UDC in India: use and problems

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Dewey's Decimal Classification was introduced in India in 1915 by Asa Don Dickinson (1876-1960), a student of Melvil Dewey, on his appointment as Librarian in Punjab University, Lahore. Soon after, India became its largest user of the system in Asia. It is, however, unknown when and how UDC was first used in India. The earliest reference to UDC can be found in Ranganathan's classic *Prolegomena to library classification* (1937), wherein he made a comparative study of the then existing classification systems in order to derive some normative principles of classification, but more so to demonstrate the supremacy of his own system, Colon Classification (CC). Nevertheless, it is known that some libraries were using UDC by the early 1950s.

Use of UDC

India is geographically and culturally vast and economically varied. The library profession and its organizations, mired in power politics and suffering from perennial poverty of leadership and funds, are less than fully professional in their operation and vision. *Ad hocism*, power struggles rule the roost. As a result, there is no up to date directory of libraries or any sort of a reliable survey on them. Hence, extent of use of any classification system is not known - not even of the CC which was projected as the *de facto* national system of India.

According to a survey by Dhyani (1983) quoted by Slavic (2008), the UDC was being used in 33 special libraries out of 251 of all types selected and surveyed in the early 1980s. Delhi alone counted for 22 of such libraries while the other 11 were scattered in other parts of the country. After that no other such survey has been reported. Most of them are still using the 1961 abridged edition supplemented by some homemade extensions. A few also use the BSI full edition (published in fascicles up until 1985) to extend the numbers, even for shelf arrangement.

Many, however, feel that DDC's western bias still runs in its bloods, and they demand special provisions in the UDC for classifying Indian subjects. Though no exact estimate of the use of UDC in India is available, yet some specialist institutes such as science libraries, documentation centres, law universities, etc., are using it to classify their collections. For example, the Jawahar Lal Nehru University is using UDC to classify its science collection only. The UDC Consortium may well think to sponsor such a willing to collect data on its use, and identify problems in classifying indigenous and local subjects. Above all, it should facilitate the availability of affordable authentic editions for the Indian market. It would surely multiply its use - many libraries across the board are eager to apply it. Its translation in Hindi or other Indian languages would be a boon for Indian librarianship.

Teaching

Nevertheless, UDC is taught in all the 98 library schools across the country as a practical classification, alongside DDC and CC, to which the most generous library schools provide fifty out of the total of 1600 credits in a four semester course. This is more than enough time to teach the intricacies of operating with UDC tables and index, with sufficient examples for practice. In

the module of knowledge organization, UDC history, philosophy and technical foundations are taught alongside other major living classification systems. Yet, a vital question remains about which edition to use for good practical results. A few rich schools are teaching on the basis of the medium edition, while others have switched over the abridged/pocket addition. Most schools, however, still find the outdated BSI's 3rd abridged edition, 1000A:1961, satisfactory. They have no funds to buy the required number of copies of the latest addition. The Indira Gandhi National Open University, having the largest number of LIS students, is not teaching UDC due to lack of awareness of the availability of the comparatively low priced new abridged addition (2004); and they prefer not to teach the old BS 1000 A:1961. The latter, though not anymore current, is still popular among library schools and students. A low-cost pirated edition is available at a price of approximately four Euros. Despite the lack of proper editions, students enjoy learning UDC and doing practical exercises with it, due to the compactness of its schedules and the freedom of synthesis with its auxiliaries and devices for addition and coordination.

Literature

Starting with Ranganathan's prolegomena (1937, 1957, 1967) many Indian authors have contributed to what is now the large body of literature on general and specialized aspects of UDC. All textbooks on the theory of classification, a popular subject in India, have given prominent place to the UDC. Some teachers (e.g. Raju and Soma Raju) have even written textbooks on UDC practice for Indian students, despite Indian LIS literature being overwhelmed by the theory of Colon Classification, nowadays an almost defunct system.

References

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