PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM IN JAMMU & KASHMIR: AN ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The paper is an insight into public library system of Jammu & Kashmir from ancient to present times. It 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 Library System; Public Libraries – Jammu & Kashmir;

INTRODUCTION

Public Library contributes in development of civilizations. Beginning with primitive services the institution has gradually adopted a liberal character to become a people's university. It has evolved on the perception that access to information is essential to produce a well informed society to enable disparity between right and wrong and play a genuine role in the advancement of a society. Naturally, its paramount functions are now well accepted in social, political, economic and cultural enterprise of a society. As Public Library assumed the task of essential services, it began to offer free services and to ensure this free-ship; the

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institution is established with legislative foundation in most of the countries; though in many countries other measures are adopted to ensure efficient and uniform public library services.

The Jammu & Kashmir has a rich tradition of scholarship and libraries. The Government has taken few strides during past century for its development. The author 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

The main objectives of the study are:
1. To trace the genesis and foundations of public library system in the State.
2. To study the physical facilities, finance, personnel, collection development and services of the System.
3. To assess the overture of IT on operations & services of the System.

SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

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. 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 logical sequence (from the general to the specific). Few

questions invited respondents to provide useful information, which they considered to be of utility to the survey. Multiple-choice questions were employed wherever possible. However in order to obtain accurate, comprehensive and timely data, the investigation was supplemented with interview and observation method.

Since public libraries of the State are geographically spread over a large area, it was not possible to assess each and every library due to time constraint. Hence, the public libraries of the State were first divided into different strata. Subsequently the random values obtained by using "RAND" (Shift+RAND) function of scientific calculator were divided by the total number of libraries in each stratum and the reminder of each division was taken as sample i.e. Libraries selected according to their serial number assigned after arranging them in alphabetical order. Minimum 25% public libraries from each stratum were selected. The number of libraries selected in the State in various strata include 1 State Central Library, 5 district, 13 Tehsil, 12 Block and 3 lending libraries. The study was conducted from March, 2005 to March, 2006.

EARLY LIBRARIES

The Scholarship of Kashmir can be traced   back to ancient times. The earliest records of rich culture and civilization can be drawn from Nilmatpurana, a 6th century manuscript. **(Bhat, 2006).**

Hiuen-Tsang, a Chinese traveller, visited south Kashmir in 631-633 A.D. It is reported that the king of Kashmir invited the pilgrim to read

and expound the scriptures. He was assisted by twenty clerks to copy manuscripts with five attendants. These details amply prove the existence of a splendid palace Library of Kashmir where reading manuscripts was a regular feature besides provision for copying them. **(Bamzai, (a) 1973)**

It was during 6th to 12th century A.D that Kashmir had world renowned personalities like famous historian poet Kalhana (the author of first recorded history in India-- Rajtarangini) Patanjali (the immortal grammarian), Charka(the great physician) and Abhinavagupta(the great philosopher). The practice of learning flourished during this period and gave a fillip to scholarship. **(Sufi, (a) 1996)**

The local Muslim rulers made exemplary efforts in educational development of the valley. Sultan Shihab-ud-Din (1354-1373 AD) at the instance of Shah Hamdan established the first College for study of Quran known as *Madrastul-Quran* and Sultan Qutub-ud-Din (1373-1389 AD) built a college at his headquarters at *Qutbudinpora* in Srinagar and named it after himself. He also laid the foundation of residential system of education in Kashmir which provided for free association of teachers and pupils after formal hours of instruction. Sultan Sikander (1389-1413) was an exceedingly generous man and his liberal patronage to men of letters attracted learned men from Iraq and khuransan (A province of Modern Iran) and Transoxiana (name used for the portion of Central Asia corresponding approximately with modern day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and South-West Kazakhstan **(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2004))** in such numbers that became an example to the courts of other provinces. He

established a college called *College of Jamia Masjid* (**Bharistan-I-Shahi, as cited by Mohibbul- Hasan, 2005**). Sultan Zain-ul Abidin (1420-1470 AD) son of Sultan Sikander established a university at *Naushahar* (presently Nowshehra, an area of old city) which was a grand monument of his love for learning. A translation bureau was also established under the auspices of this university. It was here that books were translated from Arabic and Sanskrit to Persian and Kashmiri. He spent huge amount on the collection of a library for the university .He sent out agents to different parts of the world to secure books and manuscripts for library, which equalled the leading libraries of the time in Turkistan and Iran and which existed for a century (**Mohibbul -Hasan, 2005**). Later on, Hussain Shah Chak founded a great college which was known as *Madras-i-Husain Shah* with a library and a free hostel. Revenue coming from large portion of land in Srinagar was reserved for the maintenance of hostel and library (**Sufi, (b) 1996**).

After the decline of local Muslim rule the state passed through much mayhem because of the change of the rulers. This change of hands and political instability were impediments to the progress of learning and scholarship.

GENESIS & DEVELOPMENT

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 (**Bamzai, (b) 1973**). 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, Maharaja Ranbir Sigh and Maharaja Pratap Singh established two major public libraries in 1879 and 1898 at Jammu and Srinagar respectively. These two libraries at Jammu and Srinagar are named after the two rulers i.e. Sri Ranbir Singh (SRS) Library and Sri Pratap Singh (SPS) Library Srinagar and are acting as State Central Libraries in respective divisions. In 1918 the government came up with comprehensive rules for the smooth functioning of these libraries. **(Jammu and Kashmir Government, 1919 as Cited by Gupta & Singh).**In pursuance of these rules Libraries remained open till late evening which we do not observe even in present era In the state. But the membership was open only to elites and educated class of the society.

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 among their members. **(Abdullah, 1986)** 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 **(Wali, and Koul, (a) 1969)**. The town area committees established their own libraries to provide free book service to all. The municipal committees in cities did this job by opening municipal reading rooms. But most of these libraries could not continue due to political and administrative unrest in the State.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DIRECTORATE

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, ex-University librarian of Aligrah Muslim University, 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. **(Wali and Koul, (b) 1969)**

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. These rules define the duties of the Director, Librarian and have laid down the categories of persons who can become the members of such libraries **(Jammu and Kashmir Civil Secretariat, 1963)**. 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. These rules are too old now and call for a change .

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 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 . It had 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. The main recommendations of the Committee focus on;

a)   Library Legislation

(The Committee reaffirmed that Library legislation was the basis for the development of a public library system and   suggested 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

It recommended following structure for the public library system;

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

Besides, the Committee also suggested introduction of mobile library vans in the Central Libraries for offering services in remote areas. The Committee also made various other recommendations for smooth functioning of Directorate of Libraries and Research viz. role, operation and duties. (**Jammu and Kashmir, 1976**) But the above recommendations were never processed for implementation at any level. D. R. Kalia also submitted a report for improvement of public libraries on the request of the then Governor of Jammu & Kashmir during 1986-87 which is available in mimeographed form with the Directorate.

EFFORTS BY THE LIBRARIANS

Prior to 1947, there was only one trained Librarian in the state, viz. Prof. Prithvi Nath Kaula. After attaining Diploma in the Library Science in 1946 he wrote a series of articles in local newspapers and journals on the development of libraries in Jammu & Kashmir. He framed an outline scheme for the development of libraries in the State. He also wrote a book "Kashmmir main Ilmi Inqalab" (Knowledge Revolution in Kashmir) and

submitted a plan for the development of libraries in the state to the then Prime Minister of the State Mr. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in 1951which bears an introduction by Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, the then President of Indian Library Association. Unfortunately political developments changed the priorities in the state. The then Prime Minister of the State had agreed to enact Library legislation, but before it could have been done ,the government was dismissed in 1953. In 1956 at the invitation of the Education Secretary of Jammu & Kashmir, Professor P . Kaula examined the working of the SPS Library, Srinagar and submitted his scheme for its reorganization and development **(Wali and Koul, (c) 1969)**.

Between 1951 and 1964 three attempts were made for the formation of a library association for the promotion of library culture in the state. Besides, on 22nd April, 1964 a convention of librarians in Kashmir was held. The main outcome of this convention was the formation of an ad-hoc committee consisting of seven members headed by Professor P. Kaula. On the recommendations of ad-hoc committee, J & K Library Association (JKLA) came into being in 1966 **(Shukla, 1993)**. But it could not survive and remained on paper only for some time. Many more efforts are known to have been taken by other senior professionals at various times during the last decade of 20th century but could not make any headway either for the development of the profession or public library culture in the state.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

I.   Structure of Public Library System

The present study reveals that Jammu and Kashmir has fairly good public

library system. The state possess hierarchical chain of public libraries consisting of State Central Libraries, City Central Library, District Libraries, Tehsil ·Libraries, Block Libraries and Lending Depots working under one directorate which makes it easier to reach masses in a coordinated manner.

The public library system in the State is 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 is categorised as under;

State Central Libraries		2
SPS State Central Library, Srinagar	(SCLSK)	
SRS State Central Library, Jammu		
City Central Library	(CCL)	1
District Libraries		14
Tehsil Libraries		51
Block Libraries		50
Shrine/lending depots/reading rooms		12
Research/Publication division		1

II   Buildings & Furniture

Majority of the libraries are housed in rented buildings, either on shared or single basis. A few libraries possess buildings like SCLSK, four district libraries and 2 Lending Depots. There is no proper seating arrangement in the libraries. SCLSK has the highest seating capacity (35) and others have negligible seating / reading room facility. The other facilities like adequate furniture, heating and cooling arrangement is not available adding to discomfort of users and a major hindrance for promotion of reading culture in these libraries.

III   Collection

The collection of these libraries mostly comprises of books selected by Directorate without any proper selection policy or user studies in the vicinity of libraries. The SCLSK possess highest number of books (54434). The average collection of District Libraries does not exceed10700 books, Tehsil libraries have 5440, Block Libraries 2601 and Lending depots 2156 books. The per capita books available in the areas of select public libraries range from 0.07 to 1.18

Newspapers are beings subscribed by all the libraries in a small number. SCLSK subscribes to 4 National and local English newspapers, District Libraries 5 and Tehsil and Block Libraries subscribe to one daily newspaper. Newspapers in vernacular language are also subscribed by all types of libraries which range from one to six. The other types of materials like journals, magazines, maps, audio-visual and digital resources are not available and only SCLSK and some district libraries are acquiring   few magazines and select popular journals.

The rare collection is possessed by SCLSK having 2572 documents. The encyclopaedias are considered to be major reference source in any library. It is found that highest number of encyclopaedias are possessed by SCLSK (16) followed by District Libraries having one on average. The major general encyclopaedia, considered vital for a library, is found only in SCLSK, CCL and District Libraries, possessing "Encyclopaedia Britannica" while Tehsil Libraries, Block Libraries and Lending Depots lack such sources. Special collection for children is found

only in CCL (5652 documents) and District Libraries possess, on an average, a meagre 700 documents for children. Special collection for visually challenged people in any of the public libraries of the state is not available and no such policy or framework is underway in riot stricken state adding to its number for the last two decades.

Besides, Research and Publication division have around 5,500 manuscripts. These are digitised by Indra Ghandi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi under National Mission for Manuscripts programme. It is also agreed that manuscripts will be hosted on the server of IGNCA for worldwide access and one copy each of the digitised format of these manuscripts will be provided to the Directorate of Libraries & Research.for internal use and also hosting it on the internet in future.

These facts about size and nature of collections clearly reveal that the collection building in the libraries is suffering on several fronts. Inadequacy of the collection is demonstrated by the fact that per capita books available are less than one in most of the libraries, though it is encouraging as compared with other states of India. This state of affairs restricts choice of reading and is a major threat to the use of these libraries.

The annual additions to the collection are very small, most libraries possess collection which includes a major chunk of old, outdated materials. Again, non-availability of adequate number of journals, newspapers add to their poor collection and use. The libraries are still operating manually and the benefits that are available from ICT

applications are yet to be garnered by these libraries. Finally, the collections do lack adequate reading materials for children and physical challenged members of the society and it is an impediment to inculcate the reading culture among younger generations.

IV   Technical Process

Technical process   facilitates quick access to the documents. Here, classification and cataloguing is the privilege of the few libraries. The collections of SCLSK and district libraries are classified and catalogued to a large extent, while other libraries have not yet started the process. Classification scheme followed is DDC (19th ed.) and AACR-II rules for cataloguing. Card form catalogue is in vogue wherever the catalogue is maintained.

V.   Human Resource

The most valued asset of an organisation is its human resource. Other assets viz material, equipments and finances become meaningful only when they are transformed by the people working in organisation into useful resources. The menial staff is found in all public libraries of the state.   But it is astonishing to note that out of 34 libraries surveyed, it was found that only 9 persons are qualified with BLIS/MLIS degrees. Most personnel are either matriculates or have done their matric with certificate course in library science.. All Tehsil, Block and Lending Depots/Libraries are run by these unskilled persons. The understaffed and poorly trained professionals run these libraries. Their lack of opportunity has denied the professional staff to have exposure to new trends in the profession

especially in communication and automation competencies.

The remuneration of staff is not satisfactory. In certain situations the salaries of the staff are not even higher to that of a Junior Assistant and demand an immediate revision. The Chief Librarian works in Rs 6,700 - 10,700 scale while other scales are   Rs 5,000 – 8,000 for senior Librarian and Rs 4,000 – 6,000 scale for Junior Librarian.

VI   Finance

Finance plays a major role in the development of a well planned library system. In the state public libraries do not secure separate annual budgetary allocation but is provided under "Art and Culture" which is a part of the major head "Education". With the result department is unable get significant budgetary allocation. The annual budget for department of public libraries during 2003-04 was Rs 525.04 lacs, which increased to Rs 544.49 lacs in 2004-05 showing a slight increase of 3.58%. However, in 2005-06 the budget reached to Rs 672.94 lacs making a substantial increase of 19.09%, which is quite positive.

The state, though industrially least developed as compared to other states of India, is spending more on public libraries. During 2005-06 per capita expenditure on public library services in the state was Rs 6.63. It is better   in the state as compared to all India average of less than one rupee but still overall public library scenario is not encouraging.

VII.   Services

Public library is a social institution supposed to cater   the reading

and information needs of community. In general terms the requirement may range from simple reading materials such as the newspapers, popular magazines and fiction to more complex needs that may be related to the occupation or interest of members of the community. The range of the user communities that the public library has to serve is indeed very wide. Therefore in addition to conventional services modern public library is expected to offer all the sophisticated services. The preliminary services rendered are listed:

a)   **Membership & Use**

Library hours are 10.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m during winter and 10 am to 4 p.m. during summer. Timings of the libraries are not favourable for functioning during office hours. It would be better to keep these libraries open for late hours so that people on return from their daily hours can visit and use these libraries.

The highest number of registered members is in SCLSK (298) followed by District Libraries which on an average have 204 registered members and CCL stands third with 203. While the maximum number of unregistered members visiting library annually in state is found in SCLSK (10,000) followed by CCL (900) and least is in Block Libraries (300).

In SCLSK the number of registered users is 298, which are 0.2% inhabitants of Srinagar. Since it is state central library and should cater the reading and information needs of whole province, it has failed to meet the expectations of users so far. The registered number of users in

CCL is 203 which is 0.01% population of Srinagar. In District Libraries of Jammu & Kashmir percentage of registered users is between 0.03% to 0.14% of population.

The figures demonstrate extreme poor use of the public libraries in the state. It was found that less than 1% of the population of the area are registered members in these libraries except in few areas where it exceeds 1%.

Public libraries follow ledger for circulation of their Documents. Number of documents issued to clientele in SCLSK & CCL is two (2) for fourteen (14) days duration and in rest of libraries one (1) book is issued to per patron for 7 to 14 days. There is no statistics maintained by the libraries for feedback and user analysis. Open access too is found in a few libraries.

b)   Reference & Information Service

The Reference and latest arrival services are not common in the public libraries.   However, among public libraries of the state book exhibitions are being conducted by SCLSK & CCL while rest do not provide such services. Library support to schools is found to be provided in few District Libraries. Apart from SCLSK and some District Libraries observe their weekly holiday on Monday and rest on Sunday. Thus, it is evident that all the libraries offer traditional, limited reference services. Modern information services have yet to penetrate into these libraries. Even the traditional reference services are not available in many libraries.

VIII. ICT facilities

SCLSK, CCL have 15 and 5 computers respectively, whereas District Libraries have 4 computers on an average but no library has Internet connectivity or service. Those possessing computers are not employing them for professional operations and services. These are used mostly for word processing operations or are lying out of use.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals certain tantalising facts about the prevailing public library system of the state. The Public Library System need complete revamping of all its facets. This can be achieved in two phases. One short term plan and second long term plan. Under short term plan following measures may be taken:

1   At least, one staff member from each library should be provided ICT training which later can create bibliographic databases/ catalogues of their respective libraries.
2   Releasing sufficient funds for acquisition of adequate collection.
3   Providing better and increased number of user oriented services.
4   Starting extension services to attract people to libraries.
5   Once the people come into the libraries user education should be provided so that they stay lured.
6   Providing Internet facility.
7   Extension of working hours.

Under long term plan, a master plan may be laid down to be achieved during 5 to 10 years period. This plan will make public libraries in State a living force for education, culture and development. Under this plan following targets need be achieved:

a) Construction of new   suitable buildings and Provision   of adequate furniture and fixture
b) Enactment of library legislation
c) Recruitment of Professional Staff and to train them in modern learning, education and communication skills
d) Networking of Libraries and Integration of catalogues into a WEBOPAC
e) Collection development policy to suit different regions of the state

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