendations of the Indian University Commission (1902) and Calcutta University Commission (1917-1918), the situation prevailed till Independence.

It was after 1947 university education got a big boost and the quality of higher education consequently underwent a miraculous metamorphosis. The new developments brought out many changes in the size and scope of the libraries in the universities and colleges. The book collections grew: but the library services remained totally neglected. They got a face-lift only when the University Grants Commission (UGC) was set up in 1956 on the recommendation of the Radhakrishnan Commission. Since then the UGC has played a remarkable role in the growth and development of the university libraries in the country, emphasizing their prominent role in supporting higher education and in fulfilling its objectives.

In India, the universities and colleges suffer mainly from lack of vision and finance, thus proving J. K. Galbraith right, who once described India as a functioning anarchy. Nowhere does this description fit better than in the case of the Indian education system and especially concerning its higher education system. The system expanded considerably but in unplanned ways. Resources were never committed to match the good intentions and well-meaning policy pronouncements. As a result a vast majority of the campuses across the country today present a picture of breakdown: rundown and ill maintained buildings, libraries without books and journals, laboratories without equipment. The list can be extended to cover ill-trained teachers without motivation, students without direction, creaking institutional structures and archaic systems, rules and procedures. There are pockets of excellence within the system but they are only the few islands in the vast ocean of mediocrity.

Academic libraries also suffer from the same ills that plague the universities and colleges. It is a widely accepted truth that support of a library is essential for carrying out the functions of a modern university, namely, teaching, research,
extension and publication. For reasons mentioned above, the academic libraries are not able to perform as well as they are expected to. It is here that libraries like those run by the British Council come to the help of students.

The present work, "An Investigation into the Role of British Council Libraries in Higher Education in India" attempts to trace the history of the British Council in India, giving special emphasis to their library work and the work done by these libraries to promote higher education in India. The Council’s network in India consists of eleven libraries, including four Regional Libraries at Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi and it is its largest overseas operation. The investigator’s aim was to examine, and evaluate how far the Council has succeeded in “sustaining and strengthening Indo-British relationships by creating enduring forms of collaboration between institutions and individuals which directly meet India’s development needs in education. The researcher, having worked for a long period in the British (Council) Library, Thiruvananthapuram, was curious to know how the Council libraries influenced the higher education sector in India. Though the Council had, at the time when the research began, thirteen libraries in the network, the population served by these libraries was just one lakh, (the total membership in the network) unlike the university libraries that covered a vast population of the student community. Still, from experience, the researcher had felt that the membership base of the British Library included a considerable number of students and teachers especially from the professional courses like Engineering, Medicine and Management. Even now the libraries in the British Council Library network have more than 50% of its members belonging to this category. From personal interaction, the researcher had come to know that the students, teachers and researchers alike always valued the services provided by the British Council Libraries and considered these libraries on par with the academic libraries they frequented. The researcher was naturally curious to find out why it was so and what role the British Council Libraries played in promoting higher education in India, considering the lacunae at present existing in our academic library system.

When the research first began, Education Counselling Service (ECS) was also very much a part of the library services and this service used to provide enough opportunities for students pursuing higher studies to know more about studying in Britain, various courses offered in UK universities, scholarships being offered and the
admission procedures. The researcher, a part of the ECS team at that time, had the opportunity to interact with many students and researchers who came for education counselling and this experience also aroused the curiosity to find out how far the British Council Libraries had been helpful in promoting higher education of Indian students in UK. The natural outcome of all this was the study on the techno-savvy networked environment of the British Council Libraries as compared to the present condition of the library system in India, and their role in facilitating, educating and supporting the student community.

Another interesting factor was that not many studies have been done so far on the British Council Libraries in India. Though independent studies like ‘Spreading the Word’ by Coombs or commissioned studies like ‘The British Council—the first fifty years’ by Donaldson had been carried out, all these have been initiated by the British Council and were about the Council in general, tracing its history and the growth of British Council Libraries worldwide. Studies at a country level are few and far between. Besides, no studies have been undertaken recently concerning the British Council Libraries alone, in spite of the fact that the last two decades have witnessed tremendous changes with regards to library policy, book collection, book selection, range of services and even the target audience. Research and reports on British Council Libraries in India have so far restricted themselves to the marketing of their services or something in general about the services. The aforesaid factors motivated the researcher to take a look at the British Council Libraries in relation to their role in the higher education sector.

1.1 Title of the Study

The study is entitled “An Investigation into the Role of British Council Libraries in Higher Education in India”.

1.1.1 Definition of Key Terms

Though all the terms are self-explanatory, words like ‘investigation’, ‘role’, and ‘higher education’ need further clarification. ‘Investigation’ means an examination for the purpose of discovering information about something. In this context the term refers to the analysis and examination of the British Council and its libraries to know about its operations and guiding policies. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines ‘role’ as ‘the proper or customary function of a person or thing’ and also implies the act of encouraging or furthering or
simply helping. In this study, the term denotes the ways and means by which the British Council Libraries perform their function to achieve their objective. **British Council Libraries** refer to the libraries in the British Council network in India, viz., the British Council Libraries in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai, and seven British Libraries in Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Bhopal, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Pune and Thiruvananthapuram. ‘Higher education’ in this study includes all those studying for undergraduate and postgraduate courses; those engaged in research work both in university departments and institutions and also those who teach in colleges and universities. In short, the teacher as well as the taught and the researcher come under the purview of this study. “Higher Education in India” excludes the Education Counselling Service activity of the British Council for two obvious reasons: (1) the Education Counselling Service is not taken as a library activity, it is a Council activity rather (2) It may be argued that encouraging Indian students to pursue their higher studies overseas is also a kind of promotion of higher education. But in this context it is not treated so. The aim here is to find out how far the British Council Libraries are successful in helping Indian students/teachers/researchers in pursuing and excelling in their studies in India.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the present study is to delve deep into the role played by the Council Libraries in the field of education in a developing country like India. The major objective can be stated as:

“to study and critically evaluate the aims, structure and functions of British Council Libraries in India and analyse its role in promoting higher education in India and in fulfilling the education and informational needs of the Higher Education sector in India.”

In order to attain this goal, the following specific objectives are formulated:

1. To trace the origin and evolution of British Council Library network in India and critically evaluate its performance in relation to promotion of Higher Education in India;

2. To study how policy formulation for British Council Libraries is shaped by changing needs in Higher Education sector in India;

3. To ascertain information needs in the sector of Higher Education in India and find out how far the British Council Libraries meet these needs;
4. To study how the structure and organization of the British Council Libraries relates to user needs in India;
5. To examine policies regarding book acquisition, classification, distribution and service standards and compare their corresponding policies and practices in Indian libraries;
6. To analyse the major aims and goals of British Council Libraries and evaluate how the work in Higher Education sector in India is related to them; and
7. To study the perceptions and responses of Indian users regarding the organization, collection and services of British Council Libraries.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology used in the study includes literature search, survey using questionnaire, supplemented with interview on a selective basis and analysis of records of both the British Council and its libraries.

1.3.1 Literature Search/Review

The literature review was done primarily for three reasons:
1. To bring focus to the research topic;
2. To help in the design and improvement of the research methodology; and
3. To broaden the researcher’s knowledge of the research area and topic.

For a clearer focus and ease of understanding, the following were reviewed:

a. Monographs on and about British Council Libraries in general and those in India.
b. Articles on British Council Libraries worldwide and in India
c. Articles in newsletters and in-house magazines about the British Council Libraries.
d. Council and library records

Almost all the materials considered for review dealt with the objectives of the British Council and the work of libraries in a generic sense. On the other hand, the Council’s own publications like Newsletter, InfoM, Connecting (published from South India) and Infonews (published by Information Services Management) contain valuable information about the working of various libraries in the network but they are too
short to be called 'studies'. But all these have been included in the literature review to get a clearer picture of the working of the library network in general and its contribution to education in particular.

1.3.2 Questionnaire (Appendix. I)

Since the main objective of the study was to analyse the role of the British Council Libraries in promoting Higher Education, it was decided to administer a questionnaire to the target group under study, viz., students of both graduate and postgraduate course, teachers and researchers.

The questionnaire was intended to be a tool in identifying and assessing the role played by the British Council Libraries. The questions were formulated after conducting small focus groups/brainstorming sessions with library users. During these sessions, it became clear that the focus should be on the following issues:

- What do people perceive the role of the library to be?
- How successful do they feel the library is fulfilling that role?
- How is the external user environment changing or impacting the role of the library?
- What are the needs or issues specific to their group that the library can help with?
- What changes do they anticipate for the future?

1.3.2.1 Pilot Study: The questionnaire was drafted and pilot testing was carried out on a limited number of the target group. The first phase of the pilot involved in-depth interviews and focus groups to establish the issues to be addressed in the large-scale questionnaire survey. Once the key issues were identified, another questionnaire was developed on a larger scale. This questionnaire was again administered to pilot subjects in exactly the same way, as it would be in the main study.

The following procedures were followed to improve the internal validity of the questionnaire.
The subjects were asked for feedback to identify ambiguities and difficult questions and these were discarded. Any questions that were not answered as expected were re-worded or re-scaled.

Assessment was made on whether each question gave an adequate range of responses and whether these responses could be interpreted in terms of the information that was required.

Time taken to fill up the questionnaire was recorded to decide whether it was reasonable. Originally the second questionnaire took nearly thirty minutes to fill in. This was revised and shortened and the final one, while tested again, took only fifteen minutes to be completed.

All these precautionary measures were devised to eliminate problems such as poor recording and response rates. Questions were defined in terms of what was being measured or evaluated.

1.3.2.2 Changes Made

The first questionnaire had five sections. 1. Member-Personal details (six questions) 2. Information requirements (two questions). 3. Meeting the information requirement (two questions) 4. Libraries (two questions) 5. British Council Library (eight questions). The respondents, on being interviewed, opined that the first four sections had too few questions and on the whole, did not cover all the areas/aspects under study. It was felt that for a doctoral study on student community as library users, trying to analyse their categorization, their educational and information requirements, services offered by the British Council Libraries and how far the British Council Libraries meet the higher education needs of the users, more questions had to be put to the users to elicit valuable information. The draft was modified accordingly. The revised questionnaire had the same five sections but more questions were added; the last one on the British Council Library having the maximum number of questions (fifty seven). This was again tested and the opinion was that it was very lengthy and unwieldy. It was suggested that pruning and clubbing related questions would be better, especially in Section Five. Brainstorming was again done and necessary changes were effected. This was tried out on a small sample and the final administration was done after making slight changes, for instance, expanded forms
were given for Inter Library Loan, Educational Counselling Services etc. Questionnaires were sent by e-mail and post also to selected library users. **The final questionnaire had five sections:** Member’s Personal Information, use of British Library, Collection and how it relates to the needs, services and finally, an assessment of the library by the member.

1.3.2.3 Sample of Questionnaires Administered

In all, 500 questionnaires were distributed and 351 responded (70.2%). **Stratified sampling technique was adopted for the survey.** Out of the 351, 231 (65.81%) were students, 109 (31.06%) were employed and only 11 (3.13%) were unemployed. Almost users from all the branches/disciplines of study were covered by the survey. Even then, there are more from the MA classes (56), closely followed by B.Tech (50) and PhD (49) students.

1.3.3 Interview

Another main tool/technique used for the study was interview. Selected users were interviewed in person and their responses were recorded. Similarly, two former British Council Librarians could be interviewed and the interviews were structured and the transcript is given as appendix (Appendix. II). The data collected through interviews were helpful in three ways:

1. To trace the history of the British Council Libraries in India.
2. To trace the policy changes that took place in the span of fifty years as a result of the policy changes worldwide and
3. To cross check and thus understand the policies that has shaped the British Council Library’s work in India.

Wherever clarification was necessary, it was provided so as to make their response complete in every respect.
1.3.4. Library Records

Many records of the British Council were consulted for the purpose of the study. These included the Council’s policy documents, corporate as well as country plans, annual reports and issue and other such statistics from library performance reports. Many of them were collected from the British Council website and its Freedom of Information site.

1.4 Hypothesis

Based on personal experience, the investigator could make out the importance given to collection building and quality services in the British Council Libraries and also its ability to satisfy the user needs. Based on this, the study proceeded with the following hypotheses:

1. Though the British Council Libraries are public libraries by virtue of their collection and services, they act as academic libraries by providing the best in the education field;
2. The British Council Libraries supplement the work done by university libraries by providing timely information with the help of information technology;
3. The British Council Libraries play the role of an educator training users in techniques of data retrieval, internet search and also user education;
4. The British Council Libraries assume the facilitator’s role by facilitating teaching and learning of the users from the Higher Education Sector by providing information to support their academic pursuits, by developing innovative facilities, supporting the community by way of extension activities like invited lectures, culture cafes, and seminars/workshops; and
5. The British Council Libraries have an educational role - satisfying the intellectual curiosity of the students and preparing the users for the Knowledge Age - through their IT Learning & Resource Centres (ITLRCs).
1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.5.1. Scope of the Study

The study covers all the eleven libraries in the British Council Network in India and hopes to establish a link between the British Council Libraries and those in the higher education sector. All the available records, statistics and reports on the British Council Libraries, both worldwide and those in India, form the basis of the study, supported by a questionnaire survey administered on the target population of the British Council Libraries.

1.5.2. Limitations of the Study

As the study was on the role of British Council Libraries in promoting Higher Education in India, the ideal would have been to pool the opinions of all concerned. But this could not be done because

1. It was time consuming and
2. It was practically impossible.

There are more than one lakh members in the British Council Library network and the work done in British Council Libraries and British Libraries is more or less the same. Thus the questionnaires were administered only among users of the British Library in Thiruvananthapuram and that too only to a sample. The above library has about eight thousand members out of which four thousand odd members account for family membership, that is, children below the age of fifteen and their parents. So the sample was taken from the rest of the four thousand members and five hundred questionnaires were administered on a selective basis.

The questionnaires were administered to those students, teachers and researchers who had membership in the British Library. This was a Herculean task and also a time-consuming one. But the advantage was that the questionnaire reached only the targeted audience, which would not have been possible if it had been done on a random basis. The latter would have included even those who did not come under the scope of the study whereas this method ensured that only the professional, post graduate and research students, teachers in the colleges/departments and those in the higher education sector participated. Those doing correspondence courses were excluded.
Due to practical difficulties and also because of the British Council policy, questionnaire could not be administered to target group in all the eleven libraries in the British Council Library network. Similarly, the Association of British Scholars (ABS), India, with sixteen regional chapters in India, is "a national forum as well as a single point of reference for any information on UK alumni in India" and its three thousand odd members "are Indians who have had education or training in the UK." Ultimately they were excluded from this study for the following reasons:

1. Their visit to and the subsequent study at UK universities were not always through the British Council
2. In the present set-up, Education Counselling, Scholarships etc are no longer the activities/services undertaken by the British Council Libraries; and
3. The present study is on promoting higher education in India and not in UK.

Still, a question was included about Association of British Scholars membership details, if any.

Another limitation was the non-availability of adequate data with regards to the administration of the British Council Library network. Though the British Council has an exclusive site for reports, named ‘Freedom of Information’, much country-specific data are still classified and this poses great problem in securing authentic data.

1.6 Organization of the Study

The study is organized under the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the problem being investigated, its need and significance in view of the present academic library system in India and methodology employed. This incorporates the aims and objectives, design and research techniques used in the study.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Studies

This chapter throws light on various studies conducted in the field of British Council and its libraries. It gives the background information on the genesis and development of the British Council Library network. A review of all the available Indian studies is also given.
Chapter 3: Role of Libraries in Higher Education in India

This section traces the history of universities and university libraries in India from the ancient days to the present and analyses the issues, problems and challenges facing the latter, linking it with the British Council Libraries.

Chapter 4: British Council Libraries: International Scenario

This chapter deals with the global-level operations of the British Council and highlights the changes that have taken place in the council with regards to its libraries from 1934 to 2004.

Chapter 5: British Council Library Network in India

This section traces the historical background of British Council Libraries and also explains the purposes of British Council Libraries, role of libraries, their activities and programmes.

Chapter 6: British Council’s Library Policy: Analysis

In this section, the researcher tries to analyze the policies being followed or adopted by the British Council in general and by the British Council Libraries in particular. It is also attempted to critically examine the purpose and the stated aims of the Council and to see if they are different from country to country and from one unit to another.

Chapter 7: Analysis

The responses collected through various methods are tabulated, analysed and reported in this chapter. The analysis gives a clear picture of the personal details of the target groups, their informational requirements, use of the British Council Libraries, how the collection relates to user needs, services provided by the British Council Libraries in India and the assessment by users.

Chapter 8: Findings and Suggestions

This chapter provides the major findings of the study and substantiates the objectives and hypotheses given in Chapter 1. In conclusion, it emphasizes the need for opening more British Council Libraries/Information Centers in areas not adequately covered by the present network and also suggests ways and means by which the library resources can be utilized in a better way more suited to the Higher Education Sector.
Appendices

Appendix I: Questionnaire

Appendix II: Interviews with the former British Council Librarians-transcript version

Appendix III: Comments by users

Appendix IV: The British Council Libraries: Quality Standards

Appendix V: Reports, Reviews and Surveys that shaped the Council Libraries

Appendix VI: Activities of the British Council Libraries

Bibliography: A select bibliography is given at the end, which includes materials relevant for this study.

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