Developing a Classification System for Bengali Literature: Some Thoughts

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Abstract: *Literature class is an example of the use of faceted concepts by Dewey Decimal Classification. There have been many changes in literature class in different editions of DDC and 23rd edition is not an exception. In 2011, this 23rd edition is published and while experimenting with this edition, some experiences related to its serious limitations which are still existed are gathered. A few of them are presented in this article to share with fellow professionals. This article also indicates that a new classification system, as developed establishing the symbiotic relation among DDC and CC, would work in much better way.*

Keyword: *Bengali literature, Literature Class, DDC 23rd Edition. New Classification System*

1 Introduction :

Literature is always language dependent. There are about four thousand languages across the globe. Linguists have grouped them into different language family according their origin. Indo-European language family is one of the important major group from which many modern languages are derived. Bengali is one of such modern language. It is proved that the Bengali language was evolved from Eastern Middle Indo-Aryan dialects such as the Magadhi Prakrit and Pali. Bengali is the national and official language of Bangladesh, and one of the 23 official languages recognised by the Republic of India. It is the official language of the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. Moreover, there are also a number of Bengali communities scattered across the country resulting Bengali became the major language in other Indian states like Bihar, Chattisgarh and in the Indian union territories like Andaman and Nicobar Islands. In addition, there are significant Bengali communities beyond South Asia, Japan, Malaysia, United Kingdom and United States. Some studies reveal that Bengali is the second commonly used language in India and the fifth ranked language in the world. Obviously, such a big community of Bengali speaking population have their own ideology, their philosophy; their feelings, their experiences, their devotions towards deities etc and were expressed in different literary forms. The first of its kind was Charyapada, a collection of Buddhist mystic songs. Thus the Bengali literature, a body of writings in Bengali lan-

guage, came into existence. Slowly, different forms like poetry, drama, novel, essays, letters, speeches, satire, humours etc were added into Bengali literature.

Bengali literature is one of the important literatures in this subcontinent. In India, it is the richest literature among all other. The Bengali literature has got a large number of book lovers who love to read these – they are the actual user community of Bengali literature. They are scattered in schools, colleges, universities and other learned institutions like the Asiatic Society, Bangla Academy, Bangla Sahitya Parishad and so on. To satisfy the interests of these user communities, academic and research institutions have a huge collection of Bengali literature. Public libraries, in addition, of Bangladesh, West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, Andaman & Nicober Island of India have also concentrated on Bengali literature. The statistics of Kolkata International Book Fair (কলকাতা আন্তর্জাতিক বইমেলা) indicates that the readers of Bengali literature are increasing gradually. Lovers of Bengali literature are always in search of new literatures. Bengali Story writers, Poets, Novelists and Publishers are also aware about the interest and need of the society. A large number of literary works are produced in Bengali language.

To provide right book to the right reader at the moment, when he desires to get so, is the main ideology of librarians. They need to arrange these books/documents on the shelves in proper order of classification which indicates the unique position of a particular book. Hence librarians of academic and research institute are generally dependent on the popularly used Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) inspite of its limitations in representing class numbers. The latest edition, the 23rd edition, of DDC, claims that the said schedule is translated in more than thirty languages and is used in more than 135 countries. In this research paper we try to present our investigation related to the feasibility of using DDC in classifying books on Bengali literature to find its unique location in the shelves.

2 **Landmarks**

Limitations of DDC and other classification schemes caused limitation in building classification numbers which used to be a barrier in finding the book. Thus many experiments are done in this respect. As found in literature, Late Satishchandra Guhathakurta, in 1932, tried to compile a classification 'Prachya Bargikan' based on faceted concept. But perhaps its usage in libraries were not that popular. Thus the experiment as carried out in 1949 in Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata is considered as the pioneer work done by Swamy Saroj Maharaj who had taken the initiative to redefine the class number for Language, Literature, Religion, Philosophy, Indian History etc. and the division/subdivisions were derived on the basis of DDC.

During 1950-51, Late Pravatkumar Mukhopadhyay had proposed a short scheme of classification - "Bagla Granth Bargikaran : Dashamik Prathaya Bangla Granther Bargikaran Paddhati" (Bengali Book Classification : a decimal classification for Bengali books) with his working experiences as the librarian of Viswa Bharati. This work is considered as one of the primary contributions to this field. One of the major advantages of this scheme is the use of two-digit numbers instead of three-digit DDC number. According to this scheme, divisions and subdivisions are derived by their literary forms only and these are, in the first level division, as followed :

80   Literature (সাহিত্য - সাধারণ)

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81   Bengali Poetic literatures–General discussion (বাংলা কাব্য সাহিত্য– সাধারণ আলোচনা)

82   Drama, Play (যাত্রা, নাট্য সাহিত্য)

83   Fiction, novel (গল্প   উপন্যাস)

84   Prose (গদ্য রচনা প্রবন্ধ)

85   Bengali Speeches (বাংলা বক্তৃতা)

86   Bengali letters (বাংলা পত্রাবলী)

87   Bengali Satire and Humour (বাংলা বিদ্রূপ সাহিত্য)

88   Miscellaneous writings (বিবিধ গদ্য পত্রিকা, সংবাদপত্র সাহিত্য)

89   Translations (অনুবাদ সাহিত্য)

It is understood that Late Pravatkumar had given the scope of inclusion of other literatures (i.e. treatment of literature in languages other than Bengali) in 89 classes. But he has not proposed any period division to represent author/contributor. However, in 1959, Late Pravatkumar published the second edition of his schedule which is comparatively an enlarged publication and many concepts related literature could be accommodated. This scheme was more popular and is being used by some libraries even today. Sources mentioned that though Pravathkumar revised his schedule, due to some unknown reason that revised edition was not published. It is heard that an attempt was made by Bengal Library Association to publish it; even they could not get it published.

In 1957, Late Subodhkumar Mukhopadhaya made an attempt by translating first summary, second summary and third summary of Dewey Decimal Classification into Bengali. This translation was published in his book on 'Library Science' in Bengali. Late Subodhkumar had also prepared expanded schedule for Bengali literature class.

Late Rajkumar Mukhopadhyay, in 1983, had categorised Bengali literature and suggested a structural presentation. Late Rajkumar's work was to indicate, for Bengali literature, the possible expansion of the structure as mentioned in DDC. Thus, his work was also inclined towards Dewey's line of thinking and the concept of enumerative scheme was followed.

In 2008, the latest contribution to this field of research is done by Sri Ramkrishna Saha, Former Chief Librarian, Jadavpur University. Sri Saha's work deals with the procedure of classifying of books or documents in Bengali language. This work is basically an expansion of DDC 20th edition with some modifications to support his innovative thoughts suitable for Bengali literature as a preferred class. Thus, Sri Saha adopted 810 for Bengali Literature instead of its usual class 891.44.

810   Bengali Literature (বাংলা সাহিত্য)

811   Bengali Poetry (বাংলা কবিতা ও কাব্য)

812   Bengali Drama (বাংলা যাত্রাপালা, নাটক ও নাট্য সাহিত্য)

813   Bengali Fiction (বাংলা কথা সাহিত্য – গল্প ও উপন্যাস)

814   Bengali Essays (বাংলা গদ্য সাহিত্য ও প্রবন্ধ)

815	Bengali Speeches (বাংলা ভাষণ/বক্তৃতা)
816	Bengali Letters (বাংলা পত্রাবলি)
817	Bengali Satire and Humour (বাংলা রম্যরচনা, রঙ্গব্যঙ্গ, বিদ্রূপ সাহিত্য, রসরচনা)
818	Bengali Miscellaneous Writings (বাংলা বিবিধ রচনা ও সংকলন)
819	Bengali Translation (বাংলা অনুবাদ সাহিত্য)

Dewey suggested 810 for American Literature as the preferred class; in almost same line of thinking Sri Saha had made 810 Bengali literature and 891.44 is left as empty.

3 Some practical experiences in classifying Bengali Literature

Being White Anglo-Saxon and Protestant (WASP) bias, DDC has produced its literature class placing American literature more elaborately. Western Culture, Philosophy, History in every respect was placed. Even Dewey himself was much aware about this. Thus, there we experience some limitations in classifying documents on Bengali literature. According to DDC, Language, Form and Period have been considered as a preferred sequence. Hence, it may be formulated as

Literature $\rightarrow$ Language $\rightarrow$ Form $\rightarrow$ Period $\rightarrow$ Special Characteristics

Again this has got more or less a faceted flavour which was introduced S R Ranganathan for his Colon Classification. In recent editions of DDC (including 23rd Editions), it is found that the concept of faceted classification is adopted; slowly it has been inclined towards faceted presentation. While classifying any document on Bengali literature, the following five components are to be considered essentially.

(i) *First Component* :

Literature, which is the main class, is represented by 800. Bengali would come under '890 Literature of other specific languages and language families'.

(ii) *Second Component* :

Expansiveness in library classification is well reflected in DDC for European literature. 810-889 have been allotted for European literature and only 890 is assigned for Literature of other specific languages and language families. Class number for such literature is built by adding specific Language number brought from language (Main class 400). Thus

| 490 | Indian Language |
| 491.44 | Bengali Language |

So -1.44 is the subdivision to represent Bengali languages

Hence **89**[0] + [49]**1.44** = **891.44**   **Bengali literature**

(iii) *Third Component* :

Literary forms are given in Table 3A and 3B. Table 3A is used for description, critical appraisal, biography, single or collected works of an individual author and Table 3B is used for description, critical appraisal, biography, collected works of two or more authors; also for rhetoric in specific literary forms. It is noted in DDC 23rd edition that for Bengali literature the following literary forms can be used

— 1   Poetry

— 2 Drama

— 3 Fiction

— 4 Essays

— 5 Speeches

— 6 Letters

— 7 Humor and satire

— 8 Miscellaneous writings

But out of the above mentioned forms, only a few have got subdivision which means some of the specific literary forms cannot be represented through class numbers.

(iv) *Fourth Component* :

Periods are used to represent the literature of specific period. In 23rd edition of DDC, division of period for Bengali literature is given as follows –

    891   East Indo-European and Celtic literatures

              Standard subdivisions are added for East Indo-European and Celtic literatures together, for East Indo-European alone

      .4   Modern Indo-Aryan literatures

              Former heading : Modern Indic literatures

       PERIOD TABLE FOR SPECIFIC MODERN INDO-ARYAN LITERATURES

                    1   Early period to 1345

                    2   1345– 1645

                    3   1645– 1845

                    4   1845– 1895

                          Class here 19th Century

                    5   1895– 1919

                    6   1920– 1939

                    7   1940–

                  71 1940– 1999

                          Class here 20th Century

                  72 2000–

    .44 * Bengali literature

        Use Period table under 891.4

The period relates to the authors (more specifically birth date of authors) of the specific literature. The above mentioned period division is for Indo-Aryan Literatures as a whole. This division does not fit to the Bengali literature. Librarians are using the same for Bengali Literature too as there is no specific division for Bengali Literature. Authors of Bengali Literature need not necessarily match with the above division. And this forced classification done by the librarians are mostly not error free.

(v) *Fifth Component* :

Table 3C is used for literature displaying specific features, literature emphasizing subjects, and/or literature for and by groups of people. The notations enumerated for specific features, specific kinds or types, specific forms of literature are not applicable to works of individual authors. For literature displaying specific features, literature emphasizing subjects, and literature for and by groups of people will lead us to use of Table 3C through Table 3B; Table 3C provides additional elements for building numbers.

While classifying documents on Bengali literature using 23rd edition, we have experienced serious limitations which resulted in comparatively non-expressive class numbers.

a) In case of Bengali literature, it is seen that a good number of writers / authors are from the same time period. For example, novelists like Rabindranath Tagore, Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadyaya, Sharatchandra Chattopadhaya belong to same time period, thus all novels written by them will get the same class number 891.4434.

b) We all know that DDC has got special class number for William Shakespeare (822.33). On the other hand, Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali literature is an important personality whose contributions are in different literary forms ranged from poetry to drama, short stories to novels etc, DDC has failed to provide any special class number for Tagore. Some time it is needed that all of Tagore's work must be placed in one place. But 'Balaka' (a book of poetries), 'Rakta Karabi' (a drama), and 'Char Adhyay' (a novel) will get numbers as 891.4414, 819.4424, and 819.4434 respectively scattering them in different places.

c) For special characteristics and idea are in the Table 3C. Like earlier edition the same is repeated in 23rd edition of DDC too. But, there is no instruction in Table 3A (for Single author) to add numbers from Table 3C. Thus special characteristics as appeared in a literary work of a single author can not be represented in the class number. The class number for 'Ganga' (a river centric novel) by Samaresh Basu will be 891.44371 and concept of river is not represented.

4 Development and Functionality of new classification system

To overcome the above mentioned problems and limitations as we experienced with a large number of titles, a new classification system for Bengali literature was proposed. Our objectives were to identify the problems in classifying Bengali literature and to categorise them; considering the positive points of DDC and CC to propose a new scheme which would, we feel, work in much better way in classifying documents on Bengali literatures. On the process of our research, a classification system is developed which would work in the line of Ranganathan's analytic-synthetic method of classification.

(i) In spite of having some experiences in working with Bengali literature, we felt that to gather proper knowledge regarding Bengali literature we need to know the highways and byways of the subject. Thus the methodology of study of subject as suggested by Dr G Bhattacharyya.

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(ii) A large number of terms including names of authors (writers, poets, playwrights, novelists etc), special features, specific forms, theme, etc. are collected in a Term-Records. A few primary sources and a large number of primary sources are consulted to collect huge number of term. Help of a number of experts were sought to categories them.

(iii) Then, we were governed by the Ranganathan's Canons of Characteristics. These canons helped us to place the isolates as collected in term-records in their hierarchical structure. The Principles of Helpful sequence were used to arrange them in order.

(iv) The popularity of DDC is due to its simplicity in notational system in comparison with the Colon Classification. Thus we primarily decided to adopt pure notation like DDC. But to bring the facet flavour to the newly developed scheme we have no option than adopting mixed notation concept.

(v) We have identified the symbiotic nature and relationship among DDC and CC. Thus the new scheme is based on DDC 23rd edition with some modification to make it analytic-synthetic classification in the light of Ranganathan school of thought. The concept of symbiosis between DDC and CC has been discussed elsewhere in detail.

(vi) A number of postulates were adopted and some canons and principles were framed for this classification system.

(vii) The newly developed system possesses all qualities like Simplicity, Brevity, Hospitality, Mnemonic. The present system would generate a class number in more extensive way. Testing of this system is in progress with an intention to develop a full-fledged system.

5 Conclusion

Treatment of Literature class by DDC has always been criticized due to different reasons. These are mainly caused due to lack of clear and workable definitions of literary forms, problems of treating works of mixed forms or uncertain forms, inconvenience for users due to separation and scattering of works written by and about single author, confusion caused due to arbitrary decision about the form made by librarians. In addition to these problems in general, treatment of Bengali literature have also got some limitations. These limitations are being continues years after years and editions after editions of DDC. It is revealed through investigation that the Edition 23(2011) follows the same three sub tables as the previous 22nd edition. The purpose of Table 3A, 3B and 3C were same and problems remain same too. Thus we are prompted to develop a new classification system for Bengali literature. We hope that the new system as we mentioned here are being tested in a library which would help us to bring out a full-fledged classification scheme.

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7 প্রভাতকুমার মুখোপাধ্যায় । বাংলা গ্রন্থ বর্গীকরণ ঃ দশমিক প্রথায় বাংলা গ্রন্থের বর্গীকরণ পদ্ধতি । ১৯৫৯ । ওরিয়েন্ট বুক; কলকাতা। ৩৭৯ পৃষ্ঠা।

8 বনশ্রী রায়। ডিউইকৃত দশমিক বর্গীকরণ পদ্ধতিতে সাহিত্যের শ্রেণীবিভাজন ঃ কিছু কথা। *গ্রন্থাগার।* ৫৭, ২; ২০০৭। পৃষ্ঠা ৩২-৩৫ ।

9 বনশ্রী রায় ও পীযূষকান্তি পাণিগ্রাহী । বর্গীকরণে ডিউই ও রঙ্গনাথন তত্ত্বের মিথোজীবিতা : কল্পনা না বাস্তব । *গ্রন্থাগার।* (প্রেরিত)।

10 রাজকুমার মুখোপাধ্যায় । গ্রন্থাগার ও গ্রন্থাগারিকঃ সম্পূর্ণ গ্রন্থাগার বিজ্ঞান । পরিবর্ধিত সংস্করণ । ১৯৮৩ । ওরিয়েন্ট বুক; কলকাতা।

11 রামকৃষ্ণ সাহা। বাংলা পুস্তক বর্গীকরণ। ২০০৮। বঙ্গীয় গ্রন্থাগার পরিষদ; কলকাতা। বিভিন্ন ধরণের পৃষ্ঠা (৬১৭পৃষ্ঠা)।

12 সুবোধ কুমার মুখোপাধ্যায় । গ্রন্থাগার বিজ্ঞান। ১৯৫৭। ডি এম লাইব্রেরী; কলকাতা। ৩৯২ পৃষ্ঠা।