

RULES AND REGULATIONS IN THE LIBRARY

Order is heaven's first law and every effort in all human endeavours is geared toward attaining that ideal. The library is one such endeavour. A proof that it needs more of that ideal than any other human set-up is attested to in the existence of proliferous literature in form of schemes and guides in use in different libraries. Apart from the major classification schemes and cataloguing codes there are various other known mini guides evolved to suit the arrangement of many special collections. In spite of these efforts, the ideal of order is at best a human aspiration even in any known library service and so the search continues.

Let us presume that the observance of law is prerequisite to an existing state of order. We can better appreciate the role of order in a library if we try to mentally create a state of near-disorder. In such a situation therefore, library objects are displaced and clients are made to roam about and helping themselves for whatever they need. The library staff on their part are busy in gossip groups and only pretend as giving their individual measure of service. When however, they are confronted by an adventurous library user, they openly acknowledge the library holding of this or that material but cannot account for its whereabouts as it can neither be found in its position nor traced to any borrower.

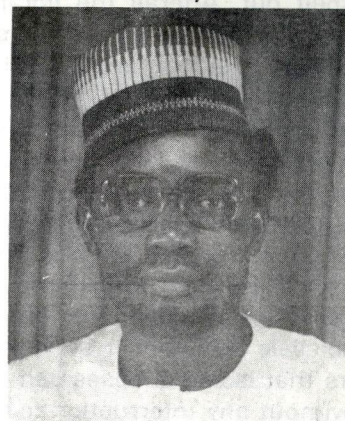
In that situation, it is always the user who on his own returns a used book to the shelf as he thinks fit, most often in piles and when attempts are made at shelving, upside down.

If ever Library Assistants are available at the circulation desk, books are checked out and taken in but often none of them is found at the counter to render the service. Under this condition, the fear of being apprehended is the only deterrent for making away with library books but often a good many pages are found missing in books and journals having been ripped off by selfish readers. Books are freely marked to the point of defacement by individual readers. Telephone calls are answered but rather in a hostile or reluctant tone. There is often no follow-up to the quick reference enquiries taken down. There is no cause to maintain silence in the reading area and so people can converse and loudly too.

With such trying situation prevailing in a library, one can also imagine some users of the library coming out of it in utter disgust and murmuring, "this is no library at all". It is no library in the sense that those necessary elements associated with a library situation are missing, namely: law and orderliness.

The importance of law and order in a library of whatever kind should be viewed against the overall aim of all libraries which in fact is the effective retrieval of stored information. In this aim, along with the word 'retrieval', equal emphasis is placed on the phrase 'stored information' because it will be tantamount to a 'wild goose search' to attempt to look for a piece of information where the need for storing the source of such information is not paramount. In other words, the role of a particular library confers on

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it the crucial need to acquire certain stocks of material at the expense of others if only in order to constitute the functional entity called by that name. More important, however, is the provision of inroads to various materials for their effective use. The wealth of a particular material is made up of the thoughts of the writers and once thousands of such materials are brought together to constitute a library, it often requires an ingenious device to extract these thought units and present them for further use. And so it needs all the artistry of librarianship to ably bring forth these thought units through such processes as cataloguing, classification, indexing, abstracting, shelving and displaying. Without a functional machinery for carrying out each of the above processes in the most able way, the treasures will forever lay hidden away from the prospective user and humanity will be the worse for it.

The importance given to orderliness in libraries is brought home to the average user in the way the library personnel try to formulate, operate and maintain such library rules and regulations which are often aptly stated and are meant to be kept by the prospective users for it is believed that it is only in their observance that the library's cherished objectives can be fulfilled. As practices vary from library to library so are there slight variations in such rules and regulations that are evolved to guide operations in particular libraries but a feature that is common to all libraries is that often such rules and regulations are typed or printed out and displayed in a sufficiently conspicuous area so as to catch a user's attention. And so it is not quite uncommon to enter a library only to be confronted by a giant poster at the door or dangling warning from the roof demanding the cooperation of the library user in one form or the other. Yet in some other libraries, the authorities go the whole hog to post at the entrance a couple of foolscap sheets of such rules and regulations stipulating all that a prospective user ought not to do to make his stay and use of the library a rewarding occasion. What is more? It is expected that such a user should familiarise himself with the practice in such a library by reading and deciding whether such terms are agreeable to him before he ventures into

the library. It is however gratifying that even though so much attention is focussed on the rules yet the situation inside the library may not be as severe as specifically spelt out. After all the library with its personnel is to give service to the users and such rules are made only to aid that service. While the aim is to create an ideal situation in order to render what service it has undertaken to give its clientele it is discovered in practice that some lapses can't but be countenanced as it is even discovered that it is convenient to give much service under a non-ideal situation. And so, as long as there is no concerted effort on the part of the users to do the contrary to the rules and regulations of a particular library thereby causing a wholesale disruption in service it is known over the years that isolated lapses can be checked individually without any interruption to the general service. As said earlier, the rules and regulations a library of whatever type operates are in most cases those that are conducive to the most profitable use of the material in the context of the community. They may as such be too common-place to enumerate.

As with all good actions in life, there is always the good intention behind them but what becomes of them in the process of being handed down is a different matter entirely. So it is with rules and regulations in a library. Well-meaning as the authors are in their earnest bid to achieve their set goal, it is significant to note that the resulting situation is often one of two extremes.

Where the immediate library staff insist on enforcing these rules and regulations as specifically stated to the letter for the benefit of both patrons and the service, it is not unlikely that some users will have reasons enough to deliberately avoid the library on allegations like harshness, undue interference and hindrance in the use of the library. On the other hand, if the library staff attempt to be lukewarm and therefore allow for considerable relaxation of the rules to give the patrons greater freedom, there is often a breakdown of the machinery and such innocent readers whose needs cannot be met look elsewhere for satisfaction. There is always a dilemma of sorts bearing in mind the fact that an increasing clientele is a reliable mark of growth in a library.

In a library set-up as perhaps in anything else, orderliness has more relevance to the physical outlook as regards the physical positioning of the various gadgets. In practical terms, the shelves are literally planted in a section of the surface area with books, journals and pamphlets arranged symmetrically at eye-level. The card catalogue cabinets, the reading tables, the charging desks are all strategically placed as to allow easy movement of people and material. Provision is made for various rooms, or cubicles for other services such as isolated reading (carrels), photo-copying, micro-viewing, audio-visuals, conferences and seminars. An important link between the users and the individual aspects of the whole physical set-up is the use of guides and notices. These exist in the form of the simple shelf-guides to the rather complicated directions on how to operate certain equipment and handle some

materials. In the long-run, however, they can be very helpful to the careful and cautious user. Indeed, orderliness can be enhanced with the use of the many gadgets specifically made for use in the libraries barring such constraints as space which has turned out to be the bugbear of modern libraries.

In this life-long strife of librarians of all grades and character to maintain law and order in a library situation by the formulation of rules and regulations for the maximum benefit of the users, one cannot be too circumspective taking stock of this role of the practitioners in libraries. It therefore came to be seen as an irony and those concerned got a shock of their life when the result of an investigation in a local authority area of England showed that some tradesmen have refrained from making use of the public library during their long break at work for fear of soiling the 'sparkling' furniture with their work dresses. This revelation indeed, means more than it sounds to the ordinary ears for if such orderliness as exists in libraries will serve to tell the local inhabitants that they should steer clear lest it be disorganised or defaced, the accounts are far from balanced.

A library by what it represents should strive relentlessly to win back a 'lost sheep' in the fold of its readers while at the same time making sure that the teeming hundreds in the fold are happily tethered to the circulation desk or the catalogue cabinet as the case may be. But when by its conscientiousness or exquisite taste it consciously or unconsciously scares away a would-be client it has invalidated its avowed intent and betrayed its traditional vow. There then arises the need for 'stock-taking', a professional re-armament and the taking of urgent remedial measures in the interest of staff and patrons - for that sort of situation should be seen as a breach of the much sought law and order.

It is not at all unusual to find that defects like the above and many others yet undetected are often traceable to one cadre of the administration or the other, that is, from the library attendant to the board. The crux of the matter is that it is not an end by itself to be a trained library functionary but what is important is the job aptitude or rather a love of the service and the clientele. And so where a trained library operative who obviously has an idea even if only vaguely as to how to solve an enquiry cannot be bothered, an honest assistant may share the lot of running around in a hit and miss game - because of the concern he shares for the need of a client. On the other hand, a conscientious assistant may effectively drive away clients in a bid to enforce such rules and regulations handed down from above through lack of supervision from the right quarters. Such a fault as spotted above must have arisen from such defects in administration as immediately cited earlier, which cannot be beyond human control after all.

Law and order are no doubt very useful instruments for achieving that goal for which libraries are created, so their conscious and unconscious breaching should be rightly regarded as dereliction from the set goal. The remedy lies in the ability to locate the fault with a view to strengthening the weak point.