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Perspectives on Knowledge: An Analysis of Libraries in Visakhapatnam, India

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Perspectives on Knowledge:

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Rebecca Strein

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India is a country of extremes: from the sweltering humidity of the southern coast to the frigid temperatures of the Himalayas, from intense poverty to lavish wealth, from a culture steeped in tradition to an economy driven by modern technology. Visakhapatnam provides an interesting window into the conflict of modern versus traditional. Not only can this be seen in its rapidly growing metropolitan landscape, but when one looks deeper it is also reflected in the attitudes of people. While there are a variety of ways to understand the interplay between traditional and modern thinking, studying how people view, value and seek knowledge can provide a unique perspective on the two different extremes existing in one city. And what better way to study knowledge then by studying libraries which some scholars refer to as "temples of knowledge."[1] In fact, libraries in Visakhapatnam reflect two exceptionally different perspectives on learning and knowledge. The Ramakrishna library is an example of a more traditional approach to knowledge while GITAM University's library and Just Books, a small subscription library, present a modern understanding of knowledge and its purpose.

Visakhapatnam's rapid growth has highlighted the extremes of India's traditional heritage and the modernization that is quickly following technology and globalization. Subba Rao, a former mayor, described the change as a "metamorphosis from a town that had little to boast of other than a shipyard and a steel plant, besides the university, to a bustling mini metro." He continued on to explain that this change "has come with the arrival of people from different parts of the country to give Vizag a cosmopolitan ethos."[2] This dramatic change from farmland to city is made apparent when palm leaf huts are less than a mile from western cafes featuring free wifi and air conditioning. Among the many businesses and buildings that are included in this

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[1] Nancy K. Maxwell, *Sacred Stacks: The Higher Purpose of Libraries and Librarianship* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2006), 21.

[2] Amarnath K. Menon, "Visakhapatnam: Metro Mania," *India Today*, October 15, 2011.

explosive growth are libraries and they come in a variety of forms such as government libraries, for profit libraries, academic and religious libraries. Distributed throughout the city, these libraries provide access to books and other resources in a variety of ways to an even more diverse group of patrons. While they represent a wide population and their information needs, these libraries also reflect two exceptionally different perspectives on learning and knowledge.

Contrasting Views of Knowledge

In order to more fully understand and appreciate the connection between libraries and how they can serve as models for different views of knowledge in India, it is necessary to have some understanding of traditional Indian ways of viewing knowledge and its pursuit. India has a rich culture in regards to knowledge. One key word traditionally associated with the concept of knowledge is *Jnana* which is the Sanskrit word for knowledge, wisdom or comprehension.[3] However, as with most words, *jnana*'s basic definition shifts depending on the individual or group that is using the word. Jainism views *jnana* as "the knowledge of details" while Saiva Siddhanta view *jnana* as a path to liberation or the way to God. [4] Regardless of the precise definition, *jnana* always relates to knowledge in one form or another and while it can refer to intellectual studying, most often it takes on a more religious connotation.

For the purposes of this paper,   the definition of *jnana* will focus on the idea that truly significant knowledge is religious and not secular. *Jnana* insists that the undesirable state of ignorance cannot be overcome by a scientific understanding of the world.[5] Even the proper study

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[3] John Grims, A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English," (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 157.

[4] Ibid., 157.

[5] Ramakant A. Sinari, *The Structure of Indian Thought* (Springfield, IL: Thomas Books, 1970), 29.

and meditation on scriptural texts involved in *jnana yoga*, is merely the beginning. Jean Varenne explains that the "true aim of this study is to awaken the knower/atman within oneself in order to receive from it a clear vision of the road to be taken."[6] True liberation comes from letting go rather than holding on. Often *jnana* is associated with the idea of seeking *moksha* (liberation). Like its definition the way *jnana* leads to *moksha* varies depending on who is explaining, but the end result of this quest for knowledge, whether discovered through divine intuition or sought after in the scriptures, is the same. While it is only one of many paths that can be taken in order to achieve *moksha,* the idea of knowledge and learning as a way to the divine is significant to the idea of libraries. As preservers and distributers of knowledge, libraries provide individuals the opportunity to access and share knowledge with those around them.

Other aspects of traditional knowledge that, while not directly associated with *jnana* are often connected to and reflected in the concept of *jnana* , include seeking knowledge from a guru, a spiritual master that often has a group of disciples,[7] and sharing the knowledge each gains from his own study. Gurus dispense their knowledge of the divine to their disciples.[8] In the past this was accomplished verbally but as printed material became more available, the words of gurus were written down and can be found in pamphlets, books and even on the sides of buildings or bus stops. While the guru's written words are essential, there is still an emphasis on seeing and actually being in the presence of the guru. For instance, I had the opportunity to attend the birthday celebration for the founder of the Yoga Consciousness Trust. People travelled

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[6] Jean Varenne, *Yoga and the Hindi Tradtion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 82.

[7] Ibid, 233.

[8] Ibid, 5.

hundreds of miles to see this ninety-three-year-old man say a few words, not just for his wisdom but to be in the presence of their great teacher. While this is not always a possibility, it considered a great honor and is the preferred way of learning.

In contrast, more modern methods of learning and knowledge do not require the learner to travel far. In fact, modern technology wants to bring the information to the individual rather than the individual to the information. The more technology advances, the more people seek information from a computer screen. Another way that modern learning differs from traditional concepts is in its focus on obtaining rather than searching. Knowledge is a path to better skills, a better job, a better salary and sometimes merely for entertainment. Rather than a pursuit for release, modern concepts of knowledge are focused on the objects and attitudes that bind one to this life. While *jnana* emphasized the divine and, more specifically, a person's connection to the divine, modern learning views religion from an analytical perspective. Science is the key to understanding and reaching truth. This may not be the personal view of individual seekers of knowledge, but it is how they are expected to process and present the information they find.

Jnana and this modern approach to knowledge are two dramatically contrasting ideas; however, they both are cultural models that allow one to better understand larger aspects of Indian culture. In their research, Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland used language in order to analyze cultural models and they defined cultural models as "presupposed, taken for granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other alternative models) by members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it."[9] Perceptions of knowledge fit into the

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[9] Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn, eds., *Cultural Models in Language and Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4.

concept of a cultural model. Both the idea of *jnana* as well as the modern approach to

knowledge present two distinct ways that people in Visakhapatnam understand their world and

how they behave in it. While Quinn and Holland used language in order to better identify and

comprehend cultural models, libraries can serve a similar purpose. By analyzing how libraries

and their sponsors present knowledge, one can see how a library conforms to one cultural model

of knowledge or to the other.

Literature Review

While libraries in India have been the topic of several papers, few researchers have

focused on the how these libraries can serve as models of cultural ideas. Many articles have

discussed libraries transitioning into digital collections.[10] Their focus is mainly on the

technological limitations most libraries are faced with and they suggest areas where these

libraries need to improve. Another common trend in these studies is evaluating how well

libraries, particularly academic libraries, fulfill the needs of their patrons.[11] These studies often

conclude that while India's libraries are improving, they are still unable to keep up with needs of

their community. Perhaps the most recent comprehensive study of libraries in India is found in

Libraries and Librarianship in India by Patel, published in 2001, which directly addresses all

forms of libraries from national and public to academic. Patel provides detailed descriptions of

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[10] See V.K. Jeevan, "Technology-enhanced Library Services and the LIbrarian's Identity Crisis in Academic and Research Libraries of India," *Libri* vol.57 (2007): 100-1009.; Rekha Mittal and G. Mahesh, "Digital Libraries and Repositories in India: An Evaluative Study," *Program: Electronic Library and Information Systems* vol. 42 no.3 (2008): 286-302.

[11] See N.K. Sheeja, "Surveying Scholar's Perceptions of Electronic Environments: A Case Study of University Libraries in Kerala (India)," *The International Information & Library Review* Vol.42 (2010): 262-268.; A.f. Siddiqui, "Use of Library Collection in the Jawaharial Nehru University Library, New Delhi," *IASLIC Bulletin* 46, no. 4. (2001): 184-196.

the resources in each library and concludes with recommendations for improvement.[12] Although each of these studies provides valuable insight into libraries, they do not view the library as a cultural model. Instead they focus on the facts concerning the library without analyzing what the facts can explain about the cultural views the library can represent. While this paper does describe the logistics about libraries, its purpose is to go beyond a mere discussion of fact in order to better understand aspects of culture, in this case how knowledge is perceived and used.

While in Visakhapatnam, I had the opportunity to study libraries in a variety of ways. First, I would observe how libraries used space. This involved studying where the library was located, its architectural structure and then how space inside the library was used to present the information within the library. Next, I interviewed the head librarian using qualitative questions that ranged from issues concerning library resources to the librarian's personal observations concerning the library. While not always possible, I also used library services when they were made available to the public to better understand how this experience with a library contrasted with American libraries. As I analyzed these libraries, it became apparent that while outwardly serving similar purposes (providing resources mainly in book form to patrons), these libraries reflected two significantly different cultural models of knowledge, one traditional (*jnana*) and one modern. While there are several types of libraries in Visakhapatnam, for the purposes of this paper only three will be discussed, the Ramakrishna library as an example of *jnana* and other more traditional ideas about knowledge in contrast to GITAM University library and Just Books, a subscription library, that both represent modern concepts of knowledge.

Ramakrishna Library: A Traditional View of Seeking Knowledge

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[12] Jashu Patel, *Libraries and Librarianship in India*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001).

The Ramakrishna library is part of the Ramakrishna mission in Visakhapatnam which is located directly across from the beach named for the mission. Two stories high and surrounded by trees, it provides a sense of serenity from the busy street directly in front of it. Inside is a room filled with tables and chairs. There are two staircases that lead to the second floor and the walls are covered with bookcases filled with books. On the walls by the entrance are posters that discuss the benefits of yoga, both mental and physical. There are two desks for librarians. One is located right at the entrance and has a book that patrons sign when they enter and exit the library. There is also a desk for a librarian or employee in the far back of the room next to a large card catalog. The official librarian is Swami Nityayogananda,[13] a monk in his early thirties. Like all monks, he wears orange robes and his head is shaved. Maintaining the library is one of his several duties at the ashram. The library is open daily(except for Monday) between four and eight in the the afternoon. Often Swami Nityayogananda will be found answering questions or organizing library materials. In this peaceful atmosphere, people are welcome to study and read.

In order to more fully understand how the Ramakrishna mission reflects the ideas behind *jnana*, it is critical to understand more about the Ramakrishna mission and its founder, Sri Ramakrishna himself. Sri Ramakrishna was born February 18, 1836 in a small village.[14] While he never travelled more than one hundred miles from his birthplace, both his followers and historians acknowledge his influence on the modern rise of Hinduism and the history of modern

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[13] Swami is used to indicate that the individual is a monk; The information for this section is based on personal interviews with Swami Nityayogananda unless otherwise indicated.

[14] Ramakrishna, *Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986),23.https://archive.org/stream/TalesAndParablesOfSriRamakrishna/TalesAndParablesOfRamakrishna#page/n0/mode/2up

India.[15] While his followers consider him a religious genius, others attribute his success to his devoted disciples who not only spread his teachings through India but also to the western world.[16] These same followers recorded many of the miraculous events that occurred throughout his life.

Analyzing what his followers emphasized about Sri Ramakrishna's life allows one to see what is considered most important, and it is interesting to note that what they determined was important coincides with teachings about *jnana*. The idea of coming to know the divine was an integral part of Sri Ramakrishna's childhood.   In the introduction to Sri Ramakrishna's parables, the publisher noted that "Sri Rmakrishna took special delight in studying and hearing about the great heroes and heroines of the Hindu religious epics. Stories of saints and association with them always set his imagination on fire and created an exalted state." [17] Sri Ramakrishna's desire to gain more knowledge about the divine demonstrates the traditional principles of *jnana*. While secular school was not necessarily valued by Sri Ramakrishna, the introduction repeatedly discusses how Sri Ramakrishna actively searched for and learned about religion.[18] Since religious knowledge is emphasized by *jnana* and focusing on this aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's life supports how his followers also consider it crucial.

While not only is this highlighted in Sri Ramakrishna's life but the Ramakrishna library also works to communicate religious knowledge to all people. In fact, the entire second level of the Ramakrishna library is dedicated to this purpose. It consists of an exhibit that depicts the

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[15] Carl T. Jackson, *Vedanta for the West The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 17.

[16] Ibid, 17.

[17] *Tales and Parables of Ramakrishna*, 26.

[18] Ibid, 25-26.

lives of Sri Ramakrishna, his wife, who is referred to as the Holy Mother, and his most famous

disciple, Sami Vivekananda. While the library appeals to everyone who seeks knowledge, a

significant aspect of its purpose is to educate people about the heroes and heroines of the

Ramakrishna movement. Those unfamiliar with Sri Ramakrishna are given the opportunity to see

his life recreated in several small dioramas. Each contains a written explanation of the event

depicted in the display but even without words, the images communicate a profound message

about the importance of religion but also how Sri Ramakrishna is important to religion.

One particular diorama tells the story of when Sri Ramakrishna was a young boy and had

a moment of divine exaltation when he witnessed a perfect formation of a flock of birds. The

diorama presents a small model of Sri Ramakrishna as a young boy who has fallen to the ground

and in the background several white birds are depicted flying through the sky.[19] Sri Ramakrishna

did not have to read a book to gain divine insight but rather it came to him reflecting one of the

many facets of *jnana.* While this at first may seem contrary to the purpose of a library, when

considered in the context of the Ramakrishna Mission which desires to promote divine

knowledge above all other types of knowledge, the inclusion of this story not only makes sense

but demonstrates key principles of *jnana*: seek knowledge in order to connect to the divine and

find liberation. This discussion of one example can be applied to several if not all of the

dioramas presented, including those that discuss the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda.

Not only did Sri Ramakrishna's life reflect traditional concepts about knowledge but both

his teachings and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda reinforced *jnana* as well. In a parable

that Sri Ramakrishna told, he meets with two scholars and afterwards one of them exclaims,

"Sir, after hearing your words, all that we have studied before, our knowledge and scholarship,

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[19] Details about the diorama are based on the author's personal notes and photographs

has proved to be mere spittle. Now we realize that a man does not lack wisdom if he has the grace of God." Sri Ramakrishna continues by explaining that, "the fool becomes wise and the mute eloquent. Therefore I say that a man does not become a scholar by the mere study of books."[20] This certainly reinforces the concept of focusing on spiritual knowledge in order to truly gain wisdom. The Ramakrishna library has found a way to reinforce the importance of religious knowledge through its collection. Swami Nityayogananda explained that the most valuable set of books in their collection were volumes of the *Veda* written in Sanskrit which means that most patrons would not be able to read them. However, the head monk of the Ashram felt that they would be a valuable addition to the library so the library was given extra funds to procure these books. While this may not seem unusual at first, one must take into consideration that the majority of the books in the Ramakrishna library are from donations and therefore the fact that the Ashram was willing to purchase books that few of its patrons would be able to use emphasizes their significance. While still providing secular books, the most valuable items in the collection were scriptures which again reinforces the idea in *jnana* of spiritual knowledge being the most important since it can lead to liberation.

In addition, religion and philosophy are the largest subjects in the collection. When Swami Nityayogananda was first explaining the types of books available in the library, he mentioned a variety of topics; however, he also explained that the subject areas with the most books were religion and philosophy. Later when he discussed how he selected which books to keep for the library, he also emphasized that he gave preference to books about religion and philosophy. With that clear, he went on to say that there were also law, science, health and children's books. The only books he indicated that they would not keep were inappropriate

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[20] *Tales and Parables of Ramakrishna*, 187.

books and school textbooks. While spiritual knowledge was given precedence, the Ramakrishna library still found secular knowledge worth including. Sri Ramakrishna's parable did not say that the scholars' secular knowledge was useless; instead Sri Ramakrishna indicated that knowledge does not just come by the "mere study of books." He still included the study of books as a way to learn but ultimately, while secular knowledge is useful, the knowledge of God was far more essential in gaining true understanding.

Swami Vivekananda also explained the significance of secular knowledge in a lecture he gave on obtaining knowledge. He began by indicating the two categories of knowledge— spiritual and secular. He then continued to explain the difference in how men obtain spiritual or secular knowledge but he concluded that

> in reality all this difference is only one of degree and not of kind. It is not that secular and spiritual knowledge are two opposite and contradictory things; but they are the same thing — the same infinite knowledge which is everywhere fully present from the lowest atom to the highest Brahman — they are the same knowledge in its different stages of gradual development. This one infinite knowledge we call secular when it is in its lower process of manifestation, and spiritual when it reaches the corresponding higher phase.[21]

Neither Swami Vivekananda nor Sri Ramakrishna entirely dismissed secular knowledge; rather they viewed it as a lower form of understanding. They saw it as the start of a pathway to achieving more and understanding one's true self. With this in mind, a library is an ideal place for people to begin learning, even if it is only a secular topic that initially creates interest. From there, individuals would have the opportunity to expand their search for knowledge into spiritual ideas and texts. The Ramakrishna library is a place that allows for this to occur. It encourages searching for *jnana* but allows their patrons to start from whatever level they are at.

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[21] Vivekananda and Bodhasarananda. "Knowledge—Its Source and Aquirement," in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.* Vol. 4. (Kolkata, India: Advaita Ashrama, 2009. http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_4/translation_prose/knowledge_its_source_and_acquirement.htm

Jnana is not focused on obtaining more but rather on freeing oneself. The monks' own search for spiritual knowledge is focused on learning in order to assist those around them which demonstrates the purpose of not only the Ramakrishna mission but also its library. Swami Nityayogananda explained that the monks learn to help themselves so that they can serve others. The library is a reflection of this desire to gain knowledge in order to assist those around you. When asked how Swami Nityayogananda became a monk, he presented a description of his training or what he referred to as the best two years of his life, and interestingly enough these years were focused on study.

Swami Nityayogananda explained that new initiates were taken to the Ramakrishna headquarters where they were essentially cut off from the rest of the world for two years. He then explained their daily schedule. Starting at 4:30 in the morning they meditated until 6:30 when they would have breakfast. At 8:00 classes would start. These were rigorous courses that focused on philosophy, history and reading scripture. Afterwards they had lunch which was followed by more studying, this time languages. He pointed out that this was how he could communicate in English with me. While they studied several languages, Sanskrit was a requirement. Swami Nityayogananda reminisced about how difficult his Sanskrit classes were. After classes the monk s did chores around the temple, meditated again, and finally ended the day reading books. Looking at the schedule, it is easy to acknowledge that studying played a significant role. Swami Nityayogananda, laughed saying without it, how could he teach others.

The monks see their learning as a way to prepare to assist others. He enthusiastically explained that the monks were there first to help themselves so then they could serve others. The knowledge the monks attained was not for their own personal prestige or gain but rather its purpose was to make them better able to serve those around them. These ideas are directly

reflected in the Ramakrishna library. Its purpose is to allow others the opportunity to learn in general but more importantly to learn about the divine. All the effort the monks put into maintaining the library was to give other people the opportunity to expand their understanding. The Ramakrishna library stands as a symbol of the monks own willingness to serve.

After they are fully initiated, the monks continue to study and learn so they can share their insights with others and hopefully assist those around them. It soon became apparent that any time there was a discussion with a monk, they would always incorporate spiritual ideas that would prompt the listener to ponder more on the divine. Every interview I had with Swami Nityayogananda ended with a discussion of the search for truth. This would take many forms. Sometimes we discussed yoga and the different types of yoga and how each provided a different path to liberation. Other times, he would explain more about meditation and how it provided a way for an individual to connect with their divine spark. He always wanted people to leave with a better understanding of who he/she was and the importance of his/her search for truth. In one email he informed me "You must go into the deep recesses and seclusion of the Himalayas and spend at least two hours a day in deep meditation and self analysis . . . Wake up the note, the song that had its birth, far off where worldly taints could never reach, in the majestic mountains and in the glades of deep forest"[22] While he was always helpful when answering logistic questions, it became readily apparent that his true goal was to help those around him seek for true knowledge and their true self. He desired everyone to search for *jnana.* The Ramakrishna library is an example of this concept. While providing helpful secular material, its true aim is to inspire its patrons to go beyond the world around them and discover inner truths about themselves.

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[22] Swami Nityayogananda, personal email message to author, October 30, 2013.

Swami Nityayogananda was not an anomaly among his fellow monks. In fact, most encounters with monks resulted in a conversation about philosophy, religion and typically both. When visiting the Mayavati Advaita Ashram in northern India, I had several encounters with monks where they would pause from their activity and discuss some deep philosophical principle. At one point, I was supposed to meet another individual staying at the Ashram but she was over an hour late. When she finally arrived, she explained that as she was walking she had passed a monk who had stopped her and her other friend from Austria and told her that he felt he needed to share his thoughts. They then proceeded to have an hour-long discussion about the expanse of space and the individual. Sharing spiritual insights is not a rare occurrence but an everyday habit for monks. Like libraries, they are full of knowledge that they feel needs to be shared with whoever is searching for truth. As this attitude of sharing spiritual knowledge with all people is common among monks, it becomes clear why they consider libraries to be such a necessary part of their mission.

The Ramakrishna monks and their libraries do not seek to serve just a select group of people. Instead they desire to share wisdom with everyone that is searching for it. Swami Nityayogananda has several responsibilities beyond the library and one of them is speaking on behalf of the Ashram at public events. At one conference held to encourage religious unity and cooperation, he emphasized how everyone has potential by explaining how there is a spark of the divine in everyone and that we must look for it in ourselves and in others. He then related a parable about a frog in a well. A frog in a well met a frog from the ocean. The frog from the well wanted to know how big the ocean was but no matter how much the frog from the ocean attempted to describe how expansive the ocean was, the frog from the well could not understand. Swami Nityayogananda then compared the frog from the well to each human being as they

attempt to understand religion. There was nothing exclusive about his remarks; instead they sought to include all people and assist them understand the truth they were searching for. This is a tradition that has been a part of the Ramakrishna movement for some time. Swami Vivekananda often spoke to foreigners concerning the teachings of Ramakrishna. He ensured that the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna were not limited to only a few people but extended them to everyone. The Ramakrishna library reflects this ideal. Regardless of race, caste, religious belief and economic statues anyone is welcome to use the library. While books cannot be checked out, all people are allowed to use the material in the library at no cost. Even children are welcome.

Another way that the Ramakrishna library reflects the ideas found in more traditional views on knowledge can be seen by observing its location and the resources it offers. It is directly connected to the Ramakrishna mission and while that is a part of the city, it seeks to create a sense of isolation and peace. Part of the Ramakrishna mission includes a temple that is for meditating. At the far end of the temple is a statue of Sri Ramakrishna and temple is surrounded by luscious trees. While meditating there one can almost forget that they are in the middle of a busy city. However, in order to gain this peace one has to come to the temple and choose to meditate there. In a sense, one has to choose to follow Ramakrishna and then make the effort to do so.

Choosing to locate the library on the way to the temple makes the library one more way that people can be directed to Sri Ramakrishna and the liberating knowledge one can obtain by practicing his teachings. The concept of choosing a guru or master to follow and consequently learn from has been a part of Indian culture and history.[23] The Ramakrishna library continues to support this form of learning by using its resources, such as the exhibit, the emphasis on both

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[23] Varenne, *Yoga and the Hindi Tradtiion,* 94-95.

religion and philosophy and its proximity to the temple in order to help people understand that the way to obtain truly liberating knowledge may begin with books but must extend far beyond.

This is also seen in other Ramakrishna ashrams throughout India and the world. A particularly secluded Ashram is located in the foothills of the Himalayas. Surrounded by awe inspiring peaks and beautiful mountain greenery it provides an ideal location to separate oneself from the world in a search for inner knowledge through study and meditation. It was once a place where Swami Vivekananda walked and meditated. Like the Ramakrishna mission in Visakhapatnam, it also is home to a library and while much smaller, still manifests many of the same traits. Its collection is solely focused on religion and philosophy with a specific emphasis

The isolated Mayavati Advaita Ashramn in the Himalayas

on Hinduism and the works of Swami Vivekananda and other Ramakrishna monks, although it also includes sections on other major religions as well, including Christianity. The library is open to the surrounding public, although due to its remote location it is not used as often as the Ramakrishna library. Also every morning and every evening monks will give lectures about the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and their teachings. Continually the monks encourage seeking wisdom by directing those who visit their ashrams and libraries to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Both the Ramakrishna library in Visakhapatnam and the one in the Himalayas invite people to learn by directing them to their guru. While no longer

living, they encourage people to walk where they walked, visit temples in their honor, and especially learn their teachings.

Overall, the Ramakrishna library in Visakhapatnam is an example of traditional views of knowledge. It not only focuses on spiritual knowledge in its collection but also emphasizes how spiritual knowledge can bring liberation through its exhibits of Sri Ramakrishna's life. This reflects the idea of achieving moksha through gaining knowledge of the divine in oneself through study, a key aspect of *jnana*. Not only does the exhibit teach the power of spiritual knowledge, but it also directs the library patron to follow Sri Ramakrishna by explaining his life. If the patron desires to know more, the library acts as a stepping stone to the temple and meditation hall dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, allowing the patron to choose to become a disciple of the guru. Last of all, the monks follow the example of their guru and seek to share the wisdom they have gained with all they come in contact with. The library serves as not only a practical but also a symbolic representation of this desire to invite all to learn in a traditional manner.

GITAM University and a Modern Education

Along the coast a few miles outside of Visakhapatnam is the Ghandi Institute of Technology and Management, more commonly known as GITAM University. It was founded thirty-four years ago by "an inspired group of eminent intellectuals and industrialists of Andhra Pradesh led by Dr.M.V.V.S.Murthi, Former Member of Parliament and popular philanthropist."[24] It has three locations throughout the state of Andhra Pradesh with the main campus being located in Visakhapatnam. As its name suggests, GITAM University focuses on promoting business and technology degrees but also has expanded since 1980 to include other programs. For example, in September of 2013, they added a yoga and meditation center. Other

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[24] "Welcome to GITAM University," GITAM University, http://www.gitam.edu/WelcomePage.aspx (accessed April 21, 2014)

areas of study include law, architecture, sciences and pharmaceutics. The campus is secluded

with gated entrances complete with security guards. The grounds are pristine with beautiful

landscaping that is regularly maintained. It was one of the few places in the Visakhapatnam area

that I visited where rubbish was nowhere to be found on the ground. In the center of this campus

stands the Knowledge Resource Center otherwise known as the GITAM University Library.

Commissioned a little over a decade ago, this building and the library system it is a part of

demonstrate many of the current ideals in modern academic learning.[25]

Both GITAM University library's location and design were chosen to specifically remind the students and faculty of the importance of the library to their academic community. The head librarian, Dr. G. Naga Ratna Mani, proudly explained

that the library was designed in the shape of an open book. The image to the left provides a

visual understanding of how the entrance is created to look like the spine of the book while the

two wings, one to each side, represent the open pages of the book. The library is five stories

high and is equipped with modern conveniences such as an elevator and even a few rooms have

air conditioning. This new building represents a significant investment of money but also

thought. They wanted to create a building that, while functional, could also serve as a visual

representation of knowledge. By allocating resources of time and money, GITAM University

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[25] Unless otherwise indicated the information from this section comes from personal interviews with three employees from GITAM University: Dr. G. Naga Ratna Mani (GITAM University's Head Librarian), the Principal of the Business Management Department and Professor M. Potha Raju (the Registrar, an official record keeper in GITAM's administration)

demonstrated how important knowledge is to their campus. While the process of gaining

knowledge is important in both modern and traditional views on knowledge, knowledge itself is

used differently, as demonstrated by GITAM University's library. While traditional learning

focused on understanding one's relationship to the divine, modern learning is centered on

money, speed and convenience. Although, knowledge costs money, it will also eventually

provide more money through better careers and opportunities. Therefore, the more knowledge

someone has the better off he/she will be.

     Another feature of GITAM's library includes security guards monitoring the entrance as

well as CCTV cameras. Both guards and cameras protect the books and other resources in the

library; this stands in stark contrast to the Ramakrishna library's open doors. While the

Ramakrishna library is open to all the public, the GITAM University library was limited to

students and faculty. I was allowed to enter the campus and then tour the library because I was

acquainted with a member of the faculty who knew the head librarian but it appeared that this

was an exception. Normally the resources of the GITAM University library are limited to a

specific and, in this case, paying public.

     By limiting resources to a select group, GITAM's library presents a different approach to

learning. Rather than sharing knowledge freely like the monks at the Ramakrishna mission,

GITAM recognizes the monetary worth of knowledge. GITAM understands that what people

value they will pay for and education is included in this. The idea of knowledge being

monetarily valuable is a significant difference between the traditional and modern model of

knowledge. GITAM proudly proclaims that, "The university has established placement cell in

each of its institutes to train and guide the students in finding lucrative placements. The

placement record has been consistently highly impressive, with major recruiters from both the

core and IT companies."[26] Their emphasis on knowledge resulting in a money-making career makes it that clear that the knowledge gained at GITAM is for more than just personal understanding but is to help students improve their financial future.

A personal instance demonstrated that, more than just money, knowledge was also influence. The second time I went to GITAM to interview the librarian, she politely informed me that unless I put her in contact with the head librarian at my own university, she did not have time to answer any more questions. At first I was slightly shocked, realizing that since I did not have the connections to produce her desired result, I would not get any more information from her. However, when put in context of the modern ideal that knowledge is valuable because it will bring money, connections or both, her statement made perfect sense.

Since the modern concept of knowledge places a price on information, the funding dedicated to the library also demonstrates GITAM's view of knowledge as a commodity. Dr. Mani explained that each of the college departments received a budget for books and therefore the size of the department determined the amount of information that could be obtained. If a department was producing better results and gaining more students and faculty, the resources in the library would reflect this. Needless to say, the religion and philosophy area in the collection, valued by the Ramakrishna library, did not play as significant a role in the GITAM University library. While they do have a separate branch library in the yoga and meditations center, it was almost half the size of the branch library for business management. Instead of a desire to learn and grow as an individual, GITAM's library is a model for valuing knowledge on a monetary basis.

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[26] "About Us" GITAM University, http://www.gitam.edu/aboutus.aspx (last accessed April 21, 2014)

This is also reflected in the type of books that are obtained for the collection. Although the budget for books was previously discussed, it is also worth mentioning that only books and other resources in English are purchased for the library. Dr. Mani explained that this was a campus-wide policy because they wanted to assist the students with their English proficiency. While this is certainly an effective way to practice and refine English skills, the motivation behind this was to make their students more marketable for future careers. Another way the collection focuses on students' job possibilities is the text book collection. The Ramakrishna library has a policy of not accepting any textbooks. On the other hand, GITAM University has an entire section dedicated to textbooks for the students. As an academic university, having textbooks is a useful resource but it should be noted that maintaining an up-to-date collection of textbooks is costly since textbooks frequently require purchasing new editions. Therefore, GITAM invests a significant amount of money in order to make sure their students have the most current items. By purchasing textbooks, the library models the idea that the purpose of knowledge is to assist the individual in bettering their material circumstances, in this case through an academic education.

Along with textbooks, GITAM ensures that they have the most current resources for each field. The faculty is responsible for selecting the most current in-print and online information and then submitting their recommendations to the head librarian. This includes purchasing books and journals for each department. The principle of the business management department explained that they keep these books in the individual branch departments for at least one year. During this time, only students from that department are allowed to borrow the books. While other students can read through the books in the branch library, they are only allowed to check out a book if they receive special permission from the principal of the department. Once the year is complete,

the book are sent to the central library where they can be lent to any student or faculty member. The campus library system efficiently determines where the books will be the most effective and makes sure that the library resources will be used by the individuals who need the most current information. This reflects the idea that the most current information is the most valuable and should be the most sought after. It is more convenient for students and faculty to use the branch libraries which are closer to their classrooms and there they are presented with the most current material. The Ramakrishna library highlighted texts from the past GITAM provides a significantly different approach to what knowledge is considered the most useful for library patrons.

While current information is essential, even more emphasized in GITAM's library is new technology. It has a fully automated library catalog that has a record of every book and journal the library owns, including the material that is in the branch libraries. Dr. Mani, the registrar Professor M. Potha Raju and the principal of the Business Management Department mentioned this online catalog and while it may not seem significant when compared to libraries in America, it is rare for libraries in Visakhapatnam to have this type of technology. Most, like the Ramakrishna library, use card catalogs. In fact, not only having a catalog on a database but also having that database accessible online was a unique feature of libraries that were more modern and with that, presented a more modern approach to learning.

The online catalog allows students and faculty to search for books by their title, author, subject, and call number. They can then see where the book is located and if it is available to check out. Perhaps these may seem like simplistic services for American students and faculty but this technological edge allows the patrons of GITAM's library to work more efficiently. The process pf searching for knowledge has minimal value; the results are what are considered the

most significant. Therefore, GITAM would prioritize procuring technology that would allow the patron to locate and retrieve information as quickly as possible so the time spent searching is as minimal as possible. Modern approaches to knowledge focus on results rather than the learning process.

The online catalog not only provides access to books but also is where students can find e-journals and e-books. This is the only library in Vishakhapatnam that focused on e-resources. They were so focused on e-material that it almost appeared to be an obsession. Dr. Mani highlighted that they have 7,000 e-journals and then mentioned that out of the 7,000 there are only 452 that have hard copies available at the library. Professor Raju was extremely excited about the e-resources available at the library. He explained that he wanted the library to focus only on e-resources. If there is not an e-book, he said it was appropriate to purchase the hard copy but if an e-book was available it should be purchased. He did not feel that buying both would be necessary or valuable. In fact, throughout his interview he continually alluded to the idea that the physical presence of the library was not necessarily as important as the library's online availability. When Professor Raju discussed the budget, he explained that money for maintaining the library's physical facilities was becoming smaller since more and more people were using the online resources which could be accessed from their dorms or other places throughout campus, not necessarily at the library. Again the modern perceptions of knowledge needing to be instantaneous and wherever the searcher happens to be, are demonstrated in GITAM's easily accessible online resources. Due to the library's growing online presence, Professor Raju made an interesting comment indicating that the students' physical presence at the library was almost zero. While not necessarily true, how the library is perceived is almost as important as the actual reality, especially when determining the future of the library.

As registrar, Professor Raju's position allows him a certain amount of influence especially over the budget and his enthusiasm for this technology can be visually seen in the libraries resources. With such an extensive collection of online resources, the networking and wifi services are critical to ensuring the library is functioning and available. Professor Raju stated that one of his major goals was to speed up network access so more students and faculty could use more resources at the same time and more quickly. While a better network is desirable, computer technology is critical. The library maintains a computer lab with 62 computers. From these computers students can access the internet, library catalog and other basic computer programs (such as Microsoft Office). This focus on technology in order to communicate information is a key part of modern approaches to knowledge. How information is stored, cataloged and searched for changes significantly when technology is available. This automatically creates a difference in how individuals obtain knowledge and a contrast between traditional and modern perspectives on knowledge. With computers, the few words that identify a document become the most critical. If a book or journal or journal article is not cataloged with the right key terms then a researcher will never realize it exists. The traditional approach to searching for knowledge is less virtual and more hands on. While this limits the amount of material available to the researcher, it does provide a more personal connection between the researcher and the knowledge rather than a virtual one.

While modern approaches to knowledge often limit information to a few keywords, they also are also able to provide and share information on a larger scale. One way that GITAM accomplishes this is by working within its system and with other universities to provide more access to its students. Professor Raju stated that the first network GITAM students can use connects the libraries of all three of GITAM's different campuses. They are able to share e-books

and e-journals but they can also look at which hard copies of books and journals are available and do the equivalent of an interlibrary loan between the three campuses. Not only are the three campuses connected but GITAM is part of a larger network of universities that share theses and dissertations so students and professors will be aware of other research being performed. This will prevent duplication and hopefully provide inspiration for future projects. This modern concept of rapidly distributing knowledge to a large audience makes gathering information not necessarily difficult; however it does require the student to be more selective when they are searching for useful knowledge. Rather than being limited by the resources available, they are overwhelmed by them. This proves to be a problem familiar to many American college students as well. Overall, GITAM's extensive networks and connections to other libraries demonstrate the significant amount of resources available but also the necessity for students to understand how to sort through the enormous amounts of information available.

Technology also creates another stark contrast between traditional and modern methods of learning by making learning an isolating process. As mentioned previously, traditional learning involved seeking a guru who could then pass his teachings to his disciples. While the higher forms of learning were within oneself, the beginning of that process involved learning from a teacher. Technology still involves the teacher but isolates the teacher from the student. Dr. Mani explained that one of the featured databases on GITAM's library computers is a database that has video lectures from top professors throughout the country. While books are also a medium for teachers to communicate information, they typically do not serve to replace the role of the teacher but supplement it. As modern technology provides new access to resources, it also limits the amount of actual person-to-person learning. GITAM's database of video lectures is an example of what is becoming a trend in the modern search for knowledge.

GITAM University's library models concepts in modern views on knowledge. While knowledge is clearly important as reflected by the elaborate recently constructed building, the main purpose for knowledge is monetary. Not only is there a market for buying and selling knowledge, but certain types of knowledge will ensure better careers which translate into more money. Restricting access to information by limiting library resources also reflects the correlation between knowledge and money. Technology is a major focus of modern education both in providing knowledge and also in the type of knowledge that is valued. GITAM's budget demonstrates this emphasis on technology by providing more money for computers and other online resources as well as providing more budget for science and technology related materials. Last of all, GITAM's library also shows that modern knowledge provides a variety of ways for individuals to learn from e-books to video lectures; however this also limits human interaction in the learning process. Overall, GITAM serves as an interesting way to better understand more modern methods of viewing knowledge.

Just Books: Subscription Libraries and Knowledge as Entertainment

GITAM University's library has a clear purpose: to help its students achieve success, but outside of an academic setting, libraries not only still exist but reflect a different modern perspective on knowledge. Rather than focusing on improving an individual spiritually or materially, this aspect of modern knowledge focuses on knowledge as entertainment. While at first this may seem like a contradictory statement, knowledge that is used for hobbies could be considered learning for recreational purposes. Even fiction can allow individuals to understand more about the world around them. While GITAM University's library focuses on academic knowledge, subscription libraries like Just Books allow for a different look at how libraries reflect modern views on knowledge.

Just Books is a chain community library with about 50 branches in eleven different cities throughout India including Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and Mumbai as well as Visakhapatnam. The Just Books library in Visakhapatnam is located in a relatively wealthy suburb called Lawson's Bay Colony and is directly above a small electronics store. Open from ten in the morning until nine at night, its goal is to provide excellent customer service. I had the opportunity to become a member of Just Books so much of the information relates to my own personal use of the library as well as formal interviews with the library staff. Not only does Just Books provide a unique service in Visakhapatnam but it demonstrates by its collection and technology an exceptionally different perspective on knowledge.

As previously mentioned, Just Books provides knowledge for entertainment and its collection is a direct reflection of that. It focuses particularly on fiction and has sections for adults, teenagers and children. Interestingly enough, it was the only library I visited that had a young adult section. It also had a nonfiction section that included self help/religious books, business, some biographies and cook books. Clearly these books are not meant for academic research or specifically for spiritual enlightenment although people could find books on those topics. These books, while providing knowledge, were meant for pleasure. For instance, while there are a few books in Telugu and Hindi, they are limited to only a small section. Most of the books are best sellers in Britain or the United States and are meant to appeal to people with more money, education and time to read for fun.

The technology used by Just Books is similar to GITAM's library in the sense that it provides an online catalog that allows you to search by title and author as well. It also lets you search by genre. However, in addition to these basic features it also allows the user to place holds on books or request books from one of the other branch libraries. All of these provide

quick and easy ways for library patrons to find the exact book they are looking for and get it as soon as possible. This reflects the same idea that GITAM's library did by demonstrating that knowledge in whatever form should be able to be located efficiently and that a patron should not have to spend extensive time searching. Just Books adds an extra dimension; since it is meant for entertainment it provides recommendations and lists of popular books in case a patron is merely browsing for a book to pass the time.

The checkout procedure is also based on convenience and speed. Similar to many public libraries in the United States it provides electronic self checkout machines. The patron scans there card and then is able to review their account, check out and even return books themselves. This was the most sophisticated library technology I encountered in Visakhapatnam. Even GITAM's library did not provide this service for their patrons. But when knowledge is seen as entertainment and a library as a business it is essential to provide the best customer service possible which in this case means the latest library technology. Other unique features exclusive to Just Books include being able to check out a book from any of the branch libraries and also return books to any branch library. Once again, customer service is considered crucial and with thus convenience for the customer is paramount.

While GITAM's library implied that knowledge comes at a price, Just Books makes it quite clear that a price is required. There are three different kinds of memberships for various costs. Two are monthly and allow the user to check out two to three books at a time for 1,000 - 1,500 rupees a month. The year plan is 4,750 rupees per a year, a significantly higher price but better deal for those who plan to use the library frequently. Library members can also check out magazines but since these have to be purchased more frequently and tend to be on higher demand, this adds more to the membership costs. This fee-based library presents a completely

opposite viewpoint to the Ramakrishna library. While all their services are free and are meant to appeal to all people, Just Books puts monetary value on the services and appeals to a select group of people. In fact, Just Books sees knowledge as a way to make money rather than a way to help those around them, a stark difference from the traditional view presented by the Ramakrishna library.

Conclusion

Libraries and knowledge are closely associated with each other . And as people's perceptions and understanding of knowledge have changed drastically with the last century, so have libraries. In India there is a significant difference between traditional and modern views of knowledge. Traditional views reflect the concept of *jnana* emphasizing the search for knowledge as a quest for liberation. Knowledge can be sought by whoever desires and is even intuitively inside each person if they choose to seek it. Traditional views also emphasize that this knowledge should be shared as modeled by the examples of gurus who imparted wisdom to their disciples. GITAM University Library and Just Books provide an alternate and more modern perspective. Instead of focusing on the process of searching for knowledge and how that can transform an individual, modern perspectives on knowledge require large amounts of information provided quickly and efficiently. Technology plays key role in how knowledge is obtained and people play a less significant role in the transfer of information.

While these two perspectives on knowledge have been illuminated by studying specific libraries in Visakhapatnam, these same ideas can apply to different aspects of culture. For instance, the libraries in Visakhapatnam could also be used as a cultural model to better understand globalization or perhaps perspectives on gender by analyzing what type of people use the library and what resources they use. This is not just limited to a city in India. Libraries

around the world can provide insight into the culture around them. Even by studying Brigham Young University's library, cultural attitudes about knowledge and what type of knowledge is valuable can easily be seen by analyzing what books are specifically excluded from their collection as well as what books are put in locked areas. Libraries provide a unique perspective and even though at first glance the significance of libraries may not seem apparent, studying the intricacies of a particular library can allow it to act as a cultural model that can provide a way to understand different aspects of culture. Although, as Quinn and Holland explain, cultural models are not the only way to understand behavior and attitudes of a group of people, they "do relate to [people's] behavior in complex, powerful ways."[27] Observing libraries will not explain all aspects of a culture but it can help us better understand and compare different cultural ideas. As demonstrated in Vishakhapatnam, libraries can provide a i culture views knowledge and, perhaps if studied, can act as cultural models for even more.

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[27] Holland and Quinn, *Cultural Models in Language and Thought, 6.*

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