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## Recollections of the Library

It was 1972 when I first saw the Library of the University of Sri Lanka (Colombo Campus) as it then was. I was then, a first-year student of the Faculty Law. The Library was housed in a rather old dilapidated building that had been a part of the Industrial Exhibition of 1966. Yet its dilapidated look was misleading. Once I started working there I discovered the most amazing wealth of information. The law collection was naturally the one I best remember. Unlike what happened in later years when there were problems with the bindery and getting the new volumes bound in time the collection was very current. One was able to access the latest reports which were first left in a loose copy form for reference before they were sent for binding. Law students were thus able to read the latest English reports and the South African reports within a few months of publication.

The library was indeed the second home of the law student. All the principal cases referred to in class were meticulously read, comprehensive case notes were written, journal articles cited were read and one hardly dared to go for the next lecture without doing this kind of preparation. Outside the library, we would hang around the half walls discussing what had gone on at lectures chatting and recounting stories discussing all sorts of trivia until it was time to go home. Life was simpler, our wants were few and these were happy uncomplicated days.

Yet it was not only the law collection that we looked at. In the course of the lectures references to non-legal material were fairly common. These materials were given so that we would understand the law in a social and historical context. It was that exposure that fertilized my later writings. It was in the library that I first read Knox, Cordiner, Tennent-Leach, and Yalman. In later years when I was teaching the law of persons, I used to spend long hours in the Ceylon Room browsing through historical texts and I can still recall the excitement of reading *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*. It surely provided a glimpse into what life was like at the turn of the twentieth century, and the impact of colonialism on every aspect of our lives. These were my salad days which had a lasting impact on my later work where I began to question the law from the point of view of the value system it had created and whether it reflected societal needs and aspirations.

It was in this environment that I started my legal writing. My first article was prepared for the Colombo Law Review in 1979. It was on the Kandyan law of manage and when looking at the footnotes in the article I see that all the source materials for this piece of writing were found mainly in the library. These include institutional writers like Armour, Sawyers, Hayley, and Modder and cases from old private reports. A wealth of material was available for young writers to access.

In the eighties, the library went through a difficult time. The old library building was derelict and it was no longer safe enough for use. The University had other priorities concerning buildings and in 1986 the main collection

was moved into the newly constructed Faculty of Law and the science collection was moved into the physics building. The ground floor of the Law Faculty building was hardly a conducive building for a library. It was dark and airless and for almost 13 years this was where the core collection was housed. Despite the unconducive atmosphere, the library was still our refuge. I had by this time finished my post-graduate work in Oxford and worked extensively on modern Roman-Dutch Law as it had developed in South Africa and Sri Lanka. Having used one of the best libraries in the world, the Bodleian, I was full of trepidation as to whatever I could continue this kind of comparative work using the University of Colombo library. It was not easy. Financial constraints had resulted in many journals and reports being discontinued. There were no outline resources and our work at times seemed incomplete. We often resorted to getting photocopies of materials from colleagues abroad and my work tended to be more Sri Lanka focused. It was during my sabbaticals abroad that I engaged in move sustained comparative research. So I spent my sabbaticals collecting and analysing developments in English Law and South African Law and in Sri Lanka, I would examine the counterpart Sri Lankan materials and synthesize them, and the University of Colombo library would provide the fulcrum for the Sri Lankan materials. A number of my publications were generated in this manner. Notably *Parental and State responsibility for Children* "Rights of Spouses within the Marriage Relationship" and "Resolving Custody disputes between Married Parents in Roman-Dutch Jurisdictions: Will English law continue to be relevant?".

In 1999 finally, the library found its own home. It was a magnificent building well suited for being the library of the leading university in Sri Lanka. Spacious attractive and well planned. Yet library votes continued to be cut whilst the cost of journals rose phenomenally. Less and fewer journals were ordered and every year we witnessed further cuts in journals and reports. As researchers, we had to depend more and more on resources outside the university. The latest textbooks were not available. Yet one does not give up in those circumstances. Instead one just tries harder.

It was in this era of library cuts in journals and reports that I contributed to the International Survey of Family Law. It seemed an appropriate time to look at Sri Lanka law in the light of international standards of equality in the marriage relationship. "Reforming the Marriage laws of Sri Lanka: A Plea for the Incorporation of International Standards" was one such outcome. This was followed by "The Sri Lankan General Law of Marriage: Dutch, Victorian or Indigenous" where I analysed the various influences on our marriage laws. Here again, there was a fair degree of reliance on the University Library although other collections were also used.

My final years of using the library were in my quest for looking at the origins and development of the special laws of Sri Lanka with my co-researcher Prof Lakshman Marasinghe. We had a group of researchers working with us and they used many libraries apart from the University of Colombo. But I, as co-editor, once again relied heavily on the University library, to re-examine and to gain insights into our indigenous laws. What was their conceptual basis, what influences were they subject to, and what accounts for the lack of an impetus for change in the post-colonial era? These were some of the themes examined.

These reflections it is hoped may lead younger academics to look at the library of the University of Colombo in a new light. The library has to the same extent ceased to be the place where academics spend endless hours looking for materials. Online resources have replaced books journals and manuscripts. Yet there will always be the need for library research. Some materials can just not be found online. Rare books will probably not be digitalized. There just is no substitute for traditional library research. It can no doubt be supplemented by online resources. And last of all Wikipedia and Google search are not substitutes for well-prepared library catalogues.

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