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Disaster preparedness in libraries of Kashmir

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Abstract

This study investigates the state of disaster preparedness in ten (10) prominent libraries of Jammu & Kashmir [six Academic libraries (S.P. College Library, Women's College Library, Govt. Degree College Library- Bemina, Amar Singh College Library, Gandhi Memorial College Library and College of Education Library); three Special libraries (J&K Academy of Art, Culture & languages Library- Srinagar, Govt. Medical College Library- Srinagar, and J&K High Court Library) and one Public library {Sri Pratab Singh (SPS) library}]. The examination was carried by adopting the survey research design. Data collection was done by using number of data collection tools like questionnaire, interview, examination etc. Data were tabulated and analyzed as per the objectives of the study. The findings of the paper discover that the level of staff sensitization and awareness on disaster preparedness is at their lowest, as none of the libraries were found to be enough-prepared to face a disaster. The results reveal that although libraries in Kashmir are susceptible to disasters like floods, fire etc, yet none of the library seems to be prepared to bear or cope any disaster. The findings offer a dull picture of libraries when it comes to their inefficiency and incapability (in terms of disaster preparedness) by finding that most of the libraries are without a disaster preparedness plan as well as a disaster preparedness team. The study also enlightens some important facets, components & procedures in Disaster preparedness.

Key words: Libraries and disaster, Kashmir libraries, Disaster management and libraries, Disaster preparedness.

Introduction

A library is an organized institution that maintains the record of the existence of different cultures. These records not only connect our present with the past, but also echo the research, educational, social and historical aspects of different generations. A library supports the functions of learning, teaching and research in a society. It is therefore mandatory for any information society to be rigged and acquainted with a library having sufficient collection of varied number of resources.

Libraries and information centers, like any other institution in a society, are susceptible to a wide range of disasters. Disaster is an unpredicted incident that puts every resource in any institution (including libraries) at threat. **Eden and Matthews (2016)** describe a Disaster as any event which not only puts human safety at risk but also can damages, or threatens to damage, the resources of a library including its collection, equipment and systems. According to **Boehm**, disaster can also be defined as “an event whose timing cannot be predicted and causes severe destructive. Disasters can have grave financial implications and also cause interruption of services. **Chandra, Harish (2014)** defined library disaster as an event or series of events which can significantly disturb the ability of a library to support institutional activities and research over a specific period of time.

In spite of all these definitions and groupings, all disasters have a common denominator that they all are relate to devastation, they can happen at any time under a wide range of circumstances & affecting the resources of libraries severely. Disasters are broadly classified into two categories: natural and human-made (**Alegbeleye, 2013**). The resources of a library can be severely affected by natural disasters like floods (**Kaur, 2009**), earthquakes, tsunamis (**Warnasuriya, 2005**). They can also face human-made disasters like fires, wars, civil disorders (**Johnson, 2005**), small fires, theft, vandalism, paper decay, insect raids, mould (**Weaver-Meyers et al, 2016**), etc.

Library and information academics and professionals have shown high concerns, over the years, about the threat that libraries face due to a wide number of man-made and natural disasters. However, this awareness is steadily shifting from immediate actions to proactive ones, over the recent times. It seems that library disasters all over the world due to natural or man-made causes

have innate the sense of preparedness to the library community. Indeed, the literature is flooded with risk and disaster management approaches, training programs and plans for libraries. As a result, the level of disaster preparedness in libraries for many countries in the world is quite high and many proactive in number of related activities, e.g. equipment and building preventive maintenance, training programs, etc are constantly taking place.

The State of Jammu & Kashmir has a rich ritual of scholarship and libraries. The Government has taken few strides during past century for its development. The state has a rich cultural and literary heritage from times immemorial. Kashmir was renowned throughout the world as it was a great centre of learning for centuries together. The famous king, Sultan Zain-ul-Abdin commonly known by the name “Badshah” meaning “Great King” ruled Kashmir for about fifty years from 1420 to 1470 AD and during this period there was a great cultural and literary developments especially in Sanskrit, Persian and folk languages. King Zain-ul-Abdin also established biggest library at that time in Nowshera, Srinagar. The library remained intact for 100 years after his death when it was destroyed. **(Kazi, 2014)** Since then a number of new libraries have been developed with some valuable and rare collection. But, like other libraries, the libraries in Kashmir valley are also susceptible to a wide range of disasters (both natural as well as human initiated).

Due to militancy & related activities, many libraries in Kashmir are not left more than ruins. The 105 years old islamia higher secondary school library, having many precious and rare resources is one of them. Many important libraries running in the mosque and temple premises were set ablaze also **(Singh, 2016)**. In 1993, Library of Hazratbal Shrine was destroyed. In May 1995, the 600 year old shrine at Charar-i-Sharif was destroyed by the Indian forces. The 2005 earthquake affected many libraries in remote villages of the valley **(Shaheen, 2008)**. September 2014 floods also destroyed the resources in most of the libraries in valley.

This paper aims to highlight the different facets of disaster preparedness in some prominent libraries of Kashmir.

Scope

The study limited its investigation on the levels of disaster preparedness of some prominent libraries of Kashmir. The libraries covered in the study are listed below:

- ✓ S.P. College Library, M.A Road.
- ✓ Women's College Library, M.A Road.
- ✓ Govt. Degree College Library, Bemina.
- ✓ Amar Singh College Library.
- ✓ Gandhi Memorial College Library.
- ✓ College of Education Library.
- ✓ Govt. Medical College Library, Karanagar.
- ✓ J&K Academy of Art, Culture & languages Library, Srinagar.
- ✓ J&K High Court Library
- ✓ Sri Pratab Singh (SPS) library

Significance of Study

Disaster preparedness is a very vital and important matter that any library should not take for granted. Disaster preparedness is the near respond to any form of disaster either on small or wide scale, since the extent of preparedness will determine, the tendency of a library to prevent or reduce its consequences on its staff, resources, equipment or facilities. The study will be important in a number of ways:

The findings of the study will inspire Heads of libraries in Kashmir and elsewhere to come up with a disaster preparedness plan that will enable their staff to be disaster consciousness. The study will aid academic institutions in the region to provide basic disaster kits for disaster preparedness and will motivate them towards training of staff on basic disaster management skills. The study will also serve a contribution to the literature on disaster preparedness.

Problem

The key to survival, whether about a person, a family, a community or public institution such as a public library, is to plan in advance. Thus, disaster preparedness must be a major concern for any library that wants to survive (**Kurilecz, 2016***). Since disasters cannot be predicted nor their location can be specified, the thrust for this research was borne to investigate the disaster preparedness levels of libraries in Kashmir.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to determine the various levels of disaster preparedness by libraries in Kashmir. In particular, the study explores to:

1. Examine the level of sensitization and awareness on disaster preparedness/disaster preparedness plan in libraries;
2. Highlight the importance of Disaster Plan and structured staff training programs on disaster preparedness;
3. Introspect the measures that are necessary for the preparedness of disasters.

Literature Review

Researches related to various facets of disaster management in libraries have been conducted all over the globe. Here is an attempt to review the literature regarding different facets of disaster management in libraries:

Fox (2014) identified five elements of disaster management as protection, planning, prevention, response and recovery. **Sutton & Tierney (2016)** described disaster preparedness as a concept encompassing all measures aimed at enhancing life safety when a disaster occurs. It also include actions designed to enhance the ability to undertake emergency actions in order to protect property as well the ability to engage in post-disaster restoration and early recovery activities. **Lyall (2013)** emphasizes over the significance of preparedness in disaster management. He says that preparedness plans are the most important in confronting with disasters. Preparedness includes, creating and periodically updating contingency plans, insuring collections, allocating restore priorities, identifying alternative storage sites, providing adequate fire protection, and providing opportunities for staff to be aware of what their responsibilities are, in the event of a disaster. **Buchanan (2013)** highlights the ignorance shown by libraries towards disaster preparedness, even if it is fundamental to the protection of resources of a library. **Amarasiri (2005)** emphasizes that Librarians should always be prepared for disasters rather than wait for events such as the tsunami or Hurricane that completely destroys a Library. **Finley (2011)** claims “every library needs a disaster plan and that plan needs to plan for the worst. It’s ok to hope for the best, but you should plan for the worst”. **Topper (2016)** reveals that institutions may have a disaster plan outlined as to what to do in the event of a disaster but in actuality one is never fully prepared for a natural disaster. So there is a need to form Disaster Recovery Centers that will help different institutions like libraries in disaster prevention, preparedness, response & recovery.

According to the IFLA manual, there are five different stages in a disaster management plan:

- Risk assessment (potential risks should be assessed and rated according to their likelihood of occurrence, as well as their effects).

- Prevention and Protection (prevention is concerned with the implementation of measures that will prevent an event from occurring, while as protection is concerned with measures to protect the library and its resources after the occurrence of an event).
- Preparedness (developing a disaster management plan, clarifying the roles of disaster response team members, ensuring the availability of the plan, revising the plan, staff training, identifying the priority material for salvaging, maintaining and updating the appropriate documents to support the implementation of the plan, establishing and maintaining links with outside agencies and individuals, collecting and maintaining supplies that will be used as an emergency equipment, arranging for immediate contingency funding, identifying and organizing a “recovery” area, drawing up various scenarios for re-establishing basic services to users).
- Reaction (at this stage the protection and saving of human lives constitutes a basic priority in every emergency situation).
- Recovery (actions that ensure the recovery of services to users, repairing building damages and insurance coverage).

Methodology

After deliberating the literature related to the disaster preparedness and disaster management, an exploratory & systematic methodology was undertaken, as per the objectives of the present study. A set of the questionnaire was constructed with 15 itemized open and closed-ended questions to extract responses from correspondents. The heads of these libraries were also interviewed to gather as much as information possible. The study adheres purely to descriptive research method. The libraries were selected using Purposive Sampling technique. In order to ensure a high rate of return, copies of the questionnaire were administered and retrieved by the researcher himself. Thereby, a variety of data collection tools & techniques like interview, questionnaire, observation etc were used to collect the data. The collected data has been

tabulated and analyzed in order to derive meaningful conclusions & findings as per the assigned objectives of the study.

Data Analysis & Findings

The collected data has been evaluated with the help of tables & charts, the apprehensions and discussions have been presented below:

Current Collection Strength

The collection strength of the libraries under study has been given in Table 1. The table not only depicts the number of resources these libraries possess, but also the nature of these resources is highlighted.

Table 1: Collection Strength

LIBRARY	STRENGTH	RESOURCE TYPE
Govt Medical College library	85,000	Books
SPS library	55,000	Books Rare books
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	35,000	Books Manuscripts Rare books Artifacts
Gandhi Memorial College library	18,000	Books
Women's College library	16,000	Books Rare books
SP College library	15,000	Books Manuscripts
Amar Singh College library	10,000	Books Rare books
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	8,000	Books Rare books
JK High Court library	6,000	Books Rare books
College of Education library	3,000	Books Rare books

Resources lost during recent disasters

The study revealed that a huge number of resources have been lost during recent times in the libraries under study, on account of both natural & man-made disasters. A detailed outlook has been given in Table 2.

Table 2: Resources Lost

LIBRARY	Resources Lost	Disaster form
Govt Medical College library	30,000	Floods
	5,000	Fire
	2,000	Rodents/Insects
SPS library	21,000	Floods
	2,000	Water Leakage
	2,000	Rodents/Insects
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	2,00,000	Floods
	10,000	Rodents/Insects
	8,000	Fire
Gandhi Memorial College library	8,000	Floods
	1,000	Mould Formation
	800	Rodents/Insects
Women's College library	65,000	Floods
	5,000	Rodents/Insects
	1,000	Water Leakage
SP College library	62,000	Floods
	2,000	Fire
	1,000	Rodents/Insects
Amar Singh College library	45,000	Floods
	3,000	Fire

	2,000	Rodents/Insects
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	30,000	Floods
	2,500	Mould Formation
	2,000	Rodents/Insects
JK High Court library	15,000	Floods
	1,000	Rodents/Insects
	1,000	Mould Formation
College of Education library	40,000	Floods
	1,000	Rodents/Insects
	1,000	Water Leakage

Susceptibility to Floods

The investigation revealed that each and every examined library is situated in a flood prone area. Although, some of these libraries have transferred their books and other resources to upper storeys, especially after the devastating floods in 2014, yet most of them haven't tactically shifted their resources to safer locations. Table 3 gives a broader view.

Table 3: Susceptibility to floods

LIBRARY	Flood Susceptibility	Resources Safe From Floods
Govt Medical College library	VH	Y
SPS library	VH	N
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	VH	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	H	N
Women's College library	H	T
SP College library	H	N

Amar Singh College library	VH	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	VH	T
JK High Court library	H	Y
College of Education library	H	N

**VH Stands for “Very High”, H Stands for “High”, Y Stands for “Yes”, N Stands for “No” and T Stands for “To Some Extent”*

Susceptibility to Earthquakes

Since the whole Kashmir division falls under the Seismic Zone V (High Earthquake Intensity Zone), all the studied libraries are highly prone to earthquakes. The study reveals that none of the studied libraries except the SPS library have been constructed keeping in view the earthquake proneness & susceptibility of these libraries. Tables 4 depicts the same.

Table 4: Susceptibility to earthquakes

LIBRARY	Earthquake Susceptibility	Precautions Taken
Govt Medical College library	H	N
SPS library	H	N
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	H	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	H	N
Women’s College library	H	N
SP College library	H	N
Amar Singh College library	H	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	H	N
JK High Court library	H	N
College of Education library	H	N

H Stands for “High” and N Stands for “Nil”

Disaster Preparedness Plan

The study reveals that although resources worth millions were lost due to number of disasters that have struck in these libraries over a period of time. Yet none of the examined libraries have framed a structured disaster preparedness plan. Same is depicted in table 5.

Table 5: Disaster Preparedness Plan

LIBRARY	Disaster Preparedness Plan
Govt Medical College library	N
SPS library	N
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	N
Women's College library	N
SP College library	N
Amar Singh College library	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	N
JK High Court library	N
College of Education library	N

N Stands for "No"

Disaster Preparedness Team

The study finds that even though the resources worth millions were lost due to predominant number of disasters in these libraries over a period of time. Yet none of the examined libraries have a disaster preparedness team. Same is depicted in table 6.

Table 6: Disaster Preparedness Team

LIBRARY	Disaster Preparedness Team
Govt Medical College library	N
SPS library	N
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	N
Women's College library	N
SP College library	N
Amar Singh College library	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	N
JK High Court library	N
College of Education library	N

N Stands for "No"

Fire Alarm System and Extinguisher availability

The investigation reveals that none of the examined libraries possess a sophisticated Fire Alarm System. However, some of these libraries do have the availability of an excellent fire extinguisher. Table 7 gives a bird's eye view of the same.

Table 7: Fire Alarm System and Extinguisher availability

LIBRARY	Fire Alarm System	Fire Alarm Extinguisher
Govt Medical College library	N	Y
SPS library	N	Y
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	N	Y
Gandhi Memorial College library	N	N
Women's College library	N	N
SP College library	N	Y

Amar Singh College library	N	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	N	N
JK High Court library	N	N
College of Education library	N	N

Y Stands for "Yes" and N Stands for "No"

Chemical Treatment/Humidity Controlling Devices Availability

Although a good number of resources have been lost by the examined libraries due to mould formation, rodents, insects etc, yet neither these libraries have opt for chemical treatment, nor are they aware of any humidity controlling device. Table 8 illustrates the same views.

Table 8: Chemical Treatment/Humidity Controlling Devices

LIBRARY	Chemical Treatment	Humidity Controlling Devices
Govt Medical College library	N	N
SPS library	N	N
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	N	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	N	N
Women's College library	N	N
SP College library	N	N
Amar Singh College library	N	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	N	N
JK High Court library	N	N
College of Education library	N	N

N Stands for "No"

Emergency Contact List

As per the investigation carried, none of the studied libraries have framed an emergency contact list that can be used at the time of a disaster. Table 9 illustrates same.

Table 9: Emergency Contact List

LIBRARY	Emergency Contact List
Govt Medical College library	N
SPS library	N
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	N
Women's College library	N
SP College library	N
Amar Singh College library	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	N
JK High Court library	N
College of Education library	N

N Stands for "No"

Insurance of Resources

The study depicts that among the examined libraries only Gandhi Memorial College library has insured its resources. Table 10 resonates it clearly.

Table 10: Insurance of Resources

LIBRARY	Resources Insured
Govt Medical College library	N
SPS library	N
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	Y
Women's College library	N
SP College library	N
Amar Singh College library	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	N
JK High Court library	N
College of Education library	N

Y Stands for "Yes" and N Stands for "No"

Digitization of Resources

Among the surveyed libraries, only SPS Library and SP College Library have digitized their resources. Rest of the libraries have not initiated the digitization process till date. Table 11 gives a broader perspective for the same.

Table 11: Resource Digitization

LIBRARY	Resources Digitized
Govt Medical College library	N
SPS library	Y
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	N
Women's College library	N
SP College library	Y
Amar Singh College library	N

Govt Degree College-Bemina library	N
JK High Court library	N
College of Education library	N

Y Stands for "Yes" and N Stands for "No"

Readiness for a Disaster

The paper highlights that none of investigated libraries are ready or well-versed to face and bear any disaster. The same is illustrated by Table 12.

Table 12: Readiness for a Disaster

LIBRARY	Disaster Readiness
Govt Medical College library	N
SPS library	N
JK Academy of Art, Culture & Languages library	N
Gandhi Memorial College library	N
Women's College library	N
SP College library	N
Amar Singh College library	N
Govt Degree College-Bemina library	N
JK High Court library	N
College of Education library	N

N Stands for "Nil"

Findings

The state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is situated in the northern part of India, is prone to both natural disasters (like floods, earthquakes, etc.) as well as man-made disasters (like terrorism, war, fire, etc). Since no institute or organization, in such a region, can prevent itself to such disasters, library and information centers are no exception here. These disasters not only destruct the resources of a library but also severely affect its routine functioning. Thus, it is vital for an organization like library to remain prepared for such disasters. This paper tried to analyze the readiness and preparedness of the prominent libraries in Kashmir. The findings are listed below:

- All of the examined libraries have very sound collection of different kinds of resources that include books, rare books, manuscripts, paintings, references etc
- The studied libraries have lost enormous number of resources due to disasters like floods, fire etc.
- All the libraries are highly susceptible to floods, yet most of them haven't placed their collection at safer locations or points.
- All the libraries are highly susceptible to earthquakes, yet no measure has been taken in the architect of these libraries to minimize the devastation or loss.
- None of the investigated libraries have framed a disaster preparedness plan.
- None of the studied libraries have constituted a disaster preparedness team.
- Not a single library has an excellent fire alarming system while as most of them don't have fire extinguishers.
- None of the studied libraries use chemical treatment against rodents & insects nor have the availability of humidity controlling devices.

- Not a single library has framed an emergency contact list that could be used at the time of a disaster.
- Gandhi Memorial College Library is the only library among the examined ones that has insured its resources.
- Among the surveyed libraries, only SPS Library and SP College Library have digitized their resources.
- None of the studied libraries are prepared for a disaster.

Conclusion

Disasters happen at any place without any prior intimation or warning and have changed the track and face of many civilizations. No era in history and no existing being can assert to be resistant to disasters. Libraries express same ideas. No library can claim to be defiant and immune to disasters. Thereby, ascertaining the fact that there is a dire need to ensure the preparedness in these institutions, in order to reduce the damage & destruction to their resources. The libraries not only should frame a disaster preparedness plan but also constitute a disaster preparedness team. The libraries must ensure that there are regular mock drills and staff training programs, prior a disaster like flood, in order to ensure that least damage is suffered by the resources, and library functioning is restored as soon as possible after the disaster.

Disaster Preparedness Model

The measures that a library should enforce before a disaster, so as to minimize the damage that could be incurred by it, comprise the disaster preparedness measures. This paper recommends the implementation of following measures under disaster preparedness model:

- ❖ Libraries should frame a disaster preparedness plan and ensure its implementation.
- ❖ Constituting a disaster preparedness committee with defined responsibilities.
- ❖ Ensuring availability of fire alarm systems, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, flood alarms and other allied systems for early detection of disasters.
- ❖ Periodical and proper use of insecticides, fungicides and other chemical substances.
- ❖ Ensuring availability of humidity controlling devices.
- ❖ Framing of an emergency contact list.
- ❖ Periodical and regular training of library staff regarding disaster preparedness, should be mandatory.
- ❖ Resources should be digitized and then preserving them at multiple sites.
- ❖ Insuring the resources of a library.

The implementation of these measures will enable the managers of libraries to preserve and protect the resources in their libraries, or at least can minimize the damage, whenever a disaster of any intensity strikes.

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