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STATE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN PUNJAB (INDIA): A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Abstract:

In the last couple of decades, significant changes have been taken place in all spheres of life. These changes have been imposing challenges to almost all the professions and professionals. The library and information science (LIS) profession and professionals are not spared from it. Generally, the libraries are known as buildings with stacks of books and signs of silence everywhere. The computers and the Internet have revolutionized common man a lot. It has not only changed the working process but also thought process as well. Today, the user wants authentic information with a click of the mouse and if libraries are unable to fulfill their information needs the existence of libraries expected to get questioned. In this study, efforts are being made to assess the state of public libraries in Punjab which somewhere are not meeting the users' information demands. The use of information technology in these libraries is not encouraging which reflected through the below standard library services being rendered by these libraries. Only State Central Library Patiala is considered as purely an automated library which also has a digital wing to digitize manuscripts available with it, rest other public libraries of Punjab are in pathetic condition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically dwelt, the existence of libraries in India started with the presence of world-class institutions during the ancient time. India had been the epitome of learning with the presence of institutions located at Nalanda, Taxila, Ujjaini, Vallabhi, Amravati and many others. All of these institutions were having big and good libraries. In medieval times, India was ruled by the Muslims, followed by British and other rulers which had a large impact on its education system as well as on libraries. The Calcutta public library was established in 1836 and introduced free services for the poor for a specific period only. Combining various secretariat libraries, in 1891, the imperial library was established. With the efforts of Lord Curzon, Governor General of India, the collection of Calcutta public library merged to the imperial library and opened for the public through a notification placed in Gazette of India in 1902. Post independence, in 1948 the name of the imperial library was changed to the National Library of India. The library movement also boosted with the efforts of Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III, who hired a library professional, W A Bordon, from America to establish a modern public library system in the Baroda State during 1910. Afterwards, Dr. S R Ranganathan steered the whole library movement in the country with his dynamic efforts in librarianship. The Model Library Act compiled by Dr. Ranganathan and presented in a conference in 1930. The Madras Library Act was passed in 1948, whereas, the Indian public libraries got an impetus in 1950 when public libraries are considered as a responsibility of individual State in India. With this, library legislation becomes essential for each state but some of the states have yet to pass the library legislation. As of now, about 21 states had already passed public library legislation and offering free services to the residents of the states.

With respect to the public library system, the establishment of Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) in May 1972 brought paradigm shift as RRRLF started funding the public libraries. UNESCO (1994) in Public Library Manifesto defined the public library as "the local gateway to knowledge,

provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of individual and social groups". Partap and Chopra (2013) defined public library as 'a centre of information. It provides reliable information free of cost, without partiality or prejudice and on as wide a variety of subjects as would satisfy the interest of readers'. In this study, the public libraries of Punjab state are being discussed.

2. PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN PUNJAB

The library services in Punjab are poor as compared to other Indian states. At the same time, it is paradoxical that the state of Punjab claims the longest history in library movement in India. The Punjab Public library was known as the first public library of Punjab that was established in Lahore in 1884. There were some prominent libraries such as Dayal Singh Public Library (1896), Sir Ganga Ram public library (1923) and Dwarka Das Public Library (1921) were established by trusts associated with these personalities. Dwarka Das public library was established by Lok Sewak Mandal in Lahore. After the partition, the library was shifted to Sector 15, Chandigarh. Punjab also witnessed the establishment of various Municipal libraries along with the Central public library Sangrur that established in 1912. The Musafir Memorial Central State Library at Patiala was also established in 1955 and opened for the public in 1956. The district libraries were set up by the government in about 14 districts of Punjab. These district libraries were established at Namaul (1962), Patiala (1956), Gurdaspur (1966), Bathinda (1970), Kapurthala (1971), Hoshiarpur (1973), Firozpur (1979), Faridkot (1980), Amritsar (1982), Fatehgarh (1994), Mansa (1995), Mohali (2007) etc.

Role of Punjab Library Association (PLA)

The PLA was founded by Don Dickinson in 1915 at Lahore (now in Pakistan). A C Woolner was the first president of PLA. In 1930, the PLA started publishing 'Modern Librarian', a monthly journal as its core publication which got ceased in 1946. The PLA had also organized a few conferences to make people aware of the library issues. After the partition, PLA shifted its office at Shimla. Since, inception, the PLA started efforts on getting library legislation bill passed in the state. The PLA continued organizing seminars and conferences on various themes related to library development. PLA has been working as a live wire for the library professionals and doing its serious efforts for the holistic development of the libraries in the state.

The present study tried to assess the outcome of efforts taken place with respect to the growth and development of public libraries in Punjab.

3. LITERATURE REVIEWED

There are few studies available on different aspects of role and responsibilities of public libraries in a rapidly changing environment across the world. The developed countries like USA, UK, Germany etc have a strong public library system whereas in developing countries like India the public libraries are in process of establishing their need. Bertot and McClure (1998) studied public library connectivity of USA. They stated that about 83% of the public libraries are connected to each other by way of the Internet. However, collaboration, cooperation and support of professionals working in these libraries are not clear, whereas connectivity to respond to users' queries collectively is one of the important objectives. Yi (2013) shared the historical development of libraries in China and the challenges public libraries have been facing in the digital era. He suggested that public libraries in China, for survival, need to emphasis on developing user specific activities and social service functions. Ebiwolate (2010) studied the status of public libraries in Nigeria and found that failure of libraries in Niger Delta states is because of lack of political will, poor infrastructure, inadequate funding and the shortage of skilled human resources.

Dasgupta (2009) highlighted recommendations of a Working Group on Libraries of the Planning Commission, 1966. The report of Working Group recommended renovation of Delhi Public library building which was in poor conditions and upgrading the skills of library professionals along with the establishment of 12000 new public libraries in the country. Kumar (2004) mentioned the national initiative in India for the development of Public Libraries. He specifically highlighted the recommendations made by Chattopadhyay Committee on National Policy on Library and Information Science in 1985. The committee was headed by Prof. D P Chattopadhyay. The Committee discussed various issue pertaining to public libraries and suggested the various means to address such issues. The Committee also entrusted key role to RRRLF in development of public library system in the country. Jagtar Singh (1984) described the need of rural public library services in the village of Punjab. He described how rural library services could contribute to the development of human resources. His study discussed the historical development of rural Public Library services in the state. He also mentioned the importance of library legislation for the development of rural public library services and described the structure and functions of the state library authorities. Wani (2008) conducted a study to the explore growth of Public library system in India. He concluded that a massive investment is required to improve the situation of public libraries in India. Kumbar (2005) tried to assess the status of public libraries in Karnataka state. The Mysore public library act was passed in 1965. He stated that public libraries in Karnataka seriously focusing on the use of technology to automate the library system so that a quality library network could be established in the state. However, he also concluded that the state of public libraries in Karnataka is not good as a lot of negligence and indifferent attitude have restricted growth of the public library system as a whole. Singh (2012) highlighted the shortage of funds for infrastructural development and to run public library system, lack of local policies, are some of the key challenges public libraries have been dealing with.

The library and information science profession is quite vibrant and dynamic. Lots of developments are taking place day by day. It is essential for all the library professionals to keep themselves abreast with the latest happenings in their respective areas. Many studies highlighted the use of information technology in libraries and the necessity of sharpening professional skills. The training of new technology and its use in public libraries for rendering needed and quality services is the key for a successful public library system (Kehnast, 1993; Devi & Murthy, 2006; Koovakkal & Jalaja, 2003; Ramana, 2006). Public libraries in India are not in extensive use of ICT because of various reasons, such as unskilled staff, lack of planning, lack of support from the government, etc (Ghosh, 2004). The use of information and communication technology in libraries booming services and helps in the coordination and collaboration of distantly located libraries (Rajasekharan, 1991; Auster & Chan, 2004).

In nutshell, the growth of the public library system completely depends on the seer involvement of local government and systematic planning. In India, the states which have not yet enacted library legislations or missing systematic planning about the growth of public libraries are somewhere encouraging poor library condition.

4. METHODOLOGY

All 14 public libraries of Punjab, inclusive of thirteen district public libraries and one state central library were considered for the study. A survey method was found appropriate for the study. A well-designed questionnaire was compiled with some basic questions about the library and the technology involved. The questionnaire delivered to each library personally and information confined to assess the current situation of public libraries in Punjab was collected. The collected data was analyzed and presented in the forms of tables, which have been interpreted appropriately in order to highlight the findings.

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Types of public library buildings in Punjab

The study revealed the status library building of each public library. Table 1 highlights the types of Public Library buildings in which the public libraries housed. The findings of the study prove that out of the 14 libraries, 50 per cent of libraries are housed in government buildings, while the remaining 50 per cent thereof housed in rented buildings.

Table 1
Types of public library buildings in Punjab

S. No.	Name of the Library	Library Building	
		Govt. Building	Rented Building
1	Central State Library, Patiala	√	-
2	District Public Library, Amritsar	-	√
3	District Public Library, Bathinda	-	√
4	District Public Library, Faridkot	-	√
5	District Public Library, Fatehgarh Sahib	-	√
6	District Public Library, Ferozepur	-	√
7	District Public Library, Gurdaspur	√	-
8	District Public Library, Hoshiarpur	√	-
9	District Public Library, Jalandhar	-	√
10	District Public Library, Kapurthala	√	-
11	District Public Library, Mansa	-	√
12	District Public Library, Nabha	√	-
13	District Public Library, Ropar	√	-
14	District Public Library, Sangrur	√	-
Total		7 (50%)	7 (50%)

(Percentages are given within parenthesis)

The findings of these buildings reveal that most of the government buildings where the libraries housed are not constructed according to the need of the library. 14.29 per cent (2 libraries out of 14) libraries are housed in local municipality building. The condition of these buildings is very poor. However, 21.43 per cent (3 libraries out of 14) government buildings are in very good condition. Another interesting finding of the study is that except the Central State Library building, none of these buildings was initially constructed as the library building.

5.2 Staff strength

The study reveals that the total number of permanent staff in Public Libraries in Punjab is 95. As highlighted in Table 2, out of the total available number of staff 30.53 per cent are professional staff and the remaining 69.47 per cent are non-professional staff. It is interesting to note that the majority of the libraries are having more number of non-professional staff as compared to professional staff.

Table 2
Staff strength in Public Libraries in Punjab

S. No.	Name of the Library	Staff Strength		Total
		Professional	Non Professional	
1	Central State Library, Patiala	8	26	34
2	District Public Library, Amritsar	2	2	4
3	District Public Library, Bathinda	1	2	3
4	District Public Library, Faridkot	2	2	4
5	District Public Library, Fatehgarh Sahib	2	2	4
6	District Public Library, Ferozepur	2	2	4
7	District Public Library, Gurdaspur	1	3	5
8	District Public Library, Hoshiarpur	4	3	4
9	District Public Library, Jalandhar	1	10	14
10	District Public Library, Kapurthala	1	3	4
11	District Public Library, Mansa	1	3	4
12	District Public Library, Nabha	1	3	4
13	District Public Library, Ropar	1	3	4
14	District Public Library, Sangrur	1	2	3
Total		29 (30.53%)	66 (69.47%)	95 (100%)

(Percentages are given within parenthesis)

5.3 Technical processing of books

It is apparent from the findings that out of the 14 District Public Libraries in Punjab, 92.86 per cent (13 libraries out of 14) are following the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme for classifying their documents, while the remaining 7.14 per cent are following the Colon Classification scheme. In case of cataloguing, 57.15 per cent (8 out of 14 libraries) libraries are using the AACR2 cataloguing code, 35.71 (5 out of 14 libraries) per cent are using classified cataloguing code and the remaining 7.14 per cent libraries are following classified cataloguing code. The analysis also reveals that 14.29 per cent Public Libraries are using the Brownie (2 libraries out of 14) System for the circulation of documents, while the remaining 85.71 per cent (12 libraries out of 14) are using the traditional register system for the circulation of documents. This signifies that the librarians should take initiative to provide better services to the users. If 14.29 per cent libraries could provide the Brownie system then it should also be possible for the remaining libraries to follow the same system instead of following the age-old register system which is quite inconvenient for the users of the library.

5.4 Accessibility

It is very interesting to note, that most of the Public Libraries (71.43 per cent) in Punjab are following the Open Access System. While very few of them (28.57 per cent) are following the Close Access System. Although the number of libraries following close access system is very less and it is expected that they should come out from this most inconvenient system. They should follow the open access system on an urgent basis. However, some libraries are facing the real problem in the absence of the librarian. It is, therefore, very important to fill up these vacant posts of librarians on priority basis so that the users of these libraries could be served in more better ways. The overall findings indicate that most of the District Public Libraries in Punjab are following the standard rules or schemes for the classification and cataloguing of their documents.

5.5 Library Resources

Table 3 indicates the number of documents that each District Public Library is having in the state of Punjab. The analysis reveals that the minimum collection of books in a particular library is 1.59 per cent whereas, the maximum collection is 23.13 per cent. Out of the total collection of District Public Libraries, one District Public Library is much stronger (having 14.55 per cent of the total collection) in the collection as compared to all other District Public Libraries in the state. As far as periodicals collection is concerned, except three libraries, including the Central State Library, all other District Public Libraries are subscribing more or less the similar number of periodicals. Similar is the scenario in the case of Newspapers subscription. Another interesting finding needs to be underlined is that out of the fourteen Public Libraries, only two libraries (14.29 per cent) are providing the reprographic service.

Table – 3
Library Resources in Public Libraries in Punjab

Name of the Library	Library Resources				
	Books	Periodicals	Newspapers	E-Journals	Reprographic Service
Central State Library, Patiala	1,50,343 (23.13)	50 (26.74)	9 (13.43)	-	√
District Public Library, Amritsar	31,700 (4.88)	17 (9.09)	6 (8.96)	-	-
District Public Library, Bathinda	26,020 (4.00)	9 (4.81)	5 (7.46)	-	-
District Public Library, Faridkot	37,547 (5.78)	6 (3.21)	3 (4.48)	-	-
District Public Library, Fatehgarh Sahib	15,725 (2.41)	9 (4.81)	4 (5.97)	-	-
District Public Library, Ferozepur	35,366 (5.44)	6 (3.21)	5 (7.46)	-	-
District Public Library, Gurdaspur	35,122 (5.40)	18 (5.35%)	11 (4.48)	-	-
District Public Library, Hoshiarpur	33,813 (5.20)	13 (6.95)	4 (5.97)	-	-
District Public Library, Jalandhar	94,600 (14.55)	17 (9.09)	7 (10.45)	-	√
District Public Library, Kapurthala	43,219 (6.65)	8 (4.28)	4 (5.97)	-	-
District Public Library, Mansa	10,343 (1.59)	8 (4.28)	3 (4.48)	-	-
District Public Library, Nabha	45,579 (7.01)	10 (5.34)	5 (7.46)	-	-
District Public Library, Ropar	34,274 (5.27)	10 (5.35)	6 (8.96)	-	-
District Public Library, Sangrur	56,348 (8.69)	14 (7.49)	3 (4.47)	-	-
Total	6,49,999 (100)	195 (100)	75 (100)	-	2 (14.29)

(Percentages are given within parenthesis)

5.6 Automation of Libraries

It was highly shocking to know that a majority of public libraries (i.e., 92.86 per cent) explored in this study has not completed its automation process. Some of the reasons were inadequate staff, lack of

economic support, vacant professional positions and ignorance of public libraries by the government. The Central State Library is the only one that can be called an automated public library in Punjab. Table 4 revealed the true picture of the automation process in public libraries of Punjab.

Table – 4
Software Used for Database Creation and Library Service

Name of the Library	Automation completed	
	Yes	No
Central State Library, Patiala	√	-
District Public Library, Amritsar	-	√
District Public Library, Bathinda	-	√
District Public Library, Faridkot	-	√
District Public Library, Fatehgarh Sahib	-	√
District Public Library, Ferozepur	-	√
District Public Library, Gurdaspur	-	√
District Public Library, Hoshiarpur	-	√
District Public Library, Jalandhar	-	√
District Public Library, Kapurthala	-	√
District Public Library, Mansa	-	√
District Public Library, Nabha	-	√
District Public Library, Ropar	-	√
District Public Library, Sangrur	-	√
Total	1 (7.14%)	14 (92.86%)

5.7 Library Users

The data presented in Table 5 highlights the number of library users in different District Public Libraries in the state of Punjab. The finding indicates that the total number of users in the network of District Public Libraries in the state of Punjab is 63,723. Out of the total membership, Central State Library and the District Public Library, Jalandhar contribute the maximum number of members. It is surprising to note that the District Public Library, Bhatinda is having only 867 registered members in contrary to the District Public Library. The District Library Jalandhar has a total number of registered members are 14125. This is due to the popularity of the District Public Library, Jalandhar. This library provides some sorts of Public Relations to its users attract more and more people towards the library. The library also conducts a number of events for its uses that helped in creating reading habits among library users.

Table 5
Library Users in Public Libraries in Punjab

S. No.	Name of the Library	Number of Users
1	Central State Library, Patiala	19,415
2	District Public Library, Amritsar	1,562
3	District Public Library, Bathinda	867
4	District Public Library, Faridkot	3,907
5	District Public Library, Fatehgarh Sahib	1,405
6	District Public Library, Ferozepur	3,317

7	District Public Library, Gurdaspur	2,760
8	District Public Library, Hoshiarpur	3,177
9	District Public Library, Jalandhar	14,125
10	District Public Library, Kapurthala	1,609
11	District Public Library, Mansa	2,016
12	District Public Library, Nabha	3,160
13	District Public Library, Ropar	4,227
14	District Public Library, Sangrur	2,478
	Total	63,723

6. CONCLUSION

Now, the user does not run to a library for information but look for accessibility of the Internet. The libraries, especially public libraries need to gear up to meet the information demands of users. It has been observed that public libraries in Punjab state are yet to meet the expectations of the users. Broadly, these libraries are unable to fulfill the information needs of current users. Various factors are responsible for the lopsided application of IT such as, lack of economic support from the government that bring down the process of automation and update of infrastructure, lack of technical skill to develop local or in-house databases and making use of current technology, etc. The public libraries in Punjab required to have updated resources, infrastructure and skilled manpower that can only be managed with the recurring amount of money, hence a library legislation need to be enacted in the state. So that public libraries can have regular amount of budget to meet the information challenges and help in preserving history and culture of the state for the current generation and posterity.

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