Public Libraries of India: Where Do We Stand?

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Abstract

Libraries are the backbone of a civilization. They help in creating and cultivating a habit of reading among students. They are the curators of the nation's cultural heritage, and a developmental yardstick. Society can only grow economically, socially and politically if people have access to libraries. The establishment, maintenance and sustenance of the growth of libraries requires strong willpower in terms of authority and governmental action. A network of libraries can be created in the country with the help of the Library Act, but the current scenario is different. This paper reviews and compares the public libraries of India with those of the USA in terms of services, expenditure and status.

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1. Introduction

Libraries are the lifeblood of a nation. They are indicators of the culture and status of the people of a country. They safeguard the nation in times of crisis by providing proper information and guidance. They serve as lifelong learning institutions for the members of a society (Mackenzie, 2000). Libraries are also custodians of local as well as national cultures and propagate these by passing knowledge and materials through generations. UNESCO's Public Library Manifesto recognizes the role of the public libraries as being the heart of a community, providing free space, resources and services for everyone. They help in eradicating poverty, enlightening citizens, and providing universal free education to the young ones, as well as in empowering women and the weaker sections of society. In India, the development of public libraries took place in the British period when Maharaja Sayaji Rao devoted himself to the development of libraries in state of Baroda. In other parts of the country, the development of libraries took place under the aegis of other similarly great persons. The great luminary Dr. Rangnathan, the father of library sciences in India, took a keen interest in the establishment and development of a network of public libraries in India. The enactment of public library acts in the country with the help of Government of India through its Five Year Plan was a major step in that direction (Sharma, 1992).

2. Objective of Study

Libraries are meant to provide services and resources to communities. Public libraries should be supported by legislation as "the Law lays down the structure, ensures the development of public libraries on an approved pattern, and prevents its haphazard growth following the whims and fancies of politicians and administrators" (S Das Gupta, 1960). The status of

public libraries in India remains relatively disappointing even after 70 years of library legislation being introduced. The aim is to study the current status of public libraries in terms of services, legislation and funding. The methodology adopted for the study is reviewing of previously published papers as well as websites of various organizations and reports.

3. Result & Discussion

Library Legislation

In 1930, the first Model Library Act was discussed and passed by the Library Service section of the 1st Asian Educational Conference held in Benares. (Ranganathan S R, 1972) A second and more robust Model Library Act was passed at a seminar held in Delhi on 14 February 1990 organized by ILA in collaboration with RRRLF. Till then, only 9 states had enacted the library acts. Dr. V. Venkatappaiah, the Chairman of Central Sectional Committee on Public Libraries, proposed the Model Public Libraries Bill in 1989 to streamline the process of enactment of library legislations in each state. The salient features of the Bill were:

- State Library Authority with Minister for Libraries as Head;
- State Library Council;
- Department of Public Libraries with a qualified person as Director;
- State, Regional, City/District Library Authorities;
- Establishment of: (a) State Planning Board: (b) Staff Welfare Board, (c) Board of Library Education; (d) State Book Development Council; and (e) Adult Education Council;
- Grant-in-aid to Private Libraries;
- Library cess and equal matching grant from the State Government for the proper functioning of libraries;
- Public enquiry on any irregularity;
- State Library Service.

Library associations also play a major role in the establishment and development of public libraries. Nearly all the states of the country have library associations as given in table1, which represents the condition of library associations in various Indian states (e-PG Pathshala).

Table - 1: List of Library Associations in India

S. N.	Name of States	Year
1	Andaman and Nicobar Library Association	1977
2	Andhra Desha Library Association	1914
3	Assam Library Association	1938
4	Arunachal Pradesh Library Association	No information
5	Bihar Library Association (Bihar Rajya Granthalaya Sangh)	1936
6	Chandigarh library Association	No information
7	Chattisgarh Library Association	No information
8	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	No information
9	Daman ad Diu	No information
10	Delhi Library Association	1939 revived in 1953
11	Maharashtra Library Association	1921

12	Gujrati Pustakalaya Mandal	1923
13	Bengal Library Association	1925
14	Baroda State Library Association	1920
15	Madras Library Association (MALA)	1927
16	Punjab Library Association	1929
17	Karnataka Library Association	1929
18	United Provinces Library Association	1935
19	Bombay State Library Association	1935
20	Malabar Library Association	1937
21	Utkal Library Association	1944
22	Travancore Library Association	1945
23	Central Provinces and Berar Library Association	1945
24	Hyderabad Library Association	1951
25	Uttar Pradesh Library Association	1956
26	Madhya Pradesh Library Association	1957
27	Gomantak Library Association	1963
28	Karnataka Library Association	1961
29	Maharashtra Rajya Granthalaya Sangh	1962
30	Rajasthan Library Association	1962
31	Gujarat Granthalaya Sangh	1964
32	Jammu and Kashmir Library Association	1966
33	Haryana Library Association	1967
34	Kerala Library Association	1972
35	Manipur Library Association	1987

No union territory except Delhi has library associations. Five of the seven north eastern states do not have associations, and neither do newly created states like Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand. However, public libraries in these areas are present and catering to the needs of users.

The census of 2011 presents a grim picture, 70,817 libraries in rural areas and 4,580 in urban areas serve a population of more than 830 million and 370 million respectively. Libraries were notified (officially identified) for the first time in the 2011 census. These numbers roughly translate to one rural library for every 11,500 people, and one urban library for over 80,000 people (B Preedip Balaji, Mohan Raju J S, Vinay M S., 2019). The condition of these public libraries is also fairly poor. A library in West Champaran was functioning with a mere 12000 books, the librarian paid a dismal fee of rupees 700 per month which he had not even received in the past 6-7 months. Yet the library is visited by several students preparing for competitive exams.

Services Provided by Public Libraries

"An informed citizen is an asset to a democratic system of governance. Proper utilization of information can improve the quality of citizens," opined Dr. D. P. Chattopadhyay, Chairman of CONPOLIS (NPOLIS-a report, 1986). Providing access to major collections of the world's literature and knowledge, including the community's own literature is a vitally important function of the public library (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994).
Public libraries are very useful for community education as:

- They provide safe services for teens
- They provide reading materials to adults and help inculcate good reading habits
- They provide common people with a way to access government programs
- They ensure greater access to computers as many may not have the opportunity to access ICTs at their homes. (Ruth A Wooden, 2006)

The services provided by public libraries range from regular book reading to reference services, interlibrary loan services, extension services, consultancy services, literature search services, materials for the compilation of bibliographies and so on.

After 70 years of independence and the setting up of several commissions and committees, the condition of public libraries is still not satisfactory. If we see the demography of India and relative distribution of public libraries as given in table 2, a clear picture will emerge.

Table - 2: Distribution of public libraries across the Indian States

Demography of India	Number	Public libraries	Number	% Covered
States and union territories	36	SCLs	33	94
Districts	732	District libraries	500	68
Talukas	5572	Taluka libraries	4482	80
Villages	650244	Rural libraries	28,196	4.33

Source: Kamble, Kumbar and Patil, 2016

Table 3 represents the state-wise distribution of libraries in the country. All the states and Union Territories except two newly created states (Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh) and one union territory (Daman & Diu) have State Central libraries. The number of district libraries, taluka libraries and village libraries is still low.

Table - 3: State-wise Number of Public Libraries Existing in India

Name of States/ UTs	State Central Libraries	District/ District Central Libraries	City/ City Central/ Town Libraries	Regional/ Divisional/ Sub Divisional	Urban/ Taluka/ Municipal/ Block/ Branch	Rural libraries (Govt., RRRLF, NGO, Grant in aid)	Aided/ Grant in Aid Libraries	Others	Total
1. Andaman Nicobar Island	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	5	NA	NA	6
2. Andhra Pradesh	1	23	NA	6	887	252	NA	1234	2386
3. Arunachal Pradesh	1	18	NA	16	34	NA	NA	38	107
4. Assam	1	21	NA	14	4	313	NA	NA	353
5. Bihar and Jharkhand	1	26	69	5	NA	4000	NA	NA	4101
6. Chandigarh	1	NA	NA	1	4	NA	NA	NA	6
7. Chhattisgarh	NA	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1609	1610
8. Dadra &Nagar Haveli	1	1	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3
9. Daman & Diu	NA	NA	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2
10. Delhi	1	NA	114	NA	NA	NA	NA	104	219

11. Goa	1	1	NA	NA	17	58	NA	103	180
12. Gujarat	2	26	513	NA	116	3587	NA	232	4476
13. Haryana	1	6	43	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	50
14. Himachal Pradesh	1	11	2	NA	NA	207	NA	NA	221
15. Jammu & Kashmir	1	14	44	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	60
16. Karnataka	1	29	26	NA	590	5766	NA	255	6667
17. Kerala	1	7	NA	NA	NA	7648	NA	NA	7656
18. Lakshadweep	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	10	11
19. Madhya Pradesh	1	30	NA	6	NA	NA	1	10730	10768
20. Maharashtra	1	35	NA	6	NA	NA	11998	1	12041
21. Manipur	1	10	NA	NA	NA	120	NA	356	487
22. Meghalaya	1	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	86	94
23. Mizoram	1	5	NA	NA	NA	459	NA	NA	465
24. Nagaland	1	8	NA	NA	NA	600	NA	NA	609
25 Oddisa	1	17	NA	1	312	600	NA	69	1000
26 Pondicherry	1	2	52	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	55
27. Punjab	1	11	68	NA	NA	500	NA	NA	580
28. Rajasthan	1	33	7	NA	9	NA	NA	228	278
29. Sikkim	1	3	NA	5	NA	NA	2	NA	11
30. Tamil Nadu	1	32	NA	NA	1925	1821	NA	752	4531
31. Telangana	1	10	NA	2	562	105	NA	NA	680
32. Tripura	1	4	1	10	7	2	NA	20	49
33. Uttarakhand	NA	9	NA	NA	16	NA	NA	22	47
34. Uttar Pradesh	1	70	NA	NA	NA	20	NA	1981	2072
35. West Bengal	1	19	232	NA	NA	2209	7	2756	5224
								Total	**67115**

Note: Others contain Mobile, CLIC, Circle, Open to public After School Hours, RSKL, etc.

When we compare this data with US public libraries the scenario looks extremely poor. The number and distribution of libraries in US is given in the table 4.

Table - 4: State wise distribution of Public libraries in USA

States	Municipal	County	Multijurisdictional	Native American	Non-Profit	School District	Special District	Academic & Public	School & Public	Others	Total
US Total	4972	104	616	10	867	319	529	8	67	466	9057
Alabama	49	16	38	NA	NA	NA	2	1	1	NA	219
Alaska	0	4	3	NA	21	4	NA	3	10	NA	85
Arkansas	7	10	18	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	59
Arizona	27	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	10	NA	NA	NA	90
California	105	53	NA	NA	NA	NA	11	NA	NA	NA	184
Colorado	31	22	23	NA	NA	1	38	NA	5		114
Connecticut	97	NA	NA	NA	97	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	182
District of Columbia	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1
Delaware	27	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	21

State											Total
Florida	52	38	9	NA	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	NA	80
Georgia	NA	5	49	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	63
Hawaii /1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	1
Idaho	56	NA	NA	NA	2	NA	43	NA	4	2	102
Illinois	350	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	252	NA	4	NA	621
Indiana	27	51	157	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	2	236
Iowa	514	3	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	534
Kansas	290	14	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	8	6	321
Kentucky	2	8	3	NA	NA	NA	103	NA	NA	NA	119
Louisiana	4	59	1	NA	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	NA	68
Maine	171	NA	NA	NA	53	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	227
Maryland		24	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	24
Massachusetts	368	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	368
Michigan	231	24	94	NA	NA	27	1	NA	NA	NA	396
Minnesota	104	12	15	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	6	137
Mississippi	2	28	17	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	52
Missouri	84	36	17	NA	8	2	1	NA	NA	NA	148
Montana	17	31	32	NA	NA	NA	1	NA	1	NA	82
Nebraska	255	9	NA	NA	NA	NA		NA	NA	NA	237
Nevada	3	6	5	NA	NA	NA	4	NA	NA	4	22
New Hampshire	208		2	NA	6	NA	NA	1	5	NA	222
New Jersey	231	14	6	NA	59	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	282
New Mexico	61	8	NA	NA	5	NA	NA	NA	NA	14	88
New York	196	5	6	NA	398	130	20	NA	1	NA	756
North Carolina	10	42	17	NA	5			NA	NA	NA	81
North Dakota	60	13	2	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3	NA	74
Ohio	24	56	NA	NA	18	153	NA	NA	NA	NA	251
Oklahoma	99	5	6	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	9	119
Oregon	88	19	7	NA	4	1	9	1	2	NA	131
Pennsylvania	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	454	454
Rhode Island	22	NA	NA	NA	26	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	48
South Carolina	1	35	6	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	42
South Dakota	85	17	7	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2	1	112
Tennessee	3	122	NA	NA	NA	NA	12	NA	NA	49	186
Texas	269	145	32	NA	88	NA	NA	NA	9	1	544
Utah	40	27	5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	72
Vermont	96	NA	NA	NA	54	NA	NA	NA	12	NA	162
Virginia	23	NA	23	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	92
Washington	50	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	12	NA	NA	NA	62
West Virginia	46	30	20	NA	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	97
Wisconsin	333	15	24	4	NA	1	NA	NA	3	NA	381
Wyoming	NA	23	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	23

Funding

The survival and proper functioning of any institution depends on the funding it receives. Funding public libraries is the responsibility of the states, who have exclusive jurisdiction over public libraries and other state level libraries (Barua, 1992). Since the library is a service organization, a continuous flow of funds is integral for smooth functioning. Paucity of funds is a major constraint in the development of public libraries (Maitrayee Ghosh, 2005). Out of the 19 states which have enacted library legislation in their states, only five have provision for library cess (table-5). This cess is supposed to be a good source of funding for libraries to meet their recurring expenses. In absence of the cess, other means of funding are required.

Table - 5: State Wise Levy of Library Cess

S. No.	States	@% of Cess
1	Tamil Nadu	10
2	Andhra Pradesh	8
3	Karnataka	6
4	Kerala	5
5	Goa	1.67

Sources of finance for public libraries may be divided into three categories: funds from the central government, funds from state governments, and local funding as well as miscellaneous funding like gifts, donations from individuals and organizations, contributions, grants, special funds and interest earned (e-PG Pathshala). The major source of funding for libraries is the local government. Libraries also earn through membership charges. The Ministry of Culture aids libraries by allocating finances in Five Year Plans, which sometimes do not reach libraries at the local level. There have been cases where local municipal bodies do not make timely payments to public libraries. (Mohammed, 2015) Many states in India face major challenges in running public libraries due to an acute shortage in infrastructure, funds and lack of local policies (Singh, 2012). To resolve this issue, a benchmarking system must be devised at a national level to measure the services and resources of libraries based on which funding would be provided to the states by the central government. (Andrew Worthington, 1999) This is currently the case with the USA, where the population of an area is the basis for categorization of libraries and the provision of funding.

Library Digitization Scenario

A well-developed library with digitized collections networked together can act as a knowledge center in the area and help in developing information societies. This is true for academic libraries already, but the situation is different for public libraries. Globally public libraries have also seen a lot of change; their services have changed in light of the current concept of information society. They now act as an Information Superhighway, i.e. as a bridge between the information-rich and information-poor, providing communities a place for cultural exchange, making them information-literate and thereby socially inclusive. Digitization of public libraries will help the economic, political and social wellbeing of individuals as well as societies (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994).

The National Informatics Center under the Ministry of Information Technology has digitized three well known public libraries of the country namely Delhi Public Library (Delhi) State Central Library (Kolkata) and Maharaja Sarfojis Saraswati Mahal Library Tanjavur Library (Tamil Nadu), but the total number of public libraries in the country is nearly 7600 (Ram

Kumar Matoria, P.K. Upadhyay and Madaswamy Moni, 2007). National Digital Library of India (NDL) was launched on 19th June 2018 by Hon'ble MHRD Minister, Prakash Javadekar. NDL is developed under National Mission on Education through the Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT) Project developed by the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur (IIT KGP), under the aegis of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Govt. of India. It contains nearly 1.7crore+ content in more than 200 languages and is expected to reach 3 crore users in an effort to better disseminate education to all(NDLI project, MHRD, 2020).Department of Public Libraries, Government of Karnataka has developed an online digital library consisting more than 100000, e-content covering class wise academic videos, textbooks, e-books, competitive exam preparation for studies and employment, novel and literature for students and general public in English and Kannada, during the lockdown period of CoVid-19.

4. Conclusion

India became independent in 1948 and the first Library Act was passed in 1950, but only 19 states have so far enacted the act. The remaining 9 states and 6 union Territories are yet to pass library legislation bills. India ranks 99th among 142 countries in terms of education, which is far behind the other developing countries such as the Philippines (76), Malaysia (51), Sri Lanka (59), and so forth. (indiatoday.in. New Delhi, Nov. 3, 2015) It is far behind other developing nations in the field of education. If it is going to be big economy then its people must be educated, for which library legislation and setting up of public libraries is essential. Whatever may be the reason for the lack of a network of public libraries, it is necessary to enforce the already set National Library Act which would help in the setting up of network of libraries in the country. Moreover, public libraries must be digitized to be able to provide access to children even residing in the remote villages of the Far East. Besides, public libraries have some other important roles to play in the life of human beings-

- Fostering and strengthening of reading habits among the children at an early stage.
- Supporting education at all levels.
- Stimulating creativity and imagination among the young ones.
- Promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific attitude and innovative minds and so on.
- Fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favoring cultural diversity.
- Application and use of ICTs skills.
- Supporting and strengthening information literacy among the members of the community.

This can only be achieved if there exists a network of well-equipped and digitized public libraries within the reach of common people. There is still a long way to go in terms of developing public libraries. Perhaps in the near future India will stand at par with other developed countries like USA in terms of libraries and resources.

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