

# *Christian Theological Libraries in South Asia*

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## *Introduction*

This chapter outlines the history and development of Christian theological libraries in South Asia. Geographically, Asia occupies one-third of the land area of the earth and 60% of the world population. Although Asia gave birth to Christianity, the development of theological libraries in the South Asia region is uneven. The theological education in this region, which these theological libraries support, is broadly classified into Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Charismatic. This chapter briefly narrates the contribution of South Asian theological associations and foundations and other regional agencies and networks as they relate to the development of theological libraries and regional library associations. The chapter ends with a synopsis of the current realities facing theological libraries and librarians in Asia and suggestions for strengthening the ongoing relationships.

## *Christian Theological Education and Libraries in India*

Among South Asian countries, India is the largest and most populated country. Buddhist institutions of Taxila and Nalanda were the earliest learning centres of higher education, which existed in India during the first century AD. The earliest libraries in Buddhist monasteries, temples, and mosques have had their greatest contribution to the religious instruction and training of priests (Gul and Khan

2008). Bimal Kumar Datta's (1960) study elicits the historical development of libraries in the ancient and medieval periods in India. Datta noted that, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, temples became chief centres of learning. Muslim rulers and sultans had maintained libraries within the premises of temples and palaces. Taher (1994, 270–74) noted that oriental libraries had the support of kings Tipu Sultan, Raja Sarfoji, and other nobles. Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library, the Royal Asiatic Society Library, Kudha Bakhsh Library, and the Theosophical Society library are some of the most-known examples from this period. Later libraries of temples, monasteries, and others became targets during the foreign invasion of Muslim leaders, Arabs, and sultanates, and a means of destroying Indian history, culture and religious identity.

The history of Christianity in India is traditionally associated with the Apostle Thomas. The Syrian Church of South India is one of the most ancient churches of Christendom and is by far the oldest Christian community in India (Ranson 1945, 32). Two years before the arrival of Francis Xavier to found the Jesuit Mission of India in 1542, a seminary in Cranganore, near Cochin, was founded by Franciscan fathers in 1540 to prepare persons for pastoral ministry. The establishment of this seminary was historically important for the beginning of modern theological training in India. Later, in Goa, the Seminary College of St. Paul was founded, which was then taken over by the Jesuits (Neill 1984). In 1584, a seminary was established in the area of the Thomas Christians in Malabar to educate the priesthood and prepare the way for consolidating the work of the church by establishing a regular parish organization among Thomas Christians. According to the survey by Kramarek, Guant, and Sordo-Palacios (2017), it is estimated that India, with its 295 seminaries, has the highest number of Catholic seminaries in the Asia region.

A few important Catholic seminaries in India are: 1) Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV), formerly the Papal Seminary, located in Pune, which is more than 125 years old. The Papal Seminary was originally founded by Pope Leo XIII in Kandy in 1893 and moved to Pune in 1955. JDV library holds more than 100,000 books and 25,000 bound volumes of journals. 2) Sacred Heart Theological College library in Shillong, founded in 1928, is one of the largest Catholic libraries in Northeast India, which has over 80,000 books and journals. 3) The St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary Library, Bangalore, in South India, has more than 85,000 books, journals, and other resources. 4) The Dharamarm Vidya Kshetram Library (DVK) in Bangalore is another notable Catholic library that holds over 100,000 books and journals.



*Image 1: The library of the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK). © DVK*

Historically, Protestant Indian theological education was started in an informal way. Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, the first Lutheran missionary who arrived in Tranquebar, started a seminary to train the workers for Christian work in 1705. The arrival of the Serampore Trio (William Carey, William Ward, and Joshua Marshman) at Serampore in 1810 paved the way for the modern missionary movement and the establishment of organized theological education in India. In 1818, William Carey and his friends started Serampore College to train native Christians and offer degree programmes. Favoured with the Royal Charter issued by the King of Denmark in 1827, this school had a special place among pioneering theological institutions in India. In 1918, the Bengal government passed the Serampore College Act, enabling the Council of Serampore College to exercise its authority to confer degrees. Around this time in 1824, the East India Company founded Bishop's College in Kolkata (then Calcutta) to train candidates for the ministry of the church.



Image 2: The library of the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS).

© SAIACS

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was very important in the life of Protestant theological education in India, as it saw a revival that contributed to its growth and development. The need for higher theological education was fulfilled by the founding of the United Theological College (UTC) in 1910 with the support of the London Missionary Society, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, and the Arcot Lutheran Reformed Church in America. Later on, Leonard Theological College (LTC) in Jabalpur was founded with the support of the Methodist Church in 1922. In 1937, the World Gospel Mission, a holiness faith mission from the USA, founded South India Bible Institute, an interdenominational seminary, at Bangarapet.

Protestant theological education in India today is accredited by two major bodies: the Senate of Serampore College (SSC) and the Asia Theological Association (ATA). At present, 59 theological colleges in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal are affiliated with the SSC. The ATA was founded in 1970 to function as an accreditation agency to support Evangelical biblical theology scholarship and spiritual formation in Asia. It has 282 institutions as its members from 34 nations. Theological colleges accredited by the ATA offer Master of Divinity (MDiv), Master of Theology (MTh), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree programmes. Both the ATA and the SSC, as well the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), have mandated their member institutions to appoint qualified librarians in theological institutions.

The largest and most important Protestant libraries in India are located in South India. Believers Church Theological Seminary Library, located in Thiruvalla, holds over 150,000 books and represents the largest Protestant theological library in Asia. Next comes the United Theological College (UTC) Library in Bangalore, with over 100,000 volumes, and then the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) library, also in Bangalore, and Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Seminary library, located in Chennai, both with a collection of 60,000 items. In North India, the largest Protestant libraries are the libraries of the Union Biblical Seminary in Pune and the New Theological College Library in Dehradun.

## *Theological Education and Libraries in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka*

### **Bangladesh**

Christianity in Bangladesh is more than 500 years old, yet formal theological education was started only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bishop College, an Anglican theological institution, founded in 1820 by the Bishop of Kolkata, laid the beginning of theological education in Bangladesh (Das 2012). Das noted that sixteen theological institutions in Bangladesh are broadly categorized as Ecumenical, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and others. They are members of the Bangladesh Theological Association. Libraries in these theological institutions lack learning resources and qualified staff to manage. Due to the lack of funding, the acquisition of books in these institutions is always a challenge, and donations from overseas organizations are a major support for them. No formal interlibrary loan or resource sharing is present among these institutions. Computerized cataloging systems and the internet are yet to be implemented. Andrews Theological College is the only college affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College and the College of Christian Theology is accredited by the ATA.

### **Nepal**

At present, Nepal has ten theological institutions; most of them were started in the late 1970s. In order to fulfill the need for offering higher theological education in Nepal, Asia Graduate School of Theology Nepal (AGSTNP) was founded in 2017. Before 2017, India, other Asian, or Western countries were destinations for Nepalis to have a theological education. The oldest theological institution is Nepal Theological College, founded in 1978 and accredited by the ATA (Tamang 2012). Most of the other theological libraries are relatively small and do not have trained librarians. The largest theological library in Nepal is the library of the

Association Theological Education Network (ATEN). The ATEN library has over 20,000 books and journals and members from various theological institutions in Nepal. At the end of the librarians' training in May 2017, the Nepal Theological Library Association (NTLA) was formed. The NTLA plans to meet twice a year and would like to develop an effective interlibrary loan system to share resources among its members.

## **Pakistan**

Islam is the state religion in Pakistan and Islamic theological seminaries play an important role in social, political, and religious life in this country. It is estimated that Pakistan has 30,000 *madrasas*, or Islamic seminaries (Kamil 2012). Christian theological education in Pakistan is 134 years old. The oldest theological seminary is Gujranwala Theological Seminary (GTS), formerly named Presbyterian Theological Seminary, which started in 1877 at Sialkot and was founded by the Church Missionary Society. After it moved to Gujranwala, it was renamed in 1912 as Gujranwala Theological Seminary. Prior to GTS, St. John's Divinity College was founded in 1869 by Church Mission Society missionaries and was closed after a decade. St. Paul's College in Allahabad was started in 1882. St. Thomas Theological College (TTC) in Karachi was formed in 1987. GTS has contributed immensely to the church in Pakistan. GTS and TTC could not meet the ongoing need for theological education, and therefore new theological institutions were started. Theological institutions in Pakistan lack quality faculty members, libraries, and facilities. The absence of quality literary resources and lack of cooperation among theological institutions pose a great threat to the quality of theological education. The majority of the faculty members are non-natives and the available theological literature is produced by Westerners. Nurturing indigenous thinking and the lack of support for scholarship is a challenge.

## **Sri Lanka**

One of the oldest Catholic seminaries in Sri Lanka is the National Seminary of Philosophate, founded in 1890 by Pope Leo XIII. Most of the churches in Sri Lanka depended on the United Theological College (UTC) in Bangalore, India, for their theological education. Anglicans sent their candidates to Bishop's College, Kolkata, Methodists went to UTC, and Baptists to Serampore College for theological training (Illangasinghe 2012). In 1963, Methodists, Anglicans, and Baptists jointly founded the Theological College of Lanka (TCL) to equip candidates for their pastoral ministry. The Ceylon Bible Institute, which was later known as the Assemblies of God Bible College, was founded in 1930 to cater to the Pentecostal churches. The majority of theological libraries, with the exception of

the major colleges, do not have an adequate budget to acquire resources for theological programmes. Sharing of resources, library staff skill development, and lack of finance are some of the problems faced by theological institutions in Sri Lanka.

### *Collection Development, Automation, and ICT Infrastructure*

The scarcity of learning resources and dependence on donations for collection development is a major characteristic of theological libraries in South Asia. The situation has not changed much since the 1960s, when Harrison (1957, 39) and Allen (1960, 221–60) conducted two surveys on library conditions in major seminaries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These surveys reported the poor quality of theological collections and the lack of enough library staff as the biggest problems for libraries in South Asia.

When it comes to automation and ICT infrastructure, theological libraries in South Asia continue to strive hard to grow at par with their counterparts in other fields of study. Computerisation of libraries was once considered a luxury and now it has become essential. Support was offered by the author to over 30 theological libraries in India and Nepal for implementing computerized library catalogue systems using the open-source software KOHA and NewGenLib. Sellan and Sornam (2013) observed that theological colleges in Bangalore made significant use of information communication tools, such as the use of social media and others for their library services. This study further offered various suggestions by the respondents for improvement, which include a need for better internet connections and development of a digital library. There is already an effort among Bangalore theological libraries to establish institutional repositories for content management (Sellan, Sornam, and Naik 2014).

The Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC) took the initiative to bring theological librarians from institutions affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College to offer training on digital library systems and computerization. The Indian Theological Library Association organized a one-day consultation in 2007 on classification and cataloging issues faced by librarians. This was attended by twenty theological librarians from various parts of India. The consultation facilitated librarians to maintain uniformity in assigning Dewey Decimal Classification numbers for books on contemporary issues.





Image 3: Users in the library of the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies. (SAIACS) © SAIACS

### *Staffing and Training*

The contribution of theological librarians is indubitable in training men and women for the ministry of God. It is expected of theological librarians to have general library science education and also ample knowledge in theology and religious studies in order to manage theological resources efficiently and meet the information needs of theological educators and learners. The quality of theological education is closely associated with library development. The Theological Education Fund (TEF) and the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA) have been making efforts to improve the quality of theological libraries in Asia by way of supporting initiatives such as library consultations, theological librarianship courses, and recruitment of qualified librarians (Theological Education Fund 1965, 51). In response to the need for equipping theological library staff, structured theological librarianship programmes were introduced with the support of national library associations, regional networks, and various theological institutions in Asia.

In the early 1990s, the need for developing theological librarians' training was felt. In 1995 the Joint Library Committee in Bangalore had planned to offer a 6–12



week training at the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) (Harris 1997). This could not be implemented due to various challenges, but it was from 1998 onwards that a formal education in theological librarianship was offered at Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS), Hong Kong (Sui Tung 2013). At present, LTS offers a Diploma in Theological Librarianship, Master of Arts in Theological Librarianship, and MDiv and MA specialized in Theological Librarianship.

A training for theological library staff was once again resurrected at the Indian Theological Library Association (ITLA) conference held in 2002. In response to this demand, a five-week librarians' training programme was organized in 2006 at the Union Biblical Seminary, Pune. This training programme was developed by Chacko Chakco, the president of the ITLA. Experienced librarians from various Indian theological seminaries were involved in teaching, and the training was attended by sixteen participants from different theological institutions in India.

Another training programme was offered in 2010, under the leadership of the Rev. Stephenson, librarian of Southern Asia Bible College (SABC). This training was attended by 30 librarians from South India; the majority of them were from Assemblies of God theological institutions. After this training, there were no training programmes offered at SABC. Notably, the majority of theological colleges and seminaries that belong to ecumenical, evangelical, and Pentecostal categories are located in South India (Sellan and Sornam 2018).

Since 2012, the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) has offered a three-month course called Certificate in Theological Librarianship (CTL). This programme has been well-received by theological colleges in South Asia to train their library staff. So far, over 60 librarians have been trained through this programme. This course is recognized by the ATA, BTESSC, and other theological accrediting associations in South Asia.

Realizing the need for training of Nepali theological librarians, Asia Graduate School of Theology Nepal, with the collaboration of the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL), organized a two-week training programme in May 2017. The training was attended by thirteen librarians from various theological institutions in Nepal.



Image 4: First generation of Certificate in Theological Librarianship graduates in 2012 at SAIACS. © Yesan Sellan



Image 5: First Nepal Theological Librarians' Training in Kathmandu, Nepal in 2017. © Yesan Sellan

## *Theological Library Associations and Supporting Organizations*

Theological library associations and networks and other supporting agencies have also contributed to the development of theological librarianship at the Asian level.

### *Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL)*

Karmito (2005, 24) narrates the history of the formation of the Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL). The ForATL was founded in 1991 by Karmito (then librarian of Duta Wacana Christian University, Indonesia). Librarians from India, Indonesia, Singapore, and Taiwan gathered for a consultation in Ching Mai in May 1991, under the guidance of the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) (Pryor and Little 1993). Even today, the PTCA continues to support the cause of development of libraries. The first meeting of the ForATL was held on October 1991 in Singapore and resolved to prepare a directory of theological libraries and librarians, offer short-term training and workshops, and prepare guidelines for theological libraries in Asia. Today, the ForATL has over sixteen institutions as its members from all over Asia. The ForATL meets every three years in different parts of Southeast Asia. Publication of a thesis directory and of periodicals holdings are underway. The ATESEA and the FTESEA were major supporters of ForATL activities. The recent ForATL conferences were not represented by librarians of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, due to the lack of funds available for travel grants.

### *Joint Library Committee (JLC), Bangalore*

The JLC is one of the regional library networks in India. A consultation on co-operative library development was held on October 27, 1984, at the United Theological College, Bangalore under the leadership of Prof. F. S. Downs, the then-Convener of the UTC library committee. A joint committee of librarians of co-operating institutions was established at that meeting and decided to meet four times a year. It was decided that this committee would be known as "The Joint Library Committee, Bangalore." Fr. M. K. Kuriakose, UTC Archivist, was elected as Convener. Over the years, the JLC has had several remarkable achievements, including the publication of the *Handbook with Listing of Periodicals and Dissertations of JLC Libraries* (Patmury 1996) and others. The need to formulate guidelines for the future course of action was felt by the JLC. As a result of this, the JLC adopted its constitution and bylaws on 21 November 2002 in the meeting held at SABC. Today, the JLC has eighteen colleges as its members. It is one of the active theological librarians' forums in South Asia, which meets



Image 6: The meeting of the Joint Library Committee (JLC) in Bangalore in 2015. © Yesan Sellan



Image 7: Triennial Conference of ITLA held in Bangalore, October 4-7, 2015. © ITLA

three times a year. The JLC has launched its union catalogue online (<http://jcbangalore.in>), which holds over 200,000 bibliographic records from Bangalore libraries.

### *Indian Theological Library Association (ITLA)*

The Senate of Serampore College hosted an All India Theological Librarians conference at the United Theological College in January 1980, under the leadership of C. R. W. David. This meeting was attended by eighteen librarians from colleges affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College (David 1980, 2). The participants of this conference named this meeting as the Indian Theological Library Association (ITLA). They felt the need for inclusion of librarians from other streams of theological institutions in India, such as Catholic seminaries, Evangelical institutions, and others, as its members. It was decided to meet every three years but, due to various challenges, the ITLA could not meet regularly as decided. After a long gap, the ITLA hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> triennial conference in Pune, at Union Biblical Seminary in October 2002. Gordon Harris (2004) describes his experience in attending the second conference of the ITLA under the theme, *The Role of Librarian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. This conference was attended by over 30 librarians from various theological seminaries and colleges from India. The ITLA hosted its 3<sup>rd</sup> conference in Bangalore in 2005. Since this conference, the ITLA has not hosted another conference.

### *Challenges and Suggestions*

The road ahead of theological libraries in Asia is not so easy, as they are faced with limited budget provisions, lack of resources to address contextual theological issues, growing costs of periodicals, and unfavourable political scenarios in various countries in which Christians are a minority community. Also, the lack of cooperation between libraries can be a stumbling block for development. In this context, the up-skilling of theological librarians and enhancement of knowledge in the latest technologies would create ample opportunities for collaborations with libraries in the global north and mutual benefit. Networking, collaboration, and resource sharing among regional, national, and local levels provide opportunities for theological libraries to reap the benefit of resource sharing. As recommended by Harrison (1957, 53), the subscription of current periodicals and interlibrary loan systems among libraries would be the greatest service to the theological community. The use of open source solutions for computerization and developing institutional repositories helps theological libraries to grow at par with libraries in other fields of study. [Globethics.net](http://Globethics.net), an online global theological library (Stückelberger and Vallotton 2010) opens up scope for Global South scholarship to be widely known to the global community. Full-text theses and dissertations from Asian seminaries would be of the greatest value for global scholars to access from anywhere if they



are made available in open access platforms. Open access to theological scholarship from the Global South will be a great value to the study of Christianity in Asia.

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