STATUS OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Public libraries play a very important role in creating knowledge based societies. Importance of public libraries has been realized at state, national and international levels. Present paper highlights the concept of public libraries in the contemporary societies. This study focuses public libraries in terms of infrastructure, collection development, collection organization, human resources and services. Scope of the study is limited to the Jammu and Kashmir state (India). The paper lists different initiatives undertaken and reports submitted to the Government from time to time. The study mainly assesses 34 public libraries for their operations, services, staff strength and infrastructure.

Keywords: Public libraries; Library Human Resources; Collection Development; Library Services; Knowledge society, Jammu & Kashmir

INTRODUCTION

The Jammu and Kashmir is situated in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent. The territory is bounded on the north by Afghanistan and China, on the eat by China, on the south by the state of Himachal Pradesh and the state of Punjab in India, and on the west by the North-West Frontier Province and the Punjab Province of Pakistan, The entire State of Jammu & Kashmir has an area of 222,236 sq km. India presently holds only 100,569 sq km, whereas Pakistan holds 78, 932 sq km and China 42735 sq km.

The State has several renowned institutions of higher learning, providing high-quality education in the fields of medicine, engineering and management. There are 14171 Primary Schools, 6665 Elementary Schools, 1194 Secondary Schools, 597 Senior Secondary Schools, 95 Degree Colleges, 4 Engineering Colleges, 4 Medical Colleges, Universities, 1 Deemed University, 12 Polytechnic Institutes and 37 Industrial Training Institutes.

In the world of libraries, the public library assumes a special significance. Among the different types of libraries, public libraries are unique in their objectives, clientele served, governance, collection development and scope of services. It has the mandate to meet the needs of its users for education, information, leisure and personal development. For centuries, libraries were considered to be among most valuable information organizations in society. Their goal was and still is to help people exploit and use information to solve problems, gain new insights and acquire new skills and knowledge (Choy, 2007). Public libraries are distinct from research libraries, academic libraries and other special libraries in that their mandate is to serve the general public's information needs (rather than the needs of a particular school, institution, or research population). Public libraries typically allow users to take books and other materials off the premises temporarily; they also have non-circulating reference collections and provide computer and Internet access to patrons. In addition to access, many public libraries offer training and support to computer users. Most public libraries today are supported by tax monies from local and state governments, and some have foundations to support them with additional capital. Libraries lend books and materials freely, but charge fines if materials are returned late or damaged. Libraries often keep many historical documents relevant to their particular town. And as such these public libraries serve as gateways to local knowledge. In the twenty-first century, the role of librarians will be facilitating access to information resources rather than acting as custodians of human knowledge. This change is a result of the pressure of digital technologies on libraries which are forced to re-write their strategies in order to stay visible in the increasingly digital society. Younger generations of library users are particularly susceptible to digital technology and their demand for digital information has increased since most of the new material is born digital and is readily accessible on the internet. The internet has taken over the role of the main information provider among young generations, changing their perspective and attitude towards libraries greatly because of the inclination of users towards search engines instead of library resources (Radovan, 2010). The world over, information and communications technologies (ICTs) are transforming the way people communicate, learn, do business and interact with their governments (Tshepo, Tiroyamodimo, Sebusang, Resego,2011). In digital world, libraries are becoming more deeply engaged in the creation and dissemination of knowledge and are becoming essential collaborators with the other stakeholders in these activities (Lougee, 2002). Thus public libraries if developed on professional lines can play a very important role in converting the dream of information society into reality.

The Jammu & Kashmir has a rich tradition of scholarship and libraries. The Government has taken New strides during past century for its development. The auther attempts to assess the present system after taking cognizance of its historical development. The study focuses on main facets of the system – structure, physical facilities, collection management, finance, human resource and services.

OBJECTIVES OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

1. Help the people of Jammu and Kashmir to meet the educational, informational and personal development needs including recreational.
2. Provide documental and informational services to all people of Jammu and Kashmir as well as for others.
3. Preserve the reading material for future in Jammu and Kashmir

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope is limited to select public libraries of the State. The study looks at the past to trace the development of public libraries from primary and secondary sources.

METHODOLOGY

It follows survey method employing a questionnaire for obtaining data about present status of libraries. The questions were grouped into appropriate sections in order to give the questionnaire a iogicaJ sequence (from the general to the specific). Few questions invited respondents to provide useful intormation, which they considered to be of utility to the survey. Multiple-choice questions were einplo} ed wyere•er possible. However in order to obtain accurate. comperhensive and timely data. the invcstigation was supplemented with interview and observation methods. Multi-pronged research methodology is being applied for collecting the data required for the present study. It consists of:

     a. Questionnaire

     b. Interview &

     c. Personal Observation

DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir as a single political entity was founded by Maharaja Gulab Singh under the infamous Amritsar treaty signed by him with the British government in March 1846. At initial stage no attention was given towards the development of libraries by Dogra rulers. However, the later links in the hierarchy of this dynasty began allocating some of their revenue towards the development of education and free book service. Accordingly two major public Libraries were established by Maharaja Ranbir Singh and Maharaja Pratap Singh in 1879 and 1898 at Jammu and Srinagar respectively. These two libraries at Jammu and Srinagar and are acting as State rules i.e. Sri Ranbir Singh (SRS) Library and Sri Pratap Singh

(SP) Library and are acting as State Central Libraries irrespective divisions. With the development of political consciousness among the people triggered by the local educated youth several book clubs were started in the important towns in the state by the young and progressive people. These clubs used to circulate books worth any cost among their members. One such club established reading room at Fateh Kadal in 1931 under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, which later on became nucleus of Kashmir freedom struggle.

POST 1947 DEVELOPMENT

After 1947 different initiatives were taken by State and Central governments for the improvement of libraries in the State. One of the initiatives was extension of free books service to the villages under the National Extension Service Scheme. In every Panchayat Ghar small libraries were opened with the books mostly on agriculture. At the town level, the town area committees established their own libraries to provide free reading rooms. But the most of these libraries could not continue due to political and administrative unrest in the State.

ESTABLISHMENT OF DIRECTORATE OF LIBRARIES

However, in order to create, promote and sustain a well knit public library system, the State Government took a giant step to set up a separate Directorate of Libraries and Archives in 1961. Prof. S. Bashir-ud-Din, a renowned librarian of his time, was appointed as its first director. The directorate gave new impetus to the library service in the state and devised a plan under which district and branch libraries were established. The directorate also appointed two research officers as subject experts, one for classification and cataloguing of Hindi and Sanskrit manuscripts and other for Persian and Arabic manuscripts. The Government also framed rules and regulations named as the Jammu and Kashmir Library and Reading Room Rules-1963, for guidance of public and library personnel, in order to improve the harmonious relations between the two. These rules define the duties of the Director, Librarian and clearly laid down the categories of persons who can become the members of such libraries. The important features of these rules are that no security money is to be deposited by any category of members except, of course, for temporary membership where the security deposit has been fixed as rupees twenty. However, these rules are too old and call for a change in present day situations.

Library Association: Efforts of Prof. P.N. Kaula:

Prior to 1947, there was only one trained Librarian in the state, viz. Prof. Prithvi Nath Kaula.. He wrote an outline scheme for the development of libraries in the state. He also wrote a book "Kashmir main llmi Inqalab". He also submitted a plan for the development of libraries in the state to the then Prime Minister of the state Mr. Sheikh Mohammad Abdulah in 1951. It bears an introduction by Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, the then president, Indian Library Association. Unfortunately political developments change

the priorities in the state. The Prime Minister of the state had agreed to enact Library legislation, but before it could have been done his government was dismissed in 1953. In 1956 at the invitation of the Education secretary of Jammu and Kashmir, Professor Kaula examined the working of the SPS Library, Srinagar and submitted his scheme for its reorganization and development. Between 1951 and 1964 three attempts were made for the formation of a library association for the promotion of library culture in the state. But due to lack of cooperation from authorities and non availability of sufficient funds there was no success. However on 22nd April, 1964 a convention of librarians in Kashmir was held. It was presided over by Mr. M.H. Razvi of Jammu and Kashmir University Library. The main outcome of this convention was the formation of an ad-hoc committee consisting of seven members. On the recommendations of ad-hoc committee J&K Library association (JKLA) came into being on 19th June 1966(5/) Though this association and the blessing of the State Government and expert advice of the Director of libraries and many philanthropists this could not achieve the high ideals for which it came into being.

Randhawa Committee:

With a view to go into the working of the Directorate of Libraries Research and Museum the then Chief Minister, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, appointed a committee vide Government order no 1867-GD of 1975, dated 18th September, 1975 the committee was headed by Dr. M.S. Randhawa the then Vice Chancellor of Punjab Agriculture University, as Chairman and Prof. Noor-ul-Hassan Khan the then Head, Department of Library and information Science, University of Kashmir as one of the members to go into the working of the Directorate of Libraries and also to recommend how the Directorate could contribute aggressively to promote library services in the State. The Committee submitted its report on 10th August, 1976. Some of the recommendations of the Committee are given below:

a. Library Legislation: the committee reaffirmed that Library legislation was the every basis for the development of a public library system that can ensure free library service, adequate funding, and maintenance of proper library standards. It recommended library legislation for the state on the pattern of Tamil-Nadu.

b. Funds: the committee recommended levying of a library cess of 5 paisa per rupee on property tax and provision of regular grants to ensure adequate and regular funding for promotion and maintenance of a standard library service in the state

c. Structure of Public Libraries: In order to have public libraries at different levels committee recommended following structure of the public library system;

1. Separate State Central Librans in Jammu and Kashmir provinces;
2. District Libraries in all the districts;
3. Tehsil Libraries;
4. Block Libraries; and
5. Village Libraries.

The committee also recommended the introduction of mobile library vans in the Central Libraries so that services are offered in remote areas. Besides, the above recommendations the Committee also made various other recommendations for smooth functioning of Directorate of Libraries and Research viz. role, operation and duties. The above recommendations were submitted to the Chief Minister by Dr. M.S. Randhawa, Chairman of the committee. But due to one reason or the other the State Government has not been able to do much to implement these recommendations.

PRESENT SITUATION OF LIBRARIES

Presently public libraries in the state are managed by Directorate of Libraries and Research. The Director is assisted by two Deputy Directors one each in Jammu and Kashmir provinces. The present structure of the Public library system in the State can be categorized as under:

State Central Libraries -2 City Central Libraries- 2 District Libraries-14

Tehsil Libraries- 50

Block Libraries -71

In 1961, a separate Department of Libraries, Research and Museum was created in J&K and district libraries set up at Srinagar, Anantnag, Baramulla, Leh, Doda and Udhampur. In 1977 and 1982, the Department was amalgamated with Achieves Department and Education Department, respectively. However, in 1986, the Department of Libraries reassumed its independent character as Department of Libraries and Research. In order to promote the culture of book reading, the Department holds books exhibitions, seminars and debates at district level every year.

Furthermore, Research and Publication division possesses around 2,500 manuscripts. These are presently digitized by Indra Ghandhi National Centre arts (IGNCA) New Delhi with funding from National Mission for manuscripts. The Mission has their responsibility to digitize the manuscripts available throughout the country for maximum exploitation and global use. Once the project is complete the manuscripts are to be hosted on the server of IGNCA for worldwide exploitation on subscription basis. On completion IGNCA shall hand over one copy of digitized format of these manuscripts to the Directorate of Libraries and Research. So far project team has digitize around 1200 manuscripts comprising of 5,00,000 folios. The manuscripts in the library mainly are in Persian, shard and Sanskrit languages. The project team started its work in Sept. 2005 for a period of three months and again resumed work in Sept. 2006 and are optimistic to complete the assignment by March 2007.

The Department of Libraries and & Research is engaged in dissemination of knowledge by providing free library and reading room facilities to public in Jammu and Kashmir. The Department runs a chain of public libraries in blocks, tehsils, districts and divisions of the State. From small children to aged people and students to scholars, every section of the society is benefited from the facility. Besides making books on various subjects available to people at public libraries, the reading community is also provided national and local newspapers and magazines to keep them abreast with the latest happenings around the globe. Special Children Corners have been added to central and District Libraries for the benefit of the younger generation. By way of promotion of book writing in the State, the Department purchases books

written by local authors on different subjects and in different languages.

The Department has a prized collection of manuscripts, presently housed in the Oriental Research Library, Hazratbal. This treasure of 5824 manuscripts in various languages and scripts like Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Balti, Hindi, Sharda, and Kashmiri, is considered to be one of the richest manuscripts collections in South Asia.

The activity of the Department helps in the promotion of regional languages of the State. The Department has now added to its library collections books on competitive examinations to help the student community prepare for these examinations. There are 139 public libraries and lending depots/reading rooms in the State.

AUTOMATION AND NETWORKING OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES PROJECT (PILOT PHASE)

As a significant step towards modernizing and improving public library services in Jammu & Kashmir, the department of Libraries & Research has started implementation on the automation & networking of public Libraries project (Pilot phase) costing Rs.116.72 lacks. The project was launched by minister of tourism & culture, Nawang Rigzin Jora, on October 28th 2011. Under the pilot phase, four main public libraries viz. SRS Central Library, Jammu, SPS Central Library, Srinagar, Oriental Research Library, Hazratbal and City Central Library, Karan Nagar have been taken up for automation and networking. In the subsequent phase, district, tehsil, and block libraries would be added to the network.

On completion, the project would result in the public library facilities in J & K switching over from manual to automated mode and allowing online access to library information. Other public libraries located throughout the state would be taken up for automation and networking in subsequent phase.

The project is being implemented with the assistance of National Informatics Centre, (NIC), and Government of India. It is for the first time that a modern library system will finally take shape in Jammu & Kashmir. For the purpose, state of the art hardware and communication infrastructure have been installed and made operational at these sites with the technical support from National Informatics Centre (J & K). In coming months, the state of Jammu & Kashmir would have its own internet based public library network for library users, researchers and students. The NIC designed e-Granthalaya library management software and digital library software is being used for automation and networking of the libraries. The internet platform through public library portal will enable access to information on public library collection in the state.

The modernization programme will also strengthen the library staff of 140 public libraries in the state to provide services and management of their activities in an efficient manner. As part of the project, two workshops are being organised at Jammu and Kashmir to train public library staff in the use of latest information and communication tools.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

- There is an urgent need to recruit the professional and non professional staffs in all the public libraries as various positions are lying vacant.
- Public libraries should have their own building at the central place of locality for easy accessibility by the users.
- Public libraries should act as community information centre, and thereby it plays pivotal role in spreading community awareness, government's plans benefits and e- governance programme.
- ICT infrastructure with wireless capability is required to be added.
- Skill and competency development programmes like training/ workshop/ orientation and refresher courses for public librarians should be compulsory.
- Collection needs to be enriched according to the needs of different category of users.
- Interactive web portal for public library should be developed.
- With increasing public access to new technologies and social media, the role of public libraries has changed significantly and hence, promotion of every activity should be done through newspapers, face book, whatsapp and twitter.
- There is an urgent need to involve the communities in the organisation, management and monitoring of public library services.
- Provision for separate sections for children literature, senior citizens and women should be developed.
- Library should offer physical and content excess to people with disabilities on the basis of their special needs.
- Public library should conduct user's surveys for feedback regarding their system and services.
- Advocacy tools for the promotion of public libraries services should be developed.
- Social cultural activities like Book club, cultural exhibitions should be organised and consumer health information services should be provided by the public libraries.
- Fully automation of the libraries are must. Switching over to OPAC has made the task quite easy. Similarly, other library operations like maintaining circulation records, creating indexes, answering reference queries etc. Have become quite easy with the exploitation of this technology.
- Outreach services have the potential to break down barriers in communication and bring

Unique library services to population. The outreach services are a resource for those who cannot easily access library for variety of reasons. In order to make public library movement a success time has come to take into fold every citizen of society. This can be achieved by providing document in various formats and need based information to senior citizens, patients, prisoners and physically challenged people at their respective places.

CONCLUSION

In nutshell, the overall situation of public libraries in J & K is not very encouraging. The study has revealed that all the libraries included in the present research are confine only the routine task of collecting, organising the reading material and are providing circulation services, reference service and OPAC etc. But facing many problems like lack of qualified professional staff, insufficient financial support and infrastructure. In the present day context, all the public libraries have to supplement their services with the latest information and communication technology gadgets to facilitate informal self education of all peoples in the community, to support the educational, informal and recreational activities and constructive use of leisure.

Hence, public libraries of J&K need revitalization and time is ripe enough for an enlightened action. There is a requirement for redesigning long range planning and financial assistance allocation, The public libraries in J&K need immediate revision and it can be concluded here that state government should take immediate steps to enactment of library legislation and implement the Jammu and Kashmir public library act keeping in view the ICT environment which would definitely develop public libraries across the length of the state. Only then, the next generation of the state would be in a position to compete with others in transforming information society into knowledge society.

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