

Theological Libraries: Reminiscences of a Glorious Past

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a brief overview of Theological libraries in Goa. The Theological libraries discussed here are the libraries that have a collection of documents related to any religion. There are many libraries in the State of Goa belonging to Christianity, Hinduism, Islamism and Sikhism. These libraries, unfortunately, are like isolated islands since the people at large are not aware about the potential these libraries hold. Some important Theological libraries are discussed, with emphasis on their collection.

Key Words: Theological Libraries, Collection Development, Seminary Libraries, Islamic Libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Through the ages mankind has been developing rapidly in all spheres. This advancement in almost all societies has been influenced by the belief that there exists a high power that oversees everything. This belief has given rise to religions. Each religion cherishes the preachings of their eternal gurus and has consequently made systematic efforts to archive the documents related to the preachings. This has given rise to libraries attached to religious institutions.

Though by and large the clergy hardly wanted the knowledge and wisdom to percolate down to the common man of the community, it was also necessary for the new generation to be trained in religious preachings and practices, so that they could spread the Word of the Lord. These aspirant clergies were educated in preachings and prayers with the help of the documents collected in the libraries attached to religious institutions. Therefore, these libraries largely remained as archives, with minimum

access made available to the selected few. We can call them libraries only because they have an organized collection of documents; they hardly offered the major services rendered by the traditional libraries. Though few the elites wanted to have a hold on the religious wisdom, knowledge about religion was passed on to the next generation. This area of knowledge was later called as Theology and the libraries related to Theology were called as Theological Libraries.

A theological library can be described in brief as a special library having collection of resources related to religious, philosophical and spiritual traditions. The functions of a theological library are two-fold. Firstly, it serves as a repository for the literature that documents the religious history of humankind and the development of religion. Secondly, it supports the educational program of the parent organization.

Special Features of Theological Libraries

Theological libraries differ from other libraries in certain aspects. The collection in these libraries is confined to the documents related to the particular sect to whom the library belongs. The users of

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these libraries are either the clergy or the priests or the elite members of the sect. The services provided by these libraries are usually meager and restricted only to reference. These libraries are usually managed by non-professionals. The documents in these libraries are organized using their own customized schemes.

Theological Education in India

In ancient India religious education was imparted orally by the sages and scholars and was passed on from one generation to another. Later the Gurukul system of education came into existence wherein children used to stay with the guru till the completion of their education. With the evolution of the written word, written documents in the form of palm leaves, parchment and then paper came into existence. With the passage of time, temples and community centers took up the role of schools. Vedas are the sacred texts for Hindus and even today Vedapathashalas attached to mutts and ashrams, impart knowledge of Vedas.

Medieval India saw many foreign invaders. Establishment of the Moghul rule in India resulted in the growing influence of Islam. This led to establishment of schools for study of the Quran and preaching of Islam. These schools are popularly known as Madrasas where the education focuses on Theology. There are around 7000 Madrasas in India controlled by various Madrasa Boards which enroll around 3.5 lakh students (Alam 2009) [1].

In the nineteenth century English missionary societies in India used education as a tool to spread Christianity in India. Indian Missionaries of one denomination of Christianity grew from 420 in 1973 to 2941 in 1983. (Venugopal 2003) [2]. Missionaries have seen remarkable growth in Northern India, in places like Bihar, Orissa, West-Bengal, Assam, Himachal Pradesh and so on. All these educational institutes have theological libraries attached to them which support religious education.

Theological Libraries in Goa

The State of Goa has a good representation of Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions and hence one can find a harmonious blend of various religious institutions in Goa. They include churches, seminaries, mosques, ashrams, temples, gurudwaras etc. Almost all these institutions have libraries attached to them. An overview of these libraries is presented in the following paragraphs.

Seminary Libraries in Goa

There are a number of libraries relating to Christian theology in Goa. Among them one of the oldest seminary libraries is the one attached to the Rachol Seminary at Rachol. This seminary was established in 1606. The library at this Seminary is as old as the seminary itself. It is under the Patriarchal Seminary of Rachol. The library has a collection of 1.5 lakh documents. The collection consists of documents in languages like English, Konkani, Portuguese, French, Latin and German. Along with books on Christianity, this library has a collection of books on Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and other religions. The library also has a precious collection of 50,000 books in Portuguese which are centuries old. The Rachol Seminary library is being used mainly by the faculty and students of theology. There is restricted access to the general public. The first copy of Christa Purana printed in India is available at this seminary library.

The All India Mission Seminary Pilar, at Pilar has a well organized library. It is managed by the Pilar Fathers. The library has a collection of 10,500 books, majority of which are in English, followed by books in Konkani and Hindi languages. The library has books in French and Latin too. The library stocks a good number of books on other religions. This library has a treasure of rare books, like Christa Purana in Marathi written in the Roman script. The library also has a copy of Christa Purana in Devanagari script and books of musical notes and Episcopal Ceremonial (book read during mass) printed in

1786. Access to this library is limited to the faculty and students of the parent organization and is not open to the general public.

Pallotti Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Assagaon, has its library situated in a separate building. This well-furnished library has a collection of 10,000 books that are carefully chosen. The collection includes books on Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism along with a major collection of books on Christianity. As the Pallotti Institute of Philosophy and Religion imparts education on philosophy, the library has accumulated many books in the subject area of philosophy. The collection in the library is rich with a number of dictionaries, encyclopedias, geographical and biographical sources. The library is equipped with all modern library facilities such as reprographic services, computer scanning, internet access etc. In addition to the staff, students, research scholars and members of the community, the library is also accessible to the general public.

Library of Sikhism

The library of Shri Guru Singh Sabha is attached to the Gurudwara, Varunapuri, Vasco. It basically caters to the needs of the Sikh community. However Hindu, Islam, Christian and other faiths are also welcome here. The library at the Gurudwara houses a collection of books on Sikhism mainly in Punjabi and English. The major collection of the library consists of biographical sources on the Sikh gurus and the Steaks, containing the meanings of Gurubani. The library also has a good collection of DVDs.

Theological Libraries of Islam

The library attached to the Islamic Information Center, at Khareband, is one of the largest libraries of Islam in Goa. It has a collection of 5,000 books including dictionaries, encyclopedias and biographical sources. Majority of the collection is on the preachings of Quran and its interpretations. The library also has a good collection of around 1000 CDs. The collection of the library is in Hindi or English along

with few books in other languages like Kannada, Konkani etc. Although much of the collection is on Islam, there are books on Christianity, Hinduism and comparative religion. Persons belonging to any faith can access the library resources here. The other two libraries of Islam in Goa operate from the Jamate-Islami Centers at Panjim and Vasco. They have collection of books along with CDs and audio cassettes. The collection consists of dictionaries, encyclopedias along with a good number of biological resources. Books are in different languages like Urdu, English, Kannada, Konkani and in Hindi. Major portion of their collection consists of books on Islam. However, books on Hinduism, Christianity and world religion are also available. The documents in these libraries are on Quran, Hadis (tradition of the Prophet), life of Sahabis and biography of the Prophet. The libraries encourage the general public to read about Islam. They also conduct book exhibitions from time to time, on some Fridays and on festivals.

Hindu Theological Libraries

Gaudapadacharya Kavle Math, Kavle, is one of the oldest institutions imparting education in Vedas. Its library which was established in 1800, treasures documents that are centuries old. Most of the books consist of personal collections that were donated to the math. The math also has its own collection of books. The library has a collection of 1000 books that cater to the pupils of the vedapathashala. 60% of the documents are in Sanskrit and the rest in Marathi, English and Kannada. All books are on Hinduism only. The library has around 300 rare books and manuscripts. However much of the relevance of these books and manuscripts is lost since printed versions of the same are readily available. This library treasures a document which enlists proverbs of India in 25 languages.

Gomantak Samskrut Uttejak Mandal, Kavle has a well organized theological library that caters to the needs of the teachers and students of the pathshala. Established in the year 1964, the library is proud of its systematically organized collection of 4000 docu-

ments. There are books on the other religions of the world along with Hinduism. The collection is mainly of books in Sanskrit along with books in English, Marathi, Konkani, Portuguese, Tamil, Telugu, etc. The collection is rich with reference sources like dictionaries and encyclopedias. The books in the library are mostly related to the Vedas, Bhagvad Geeta, Upanishadas and a number of biographical sources.

Gokarna-Partagali Jivottam Matha, Partagali, was established in 1810 and the library was also established in the same year. This library is meant strictly for the inmates of the Matha. Members of the community can access the library only with the permission of the Swamiji, who is the chief of the Matha. This library has a collection of 30,000 rare and sacred books. It is really a treasure of knowledge. The library also has manuscripts in the form of paper, palm leaves, metal plates and writings on cloth. Most of the library collection is in Sanskrit. There are books in English, Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati, and Telugu etc. There are dictionaries, encyclopedias along with books on life sketches of saints. They are all systematically organized in different cupboards.

Except Palloti Library, no other library has books on comparative religion. Another glaring observation is that none of these libraries has books on cults, splinter groups or schisms.

CONCLUSION

Theological libraries in Goa, like their counterpart elsewhere in India, have a great treasure of knowledge in the form of books and manuscripts. Many of the documents here are rare and are not easily available elsewhere. These religious libraries have documents like original texts of the Bible, books on the Old Testament and the New Testament, Patristic studies i.e. theological writings of 'Fathers' which give insight into how doctrines of early Christianity were developed; Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagvad Geeta, Quran, Hadis and a number of reference sources. However, these libraries are like undiscovered islands, not exposed to the external world. They have

their fixed clientele and there is restricted access to the general public to use the resources of the libraries.

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