



Available at <http://pu.edu.pk/home/journal/8>

Pakistan Journal of Library & Information Science

ISSN 1680-4465



Abdur Rahim Khan Corner

Abdur Rahim Khan as I knew him (1)

Mumtaz A. Anwar

Department of Library and Information Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
Email: gombak_98@yahoo.com

I was lucky to have met three top leaders of the profession and, in time, developed very close relationship with them - amounting to almost friendship. They were: Abdur Rahim Khan (ARK), Anis Khurshid, and Abdus Subuh Qasimi. The first one who I knew the most has been the last to depart. The situations, circumstances and the time-span in which I interacted with these seniors were different in each case but we spent hours together discussing, apart from personal interaction, the past, contemporary and future issues of Pakistani librarianship. Each one of them was deeply involved in professional activities and was part of the history of the profession. During these interactions and the discussions that followed, I learned a great deal about many unrecorded events of our professional history (2).

My entry into the profession was accidental. I had planned to study for the master's degree in Economics. A nasty fever delayed my visit to Lahore to apply for admission on time. It seemed that I had lost my chance to pursue the studies that I had planned for. I tried to think of some other options. I discovered that even the admission to the B. Ed. class in the Central Training College was closed. I rushed to Bahawalpur for the possibility of admission to B. Ed. class there but found out that the doors there were also shut due to being late. While traveling back by train, a little disappointed, I bought a newspaper to kill time. I noticed an advertisement for admission to Diploma in Library Science which brought me back to Lahore. The first person that I met at the Panjab University Library was ever-smiling, late Syed Ghulam Rasool Shah, the Assistant Librarian, who sat with me to fill in the admission form. While looking at the details, he told me to come back next week, bring along my luggage, and be ready to deposit fees.

Thus just to save an academic year, I joined the Diploma in Library Science Class at the University of the Punjab in August 1960. I saw ARK twice during the academic year of 1960-61. Our class was composed of 12 male and five female students. On the first day of the class, a very good looking man meticulously dressed and walking upright, entered the classroom. He introduced himself, emphasized our choice of the profession and its implications, advised us to study hard, and told us that we would be taught by an excellent group of teachers. They consisted of: Robert P. Lang, an American Fulbright professor; Mrs Wold, an American lady from F. C. College; Khwaja Nur Elahi, the Librarian of the Punjab Public Library; and Muhammad Ashraf, Reference Librarian at the Panjab University Library (later lecturer in English at the M.A.O. College). ARK spoke in English, his sentences clear, without difficult and ambiguous words, and his message precise, to the point, and very brief. He stayed with us for about 10 minutes. The rest of the year we saw him from afar; coming to office on time on a bicycle and walking about in or outside the library building.

My second encounter took place at the end of our final examinations. I was informed that ARK wanted to see me. I went into his office, a little hesitant not knowing what was it about. He talked to me gently and asked me about my future plans. After listening to me, he said that I could join the Panjab

University Library and mentioned the benefits of having experience in the largest library of the country. I had never thought that my first job would come my way so soon and so easy. I was then told to report to the Assistant Librarian on June 1, only a few days away. Another friend of mine, Ahmad Nawaz, went through the same process. I had the impression that, since ARK was not teaching us, he had no way of knowing us. As it turned out, he seemed to have full knowledge of our progress and abilities and had already made up his mind as to who was to be recruited; no application, no interview. I have wondered as to how he managed to get us appointed on a professional position without having a formal professional qualification. This short encounter brought in another surprise. We got our first salary (Rs. 185) the same day our results were announced (This salary was higher than what the college librarians used to get at that time). The point is that as a manager he was not aloof as we had thought; he was somehow judging the abilities of potential candidates and making decisions for recruitment at the same time.

My real encounter with ARK came after almost a year in early 1962. I had been assigned to the Technical Services Section that provided me with a very useful learning experience. I was, however, very dissatisfied with the working environment of the Section and decided to leave the university. I quietly applied for a job at the University of Agriculture which had been created a year ago. My interview there was more of a motivation to leave Lahore and come to Lyalpur (now Faisalabad) rather than judging my ability. During the interview, Prof. Z. A. Hashmi, the Vice-Chancellor, dropped a hint of the possibility of a study abroad. It may be interesting to record that many years later in 1974, Dr. Hashmi, being chairman of the Pakistan Science Foundation, nominated me on the National Committee for the UNISIST Programme that was to be responsible for coordination with UNESCO for the development of science information services in Pakistan including developing a plan for a national science library. A lot of work was done by this committee including a plan for the creation of the National Science Library. I lost contact with this committee after I left the country in January 1977.

After my return from Lyalpur, I submitted my resignation the very next day and started preparing to leave. A week later, I was asked to see ARK. He tried to understand the reasons for my resignation and the factors for my dissatisfaction. Then he talked about the limited potential of a small city for my professional advancement. He also talked about the future growth in the University of the Punjab and resulting opportunities. His arguments were very convincing and I felt that he was possibly seeing things that I could not visualize at that time. I am sure that when he felt that he had convinced me, he told me that he had had my resignation rejected and handed over the letter from the Registrar to me. As years went by, a lot of opportunities came my way and I strongly felt that if I had insisted on my resignation and gone to Lyalpur I would not have achieved what I did by staying on at the Panjab University Library. The decision of not letting me go came from a man of deep and keen observation and a far sight that were not very common. ARK possessed those qualities.

A few years later, I came to know that an interesting development had taken place at the University of Agriculture. In order to have a well-qualified librarian soon, the university had decided to ask one of its faculty members, with a Veterinary Science background, who had been sent to the United States for higher studies to change his subject and to join master's degree in Library Science instead. This is how Mr. Najaf Ali Khan was pulled into the library profession. I am sure he must have disliked the university's decision. Upon his return and using his background, he managed to change the status of the university library to an academic department. The library was officially named as the Department of Library and he as the Head (Khan & Kazim, 1987). He was able to introduce a compulsory course called 'Bibliography', focusing on teaching students the use of information, a pre-cursor of 'information literacy' (Anwar, 1979). I am sure, as far as I know, that he was the pioneer who achieved academic status for the university librarian in Pakistan for the first time and actually taught bachelor students a full course. It is unfortunate that when the right time came to expand on his achievement for the profession, college librarians started teaching 'library science' at the Intermediate and Bachelor levels. I have emphasized several times that we must change this approach and go back to 'user education'. Such a shift will provide many academic positions in colleges for our young graduates and improve the image of the profession as well (Anwar, 2010).

My extended interaction and close relationship with ARK started developing in 1964 when I joined as a lecturer in the Department of Library Science, which he was heading ex-officio being the University Librarian. We spent some time together in his office almost daily, had noon tea together and had meaningful discussions about diverse issues. This was also the period to know the real ARK. He had about a dozen intimate friends, some of them old school buddies from Jhang, who would come to see him occasionally. I was younger to them by about 20 years. They would frankly and openly talk about anything and everything including telling jokes that were rarely spoken openly. Sometimes I felt a little

uncomfortable and tried to leave but he always insisted that I must stay. Those exchanges were a learning experience for me. I also came to realize that ARK who was considered as an aloof person was not really detached. He shared his self with those who became close and understood him.

ARK was very simple in his habits. This reflected in his eating preferences also. He used to bring a nice looking rectangular tin lunch box from home. He asked me several times to join him and share his lunch. This box usually contained a single bread made out of fresh corn flour, and nothing else. He used to eat it with a cup of tea. He smoked but very rarely. I must admit, to the surprise of the people who know me that I have smoked five cigarettes in my whole life, three on his insistence to join him when he had the need or urge to do that. The story is long and can not be told in a few pages. We came much closer family-wise during his stay in Jeddah from 1978 to 1984. He and his wife stayed with us in our apartment for over a month before a suitable accommodation was found for them.

His communication and language skills in English, Punjabi as well as Urdu, were extremely good. ARK was basically a very able and successful manager and communicator. His managerial skills were excellent which was attested to by the fact that he was asked to act as Registrar of the university seven times during 1965-1976 amounting to two years and 6.5 months, with the shortest assignment of 24 days to the longest of 412. During one of these assignments in 1976, I was asked to act as the University Librarian to relieve his burden. My acting period would have been much longer if I had not resigned my position in the Department of Library Science in order to leave the country. It may be noted that he was working as an Assistant Registrar when he was selected to proceed to Canada to get his degree in Library Science. One incident that he mentioned to me and also reported in one of his writings showed his managerial judgment. There was a problematic case which was also very sensitive politically. ARK, as Assistant Registrar, wrote the summary of the case with his recommendation, the Registrar's note disagreed with the view of ARK, and the Vice-Chancellor supported the view of the Registrar. The file went to the Chancellor (Governor of Punjab), Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar for final decision. It came back with the verdict: "I agree with the Assistant Registrar" (Rahim Khan, 1998). All the Vice-Chancellors who he worked with regarded him highly, sought his advice frequently, and respected his counsel even if it went against their wishes. This was amply certified by one of the Vice-Chancellors (Mushtaq Ahmad, 2000).

ARK was very intelligent, capable, and articulate. He was straightforward, humble, honest, courageous, respectful, self-respecting, sincere, and, more than anything else, highly principled. He always respected the law and merit and stood against all odds if situations arose to defend those. He was extremely neat in his appearance. He was moderate in his views and deeply patriotic. He possessed all the qualities that one would expect an honorable man to have.

ARK was born on December 20, 1918 in Amritsar (the date mentioned in the official documents is March 31, 1919). His father, a highly respected teacher, was the headmaster of a high school in Jhang that was where ARK was raised and schooled. He came to study in Lahore and eventually got his master's degree in English Literature in 1940 from the University of the Punjab as a student of F. C. College (now university). A copy of his bio-data shows his first employment as Assistant Registrar beginning with January 16, 1950 at the University of the Punjab (Rahim Khan, 1977). He, however, mentions his first job as the Secretary to the Vice-Chancellor at the University of the Punjab beginning with January 29, 1946 (Rahim Khan, 1998). This requires some explanation. Did he stay unemployed from 1940 when he received his master's degree to the beginning of 1946 - a period of more than five years? Also, could one be appointed as Secretary to the Vice-Chancellor without some previous working experience? He shared with me the situation faced by him after obtaining his master's degree in English from a well-reputed institution. Such a qualification was not that common at that time. He could have easily been recruited as a lecturer in any of the colleges in the Punjab. But that was not to be. Many young intelligent and deserving Muslims must have faced the same situation. I can not share the details except to say that such circumstances must have motivated the deprived Muslim youth to rally behind the Pakistan movement. The present generation needs to understand this and learn from it.

ARK's entry into the library profession was at the age of 35 when he was a mature administrator at the university. Also his entry was not smooth-sailing. The University of the Punjab, perhaps in a similar situation as had obtained in 1914 when it decided to employ a full-time foreign librarian in place of an academic working as a Honorary one to improve library services, took a similar decision in 1953. It may be noted that Dr. Syed Mohammad Abdullah, Head of the Department of Urdu of the Oriental College was also working as Honorary Librarian since 1948. He had obtained the Certificate in Librarianship in 1934 and had also worked for some time as Arabic Assistant in the Library before being appointed as a faculty member (Qarshi, 1990). This time the University decided to recruit a young man and send him for foreign

training. The university obtained a Colombo Plan scholarship in 1953 and advertised it. ARK applied for it but his selection had an interesting twist. One of the applicants was Mr. Ebadat Brelvi (later Dr.), a lecturer in Urdu and a colleague of the Honorary Librarian (Mirza, 2011). ARK got selected, went to Canada, and came back with the B.L.S. degree in 1954. It may also be noted that he was the first Pakistani to study Library Science abroad on scholarship. On his return when he reported to the Library, he was not allowed to join as the University Librarian, a post for which he had been selected and sent abroad. He had to join the Library as Officer-on-Special-Duty and was thus side-lined from October 21, 1954 to February 4, 1955 for a period of almost 3.5 months. The post of the University Librarian was advertised. He was selected, formally appointed, and only then joined on February 5, 1955. Later he did his B.A. in French in 1960.

ARK eventually retired on March 30, 1979 but took one year off as LPR (leave-preparatory-to-retirement) and joined the Central Library of King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah and served it for about six years. He managed the Punjab University Library for more than 24 years, much longer than any of his predecessors. He acquired more authority for the position of the University Librarian and managed to increase the financial and human resources manifold. By June 1977, about two years before his retirement, the central library collection was about 300,000 volumes, managed by a professional staff of 21. His contribution to library development at the University of the Punjab requires a full-length narrative that should be written.

The library training class begun in 1915 by Asa Don Dickinson had continued as a Certificate in Librarianship. The University of the Punjab had already decided to upgrade its Certificate into a Diploma as a result of the movement initiated by K. M. Asadullah, Secretary General of the Indian Library Association (University of the Punjab, 1950). The teaching which should have begun in 1947 with the approved Diploma remained suspended from 1947 to 1950 as an after effect of partition because most of the senior librarians had left for India. The new Honorary Librarian who himself had only a Certificate ignored the approved Diploma and revived the Certificate in 1950. This proved to be a big setback for the teaching of Library Science at the University of the Punjab. It would have been much easier to begin the master's degree in 1956 or soon after as had been recommended by L. C. Key (1956). Why didn't it happen is a question that still needs to be resolved.

After his return, ARK updated the curriculum of the Certificate in 1955 dropping the term 'librarianship' and upgraded it to Diploma in Library Science in 1959. The Department of Library Science as a separate academic entity with its separate budget began in 1963 (University of the Punjab, 1963), earlier than in any other university in the country. As a result of the movement led by LIBSAA, a newly-formed alumni association in 1962, the master's degree was approved and its budget allocation made for 1965-66. These provisions continued to be published for later years (University of the Punjab, 1968). All details had been worked out including approval of the curriculum. The classes were to begin in August 1965 but the government froze all new programs due to the economic consequences of the Indo-Pakistan war. Further delay was caused by my planned departure to the United States on Fulbright-Hays Scholarship for higher studies in August 1967 which was delayed for a year due to the late renewal of the Fulbright program. I eventually left in August 1968.

ARK was fully involved in the creation of the Pakistan Library Association right from the beginning. He was elected as one of its three Vice-Presidents in the first election. During the first year of its operations, he became disappointed with the way it was being managed and resigned from his position in protest and decided not to renew his membership. He re-joined it in 1961 urged by a group of young professionals and actively participated in its activities then on. He attended several international conferences and training programs. He published several papers. His writings have been collected and will be published soon.

His health deteriorated during the last few years, especially due to hip-bone fracture and back pain. Surprisingly, he remained totally independent and managed all his personal affairs with the help of a servant. He remained mentally alert and cheerful and engaged you in enjoyable talk when you met him. With his memory still reasonably sharp, he reminisced about the past and would recollect and use proverbs and couplets suiting the occasion. He became weak and bed-ridden during the last six weeks of his life. Eventually stomach upset and pneumonia during the last two weeks of his life overpowered him. During these days, he was being treated by a very senior doctor who had retired from the university. Four days before his final departure, I tried to convince him to allow me to consult another physician. He declined saying that it would hurt the feelings of his doctor. Such were his sensitivities about personal relations. I did manage to convince him to take a homeopathic medicine which gave him quite a relief. And three days later while quietly lying in his bed, almost unnoticed, he traveled to his destiny on February 8, 2011 at about 6:00am. Strangely, his elder son, a retired Commander from the Pakistan

Navy, who lived next door, suddenly died of heart attack exactly 40 days later on the morning of March 20, 2011. It would have been very painful and totally unbearable for ARK if he was alive at that time.

ARK had led a full, active and enjoyable life long enough, 92+ years. This was the right time for him, and he had expressed this wish several times to me, to move into the twilight of life. I don't feel sorry for his passing away. It hurts me very much when I feel lonely having lost a lovable old friend almost impossible to replace. The neat and righteous life that he led must have given him a deserving place in the world unknown to us. I am sure his soul must be smiling while occupying that space.

Notes

1. This is an expanded version, with some corrections, of my earlier write-up "Remembering late Abdur Rahim Khan", *Pakistan Library & Information Science Journal*, 42(1), 2011, 3-6.
2. Some of the information used in this writing is based on personal knowledge and discussions with ARK.

References

- Anwar, Mumtaz A. (1979). *Education of the user of information*. Lahore: Amer Publications.
- Anwar, Mumtaz A. (2010, September). The looming crises for LIS professionals in Pakistan. *Info@PULISAA*, pp. 5-7.
- Key, L. C. (1956). Report and proposals on the establishment and improvement of libraries and library services in Pakistan. 158 p. (Unpublished)
- Khan, Najaf Ali & Kazim, Murid. (1987). Education and university libraries in Pakistan. *Pakistan Library Bulletin*, 18(4), 25-44.
- Mirza, Qamar. (2011). A personal interview. Mr. Qamar Mirza was a student first of M. A. Urdu and then of the Certificate in Librarianship class during 1950-51. He remained in contact with the senior staff of the Panjab University Library for several years and knew the developments there.
- Mushtaq Ahmad. (2000). To sir, with reverence: A humble tribute to Mr. A. Rahim. *Pakistan Journal of Library & Information Science* (6), 1-8. Some of the facts and interpretations in this paper are not accurate. It is being revised to be published again.
- Qarshi, Afzal Haq. (1990). Distinguished library science alumni of the University of the Punjab. *In: A Treatise on Library and Information Science in Pakistan*, edited by Sajjad ur Rehman. Lahore: PULSAA, pp. 143-150.
- Rahim [Khan], A. (1977). A three page unpublished Bio-Data dated June 20, 1977.
- Rahim [Khan], A. (1998). The days gone by. *Pakistan Librarian*, (4), 1-11.
- University of the Punjab. (1950). Diploma in Librarianship examination. *In: The calendar of the University of the Punjab for the years (1947-48, 1948-49) & 1949--50*. Lahore: University of the Punjab. Vol. 1. pp. 203-207.
- University of the Punjab. (1963). *Budget estimates 1963-1964 as approved by the Syndicate at its meeting held on the 22nd June 1963*. Lahore: University of the Punjab, p. 38.
- University of the Punjab. (1968). *Budget estimates 1968-1969 as approved by the Syndicate at its meeting held on 9 November 1968*. Lahore: University of the Punjab, p. 39. The *Budget estimates for 1965-1966* was not available at the library now but similar provisions were published in that document.