Conclusion and Suggestions
This last chapter sums up the research findings under three major headings, each supplemented by the libraries in autonomous colleges.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The UGC, in 1973 (Autonomous colleges: Criteria, Guidelines and Patterns of Assistance, 1973) and the National Policy of Education formulated in 1973 strongly pleaded for setting up of autonomous colleges especially to cope with the new demands of knowledge explosion and the need for a new educational system oriented towards employment. Autonomy, they said, was not an independent free-lance venture in education. It is a concept, first to be accepted in letter and spirit. The concept of autonomy goes hand in hand with the principles of disciplined self government on democratic lines. Here success will be judged, not by numbers, but by the qualitative nature of its products, namely the behavioural pattern of students and their employment opportunities. The concept of academic freedom is yet to receive total acceptance and take firm roots since there are several criticisms against this new concept of autonomy in higher education.

The unique distinction of becoming the first to start autonomous colleges goes to Tamil Nadu. In 1978, twelve colleges, eight in Madras
University and four in Madurai Kamaraj University, were the first to embrace autonomy in three major areas, namely administration, curriculum development and evaluation system. The rigidity of affiliating system was broken for the first time. In 1999 the number of autonomous colleges rose to 127 in India, of which 49 are in Tamil Nadu. The libraries in these colleges were looked at with a modern perspective, taking their librarians on boards and committees of management. With expanded budget proposals and adequately qualified personnel, the libraries in autonomous colleges are found to extend a systematic and perfect assistance to the staff and students. The trend analysis, given in the previous chapter along with the facts and figures is a true picture of the libraries that maintain a steady progress in the autonomous colleges in Tamil Nadu.

In an autonomous college it has become imperative for teaching faculty to depend more on new books at a higher level so as to equip themselves well. As for the students, the learning process has gained a new impetus and direction, because they have to do more self study with guidance from teachers and librarians. Hence the library component of an autonomous college is so designed to help the staff and students in their academic pursuit. On the other hand the one-time annual examination system and teaching prescribed syllabi for years on end, offer little or no scope for extra reading. Analysing these scenarios of two extremes, it is found that autonomous status conferred on a college is a boon to its reading community. The twenty libraries, taken as
sample, show visible changes towards progress fulfilling the objectives of the autonomous colleges in which they function.

In the order of rank arrived at, sixteen libraries, after the conferment of autonomous status, have made great strides in all spheres of their activities. Furthermore, their activities, ranging from budgeting to on-line bibliographic services, are in line with the standards and objectives set by the UGC. The last four libraries, two run by private managements and two by Government of Tamil Nadu fall far short of the excellence reached by their counterparts. The reason for the lower position given to the two libraries is attributed to a lack of finance and desire on the part of the Government or the management. In summary it may be said, conclusively, that the impact of autonomy is positive and beneficial. Positive, because the services offered by the libraries and the role played by their librarians help to increase the academic reputation of the colleges. Beneficial, because the staff and students have learnt to improve their urban skills and personality by means of self study.

4.2. ROLE OF LIBRARIANS IN AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES

The librarians in all autonomous colleges play a significant role in the governance of the colleges where they work. Like any other teacher in the campus, his involvement in administration and curriculum development, however small or great it may be, gives him the feeling of being a useful component in the college system. The college, on its part, gives him unlimited
opportunities to develop his professional skills. Some with a talent for teaching have started courses on librarianship at certificate level [A.V.V.M. Sri Pushpam College, Poondi and N.G.M. College, Pollachi]. Most librarians in autonomous colleges have become adepts in computerization work by availing the new-found freedom and opportunities. It is worth while mentioning here that one librarian in an autonomous college (The American College, Madurai) was invited by the United States Information Service in India to become a Fulbright-Scholar-a unique honour conferred on a college librarian in India. Innovative work, combined with a sense of sincerity and efficiency, brings recognition as well as rewards. Their readiness to meet the challenges thrown by knowledge explosion is equalled by their eagerness to do research in librarianship, for it is found during the interview that two librarians have registered for their Ph.D. degree. There is no dearth of human resources in India. Along with the teaching profession, Indian librarianship strives to make education relevant and meaningful to the society. Given the right kind of freedom and direction, the librarians are ready to participate in any new experiment in education. It is therefore suggested that librarians in all institutions should, first be recognised as valuable human resource and be allowed to function in an atmosphere free from rigid bureaucracy.
4.3. FINANCE

The UGC and the Government treat all colleges more or less uniformly when it comes to the question of granting funds to libraries. Autonomous colleges vary in strength, and their libraries differ in rendering services as found in the rank order. The financial need for each library differs. The autonomous colleges run by private managements enjoy extra economic power by its own contributions in addition to the grants from the UGC and the government. But the autonomous colleges run by the government depend on government and UGC sources only. This imbalance in funding pattern therefore affects the normal growth of libraries. It is therefore suggested that all autonomous colleges should be assured of adequate funds for the development of their libraries. The inflationary trends in the cost of books and equipment compels the autonomous colleges to make increased allocation for the libraries. Subscription cost of journals increases by 15 to 20% every year. This demands a minimum increase of 20% more funds for journals. Alternatively INTERNET facilities to more number of students and staff should be considered in every autonomous college. Another means to offset the inflation and increase the resources is to consider establishing an Association of Autonomous College Libraries that may translate the ideals of co-operation and sharing a reality. Such a consortium of libraries at state level will become a professional forum and play as a role-model for their less-fortunate counterparts in non-autonomous institutions. A second suggestion in this regard is to request the UGC and the Government to disburse the funds early in
the beginning of the financial year or in a phased manner. The present practice of distributing funds at the fag end of the year forces the library to avail the grants in haste and it affects the quality of book collection. A third suggestion is to evolve a final ratio in the allocation of funds for the library from the college budget. This would ensure a uniform development in all autonomous college libraries. Fourthly the financial code of the colleges may be drawn so as to allow such sundry income as overdue charges and the sale proceeds of old newspapers and magazines be credited into the library budget. These suggestions are given with a view that quality of library services in an autonomous college should not be at premium for want of adequate funds.

4.4. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge is a process as well as a product. As a process the boundaries of knowledge keep expanding, giving rise to new descriptives.

‘Knowledge is like a sinking star
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought’

- A.Tennyson

We have this knowledge captured and written down in the physical form of documents. The exponential increase in the number of documents corresponding to knowledge explosion, is called literature explosion. One of the demands of modern education is to keep abreast with new knowledge. In the non-autonomous colleges old syllabi are kept rooted for years with a result the new knowledge remains outside the educational system. Though book
reading is the staple of college education a stagnant syllabus, common examinations and the absence of statutory requirement for individual projects give no scope for self-study. In the autonomous colleges on the other hand curriculum is periodically reviewed and modified to suit the social needs of the time. Curriculum development is the one important area unique to all autonomous colleges.

The ecological environment of the college, the cultural needs of the region and the proposed tie-ups with local industries are taken into account when syllabus is revised in an autonomous college. In-service training of students in nearby banks and industries may also form part of the curriculum. The levels of the courses may vary from certificate to post doctoral. In this context, designing, restructuring and implementing a new syllabus presupposes the presence of a book collection relevant to all new courses.

As far as the curriculum development is concerned, the library plays more than one role. First, the librarian as a special invitee to the Academic Council is responsible for the building up of a book collection that would cater to the new demands. Here he dons the role of a teacher, and does acquisition work from the stand point of a teacher. As a librarian his interest lies in maximising the utility of the collection by initiating innovative services. As years go by, the feed-back both from the staff and students helps the librarian to update the guidelines when it comes to acquisition or weeding out.
Integration of library hour in the revised curriculum, as done in four colleges [A.V.V.M. Sri Pushpam College, Poondi, Government Arts College, Kumbakonam, N.G.M. College, Pollachi and Lady Doak College, Madurai] offers yet another innovative role to the libraries in autonomous colleges. Thus it may be seen that all library development begins with, or rather springs from, the introduction of new courses and the corresponding restructuring of syllabi in autonomous colleges.

In the present context of growing importance for Internet, it is feared that book and book reading are a fading phenomena, if not a dying one. But the publishers and book lovers are still optimistic that book will continue to dominate the information disseminating function. And librarianship will continue to collect and organise book collections as resource material in education system. If book collections are going to stay and play a role in information preservation as well as dissemination, then the emphasis is on qualitative collection and not a quantitative one. What a student in an autonomous college reads is more important than how much he reads. Being a member in the Book Selection Committee, the librarian of an autonomous college scrutinises every title, its relevance and suitability, against the syllabus before he makes a final decision.

Book Bank scheme, originally conceived by the UGC, in the early 1980s was adopted in all Government and private affiliated colleges. The one
important objective of the scheme was to build an adequate collection of text books in multiple copies. The choice is to focus on all subjects covered in the syllabi for the various courses. As far as this special collection is concerned the lending policy is restricted to over-night reading by undergraduate students, if it found, the Book Bank scheme was a real boon to the students from the economically weaker sections. The data on lending shows a heavy borrowing from this collection, and it attests its usefulness from this collection, and it further attests its popularity among the students. From 1995 onwards, for one reason or other, the scheme was abandoned in almost all autonomous colleges, and no special grants were earmarked for Book Banks. Madura College, Madurai, still houses the largest collection of text books and maintains it under the banner of ‘Book Bank’. The librarian of this college, while being interviewed, stressed the need to revive the scheme and enrich the collection.

4.5. CONCLUSION

Freedom to choose new courses and draw a unique syllabus, the critics fear, may vitiate the standards of education. But the development seen in the twenty college libraries (the sample represents more than two-third in the total) bear witness to the success of autonomy. The advantage of having an autonomous status has ensured a better and more effective functioning of libraries. The readers in an autonomous college library, unlike in a non-autonomous one, express different needs, often at different levels. Therefore the library in an autonomous college has to adopt itself to the changing
information needs of its readers. Traditional library routines on ad-hoc principles have to be replaced with IT-based standard library services which emphasise on exhaustiveness and expeditiousness. Autonomy implies greater co-operation among the staff, including the librarian, as much as it demands greater co-ordination between the autonomous colleges. In this sense, the consortium of autonomous colleges, proposed earlier, can also experiment in launching an electronic information network through which instant information exchange can be assured.

The main focus of this investigation is to find out the extent to which statutory provision of academic autonomy to colleges can bring development to their libraries. The data helped to draw a true picture of allround development and progress in 18 out of 20 libraries. Access to more books with nascent information, open access system, long and unconventional hours of working, above all the librarian’s professional involvement and his readiness to serve in an all-too-personal way – are some of the benefits the students and staff have not enjoyed before the colleges turned autonomous. Not only that. Taking the quality of service, budget and infrastructural facilities as criteria, the twenty libraries are ranked. This ranking of libraries, looked from the stand point of the respective colleges, reflects a pecking order of excellence that coincides with the findings reported by the nation’s prestigious accreditation agency, NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council).