

Libraries – The responsibility of the readers

The editorial on Libraries (*Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **81**, 1509–1510) presented a clear picture about the present situation of the conventional library.

We would like to highlight the degradation that has set in during the past two decades. Due to escalating cost of international journals and paucity of funds, subscriptions have been stopped. The libraries which can afford to subscribe a few core international journals, opt to receive them through surface mail to save some money. Since local journals are affordable in many libraries, journals that are rarely referred to and are substandard but costly books are purchased in a hurry before the financial year ends, to exhaust the funds. Hence it is the users' responsibility to see that only necessary journals and most important books are purchased.

Though the books and journals are indexed using a computer, it is difficult to virtually locate a book when it is needed, since the users reshuffle the

arranged books, at times intentionally. This is partly because of insufficient maintenance staff. Hence more than the library personnel, readers are also responsible for a smooth functioning of a library. A pathetic situation in libraries is the theft of journals and books and mutilation of important pages, even in the developed countries.

Nowadays several libraries have photocopy machines. When these machines are out of order, it often takes a long time to set them right. In some libraries, the user has to provide paper for photocopying and also has to pay the regular price for utilizing the facility. Some libraries fix a *per capita* quota of 10 pages and they do not allow books to be taken out. Ten pages are nothing for an active researcher who has travelled a long distance in search of knowledge. But in institutes like the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore where the collection of journals and books are more in number, private

owners also cater to the needs of researchers efficiently. In some libraries 'dedicated librarians' genuinely help users by sending copies of papers with a request to settle the bill. Another important aspect is that most faculty members do not return borrowed books on time. Also, in most of the libraries there is no penalty for faculty members, which facilitates them to keep the books for a longer period. Like librarians, users also have an equal responsibility for better functioning of any library.

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The price of war

In retaliation for the 11 September terrorist attacks on the U.S. carpet bombing destroyed the terrorist camps in Afghanistan. This also took the lives of innocent civilians, all killed in search of a single person. Thousands of tons of bombs which have been poured in the already war-ridden devastated country, not only left thousands of people homeless and shelterless as refugees, but several will die in refugee camps due to poor facilities.

Next to human loss, the biggest harm which is being done after Hiroshima, Vietnam, Iraq and Kosovo and presently in Afghanistan is to the global environment. Countries, signatories of Rio Conference are silent. All environmentalists are silent. Scientists have not even issued a single statement of caution against destructive damage to the environment.

The undiffused bombs lying in Afghanistan will take the lives of thousands. Poisonous gases will pollute the local environment, and air currents will carry

them to neighbouring countries. The precipitation will definitely cause harm to infants and will make the soil infertile in coming years. It would harm several kinds of pollution-sensitive biota and other organisms¹. The planet is losing plants, animals and fungal species² already at a very high pace of extinction due to industrialization, urbanization, deforestation and certainly more due to the madness of war. Bunker buster bombs, which penetrate 25–30 ft below the ground, are disrupting the geological strata and will certainly pose more problems with poisoned groundwater and soil³. No neighbouring country protested against this environmental damage, but instead provided support for such mass killing. No country has a right to destroy this only planet with life, which has had 550 million years of evolutionary history.

This menace should be stopped with immediate effect. All environmentalists, scientists, geologists and governments

should realize that this indiscriminate bombing will cause permanent irreparable damage to the environment and will further reduce the age of this planet and biota.

1. Arnold, E., in *Frontiers in Mycology* (ed. Hawksworth, D. L.), CAB International, 1991, pp. 243–264.
2. Myers, Norman, in *Ecology 2000* (ed. Hillary, Edmund), Multimedia Publications Ltd., 1984, pp. 82–107.
3. Tolba, Mostafa, K. and El-Kholy, Osama, A. (eds), *The World Environment: 1972–1992 – Two decades of Challenge*, Chapman and Hall, and UNEP, 1993.

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