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*Abdur Rahim Khan Corner*

## **Abdur Rahim Khan - Pioneer of library movement in Pakistan**

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A. Rahim Khan (ARK) was one of the pioneers of library movement in Pakistan. Dr. Mumtaz Ali Anwar (MAA) called him "Teacher of the teachers" (Ameen, 2008). He was gifted teacher of the oldest library school of Pakistan as well as of Asia, veteran librarian of the biggest and the oldest university of Pakistan and devoted worker, i.e. first Vice President of Pakistan Library Association (PLA). He had been bestowed "Lifetime Achievement Award" on the eve of PLA Golden Jubilee Conference 2007, held at Lahore. He could not receive his award in person due to his poor health, and Ch. Muhammad Hanif, Librarian University of the Punjab (PU) received the same on his behalf (Ameen, 2008, pp.167-8). The history of librarianship in Pakistan is incomplete without mentioning the untiring efforts and achievements of the library pioneers like ARK.

Before discussing ARK we look at the historical glimpse of the Library Science Department of PU, which was established in 1915 by an American librarian, Asa Don Dickinson, a pupil of Melvil Dewey. He started certificate course in Library Science, which was upgraded as Graduation Course in 1928. Although the Vice Chancellor was vested with the authority to grant admission to undergraduate working librarian, no undergraduate could get admission directly in that class. Post Graduate Diploma in Librarianship was approved and sanctioned in 1945 (Anwar, 2008). Its syllabus and schedules were also published in the University Calendar. Course was to be started in 1946 but due to the disturbance during the partition of India and creation of Pakistan, it could not be materialized. Pakistan came into being on 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1947, all senior librarians being Hindu, left this area and migrated to India. PU Library School remained closed during 1947-1950. Newly emerged state was much busy in solving other pressing issues. It was not possible for the government to pay proper attention towards education generally, and libraries and librarianship in particular. Old certificate course, which was revised in 1928, could be started in 1950 again. Why was diploma course not started? Perhaps non-availability of any teacher to teach this course might be the reason (Anwar, 2010). ARK appeared on library scene of PU in 1955. He revised and redesigned the syllabi and course contents, restricted this course for graduates only. Later this course was upgraded to Post Graduate Diploma in 1959.

ARK was born on 20<sup>th</sup> of April 1918 at Amritsar (India), whereas in educational documents the date of his birth is recorded as 31<sup>st</sup> March 1919. This difference has been observed in various people of that era. At the time of school admission, whatever date remembered was written, later actual date was revealed for onward correction (Anwar, 2010). Same happened in case of Dr. Anis Khurshid. ARK passed B.A from PU in 1938 and MA in English from same university as Government College (Now GC University) student. He went to Toronto University, Canada for acquiring Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) under the scholarship scheme of Colombo Plan in 1953. He secured this degree on 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1954 (Balqees, 1982). ARK has unique honour, being first Pakistani, who got higher education in Library Science from

foreign country after the creation of Pakistan. Khurshid (1992) has erroneously recorded that ARK got degree from McGill University. ARK corrected the fact in his own wording, "I was requested by the library of Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, to organize their Urdu collection. I went there in June 1962 and completed the task within six month and came back to Pakistan in November 1962. I have never been a student of McGill University" (Anwar, 2011). ARK also passed Diploma in French Language in 1958 and BA in French in 1960 from PU.

He remained Personal Assistant (PA) of Vice Chancellor PU in 1947, and was appointed in university library as Officer on Special Duty (OSD) on 21<sup>st</sup> Oct 1954, later he was offered the post of Librarian on 5<sup>th</sup> of February 1955. He was librarian as well as head, Library Science Department of the PU. He executed both duties in a befitting manner. He introduced the second shift of library services. He also got created new posts for library staff and also got upgraded the then existing posts. He changed the administrative set-up of library. In the old set-up the authority of president of library committee was much more than librarian whereas in the new one the powers of librarian were enhanced to be more authoritative. He also succeeded in providing more facilities to readers, e.g., first ever photocopying services. He performed the duties of University Registrar for three years in addition to the library management (Anwar, 2010).

Due to heavy rains in 1976, the roof of library building started percolating. Due to more rains in the following years, the valuable assets of the library was in danger. ARK being captain of his time, worked day and night to save the prestigious treasure of knowledge with missionary zeal. He acquired funds for necessary repair / maintenance of library building. The scarcity of space in library was solved by the segregation of books less-consulted by patrons. The less consulted ones were shifted in separate place available in the upper story of library building. He suggested and persuaded hard to erect new building for library as a permanent solution (Balqees, 1982). He took retirement after quarter century library service on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1979. He took one year Leave Preparatory to Retirement (LPR) and went to Saudi Arabia in 1978 to work there in the main library of King Abdul Aziz University, Jaddah till 1983. He actively participated in national and international conferences and seminars on library science. He was gifted with the art of speaking and writing efficiently in English and Urdu and even in French language (Anwar, 2010). Fifty years library science literature index reveals his research articles on university libraries, school libraries and problems of Pakistani Librarianship (Samdani & Mahmood, 1998). He presented a survey on "*Anna libraries of Lahore*" at *Sham-e-Hamdard* (Anwar, 2011).

Once, I met a retired librarian, who was MLS from PU. Luckily he was the student of ARK. He criticized ARK in a whispering way and said, "No doubt, he (ARK) was able teacher but was only BLS, so he created hurdles in starting of Master in Library Science (MLS) classes in PU." It is a misconception, again I am thankful to Dr Mumtaz A. Anwar, who cleared the actual position and corrected the error. Anwar (2010) wrote,

This is totally wrong assumption, that ARK didn't start MLS just because he himself was BLS. In fact, his BLS was equivalent to MLS. Before some time, there had been BLS degree in United States too, which was later on re-named as MLS. After some years, Canada exercised the same. Mind it, I granted admission in MLS class to old certificate holders in library science from PU, considering it equal to diploma. Why MLS class started late in PU, it is a separate story. The suggestions submitted by Mr. L.C. Key in 1956 were moving ahead in government offices slowly for implementation. MLS classes were to be started in Dacca University, then East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) and PU simultaneously. One federal secretary shifted it to Karachi University instead of PU at the time of final approval of the case in 1961.

ARK passed away on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2011 at Lahore. He had a highly successful career. He left significant impact of his diverse ability and talents as librarian as well as teacher at PU.

I was making my mind to write on his achievements and personality since July 2010. I collected some material from various books and journals, but it was not sufficient. I requested Ch. Muhammad Hanif, Chief Librarian, PU to provide me with some material on ARK, who gave me some photocopies of the papers taken from thesis of Master in Library Science, written by a student. I completed an article in Urdu language and sent to Dr. MMA for revision and correction. He not only refined it but was also kind enough to provide the address of ARK's residence. I availed the opportunity and sent the article to ARK in January 2011. MMA replied that ARK being very old, unable to read the article, whereas I read it for him, he amended the same and added some more valuable information to it. I received the same article on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2011. I was very keen to meet this hero of library profession but unfortunately now my desire would not

be fulfilled. However, this article in English language is being sent to share this information with my professional colleagues.

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