INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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While inaugurating this Seminar I would take the opportunity of touching on one or two points. When an invitation to attend this Seminar was sent to a librarian, he immediately wrote back rather surprised that such a Seminar was being held. He said when our university libraries and special libraries lack some elementary dimensions in the way of reading space, good shelving, reliable catalogues, good periodical literature and the rest, what is all this talk about using computers in university libraries and special libraries. He also queried the propriety of discussing this topic when our manpower is so generously available. These are valid questions. My personal sympathies are with my young friend. However, I should like to assure him that discussing this topic does not necessarily mean that from tomorrow onward, all our university libraries and special libraries will start availing themselves of computer facilities. Sophistication has to be undertaken on merits and not on moods. The reason why this seminar is being held is to discuss how the computer could fit into the economy of a developing country's libraries, without in any way causing any sort of 'imbalance. That our catalogues are not uptodate, our shelving lack a lot of finesse, our reading spaces are not well-lit, our stock of book and periodical material is not very plentiful, I do not doubt. The question is whether we should not worry at all about the impact that computer technology is making on information handling. When it comes to compiling union catalogues, cumulative indexes, analytical statements about manpower and resources all of which have to be produced very quickly, keeping in pace with the output of literature in the various fields, should we not, in the interests of promptness and some speed, consider what repetitive processes could be dealt with successfully by the use of the computer facilities already available in the country. This is an open question. A Documentation Centre like the INSDOC with its international context and its national responsibility, cannot afford to neglect a very significant development in the information field. It must have a core of people trained and expert in this matter such that if need arises, as in the aeronautics and electronics fields, this group can without difficulty programme projects in the field of information retrieval. I am very happy to find that INSDOC has already flexed its muscles in this direction and produced author and subject indexes, keyword indexes, cumulative indexes, a print-out of a regional union catalogue and a roster of scientific translators, using computer techniques. The libraries of our Institutes of Technology and other massive science libraries belonging to the agricultural, medical and other complexes must experiment as to how their accession records, their charging records, even their very catalogues could be kept up-to-date by new techniques. Therefore, this Seminar is a bit of loud thinking wherein computerwallas and no-computerwallas can have their fullest say and arrive at rational decisions. I am glad to find that not only librarians and information scientists but computer technologists and scientists are also taking part in this Seminar. I welcome you all to this gathering which is meeting under a very heavy shadow of national mourning.