
LIBRARY LEGISLATION IN INDIA: EVOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract:

The legislation of public libraries has become a pillar of the development of library systems in the Indian states, as a kind of legislation aimed at institutionalizing access to information, education, and cultural resources. Following the promulgation of the first Public Libraries Act in Madras (now Tamil Nadu) in 1948, additional Indian states instituted their statutes to regulate and administer public libraries. However, there has been a great variation in the historical evolution and enactment of these legislative measures in particular regions, and thus, no single national framework has emerged. The present paper traces the historical trajectory of library legislation in India, addressing the contributions of S.R. Ranganathan, the characteristics of state acts, and the roles performed by central and state-level bodies such as the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF). It also looks at the key implementation barriers such as poor financing, insufficient skilled human resources, poor enforcement measures, and policy indifference. The review of differences between states with and without library legislation highlights the lack of library development and service provision. The paper ends with a call to a common national policy that can be made to construct fair, contemporary, and sustainable systems of public libraries in India.

Keywords : Library Legislation, Public Libraries Act, Library Development in India, S.R. Ranganathan, State Library Acts, Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF)

Introduction :

The evolution of a public library system in India depends on the legislation, and it is non-negotiable regarding education, social development, and equal access to information. A systematic state-supported network of public libraries had been propagated by Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, who elaborated the Madras Public Libraries Act of 1948, the first legislation of the kind in India, after the country had gained independence. The decades that followed saw an explosion of state-specific laws that sought to promote extensive systems of government-controlled public libraries. However, adoption was uneven and discontinuous: some jurisdictions responsibly developed the state of public libraries, while most of them were still idle due to a lack of legislation, financial resources, and administrative ennui, and a lack of political commitment. Central initiatives such as those of the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) endeavored to provide



coordination and support; however, the absence of a national library policy perpetuated uneven regional outcomes. This paper explains how library laws in India have changed, looks at the differences in how these laws are applied in different states, and highlights important challenges in creating a strong network of public libraries.

Objectives of the Research :

- 1) To trace the historical development of library legislation in India, specifically highlighting the contributions of key figures and institutions.
- 2) To scrutinize and contrast the key characteristics of library acts passed by different Indian states.
- 3) To assess the effectiveness of this legislation in terms of governance, infrastructure, funding, and service delivery.
- 4) To pinpoint the obstacles and constraints that states encounter when implementing library legislation and managing public library systems.
- 5) To evaluate how central agencies like the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) and the Ministry of Culture contribute to the support of state-level legislation.
- 6) To suggest policy measures that will foster a more unified, inclusive, and sustainable legislative framework for public libraries in India.

Literature Review :

The intellectual roots of Indian library legislation were sown in 1950 when S.R. Ranganathan (64) championed the cause of both a tax-free and a state policy that would provide equal access to information by creating tax-aided amelioration and tax-aided fidelity to information, i.e., public libraries. Building on this foundation, P.N. Kaula's works in 1961 and 1983 revealed the imbalanced development of library legislation, highlighting that political inertia hindered the otherwise effective growth of public library systems in the country. R. Bhattacharjee (1999) then scrutinized the operational effectiveness of state library acts, noting that many remained unimplemented owing to administrative inefficiencies and insufficient funding. In a comparative framework, Y. Satyanarayana Rao (2001) illuminated inconsistencies among state laws and called for a model bill to standardize governance structures. R.L. Mittal (2002) reinforced this argument by emphasizing the need to modernize outdated statutes to align with the evolving demands of the digital era. Anandh and Shastri's analysis of central agencies (2006) revealed marked variation in financial and structural support available through the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), indicating that institutional infrastructure remains uneven. K. Kumar (2010) linked robust library legislation to advanced literacy outcomes and stronger public library usage, suggesting that effective legal frameworks foster societal development. Sivakumaren et al. (2012) highlighted the necessity of digital integration, arguing that library statutes must be revised to incorporate ICT infrastructure and digital access provisions. V.S. Deshpande (2014) focused on Maharashtra's Public Libraries Act, noting that although the statute



is sound, inadequate staffing and administrative delays hinder service delivery.

Research Methodology :

This study examines the evolution, scope, and implementation of library legislation in India. It uses a descriptive and analytical research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research uses secondary data from government reports, academic articles, annual reports, ILA and IASLIC documents, and legislative documents. The sample includes early adopter states, states with no legislation, and union territories with partial implementation. The study uses content analysis, comparative analysis, trend analysis, and qualitative synthesis to identify common features, gaps, and implementation patterns. Limitations include the study's focus on developments, reliance on secondary data, and archival constraints on state-specific legislative documents.

Library Legislation in India: Evolution and Implementation :

The Indian legislation that governs itself establishment, funding, maintenance, and administration of public libraries in India is referred to as library legislation. The development of library legislation until 2020 portrays the determination of the nation in creating a knowledgeable and literate community using a well-structured library system available to all. Even the concept of making library institutionalization through laws was known since the pre-independence days, and the Madras Public Libraries Act, 1948, was the first instance of a public library law in independent India.

The need to have organized library systems to aid literacy, education, and social development started to be realized in Indian states post-Independence. Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, described as the Father of Library Science in India, was largely instrumental in supporting library legislation in states within India. Major state library legislation (up to 2020) also includes Tamil Nadu (now Madras), Andhra Pradesh (1960), Karnataka (1965), Maharashtra (1967), West Bengal (1979), Manipur (1988), Haryana (1989), Kerala (1989), Mizoram (1993), Goa (1993), Orissa (now Odisha), Uttaranchal (now Uttarak

The following are key features in the Indian library legislation: Library Cess, State Library Authority, Library Committees, Library Network, and Public Access. The implementation was, however, affected by poor funding, administrative problems, lack of human resources, lack of infrastructure, and digital divide. The provisions of the Delivery of Books and Newspapers (Public Libraries) Act, 1954, Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), and the National Knowledge Commission (20052009) are all provisions of the central government, which have helped in the development of libraries.

Although there have been multiple efforts towards making a National Policy on Library and Information Systems (NPLIS), India lacked a national library law by 2020; the result was an uneven state of libraries. With the transition of India to a digital knowledge society, the necessity



of a reformed technology-friendly legislation and a national library policy became essential to promote access to any proportionality of information in every region.

Origin of Library Legislation in India :

Legalizing the structure of public libraries in India is a mere element of the universal process of the nation to blaze new education, literacy, and information accessibility. Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, also known as the Father of Library Science in India, made an important contribution to the idea of a specialized law of public libraries and to propagating it. In his intellectual corpus, Ranganathan synthesized a systematic library organization to be channeled using a library cess and led by professional library management. This resulted in the formulation and the adoption of the first ever in-depth comprehension of a law on public libraries in India, the Madras Public Libraries Act, 1948.

After this groundbreaking law, other Indian states are passing laws to code and govern the public libraries. Some of the statutory instruments promulgated during this era are the Andhra Pradesh Public Libraries Act, 1960; the Karnataka Public Libraries Act, 1965; the Maharashtra Public Libraries Act, 1967; the West Bengal Public Libraries Act, 1979; the Kerala Public Libraries Act, 1989; the Odisha Public Libraries Act, 2001 and the Mizoram Public Libraries Act, 2005. All these tools show a trend of the State establishing a statutory body that governs the network of regional and municipal libraries, a library cess to form the main source of public funding, and standards of library services.

Despite these advancements, many of the Indian states and union territories have not enacted special library legislation, thus making apparent differences in the library infrastructure and service delivery in the country. The recognition of this imbalance spurred calls for a cohesive national structure, notably the proposed Model Library Bill and the formulation of the National Policy on Library and Information Systems (NPLIS). Despite the adoption of these (non-binding) proposals, legislative uniformity remains elusive.

Overall, the history of library laws in India shows us how the step-by-step and unrelenting determination has paid off in terms of institutionalizing public libraries as a source of education and the democratic process.

Key Features of State Library Acts :

The vastness of state library law in India is aimed at developing a well-organized, accessible, and sustainable system of public libraries. The usual core characteristics are a constituted State Library Authority, a statutory dedicated cess, a hierarchical tiered structure, and professional staffing formalised arrangements. The formulation of policy, the control over its actualization, and the coordination of the library services between the levels of the same state are the activities of the Authority, which is comprised of governmental officials, library professionals, and figures representing the civil society.



Colleagues may be glad to learn that a key mechanism in this architecture is the library cess, which is a form of tax on property or is part of local-body revenues, which guarantees a steady, recurring income to public libraries. However, the real collection and disbursement of such funds are often affected by administrative sluggishness or discrepancy, thus diluting their desired impacts.

At the same time, the hierarchical order of libraries has been mandated by these acts, where the State Central Library sits at the highest post with the rest of the libraries, namely, district, taluka or block, and village or panchayat libraries at the grassroots level, falling in line. This multi-tier system will be aimed at ensuring geographical coverage and equal access to resources and services in libraries in urban and rural areas.

The legislation also makes particular mention of library services and outreach, and certain acts suggest mobile library units should be used to access remote or rural locations. However, there are still lapses in statutory intent versus operational reality, and often irregular cess collection, insufficient staffing, inadequate infrastructure, and poor monitoring mechanisms undermine the effectiveness of such provisions, resulting in high variations in not only the quality but also the availability of library services even among states and regions.

Role of National and State-Level Institutions :

The system of public libraries in India has been developed under the influence of the interaction between national agencies and state administration. Established in 1972, the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) serves as the central governmental institution responsible for promoting and supporting public library services. The Foundation provides both financial and technical assistance to the development of the library's infrastructure, primarily the states with adopted legislation on libraries. Besides, it promotes the state governments to improve current library networks and implement the library laws where they are none.

Simultaneously, the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) (2005-2009) acknowledged libraries as indispensable to building a knowledge-based society and recommended a comprehensive legal framework through the proposed National Library Act. Furthermore, the NKC stressed the importance of modernizing the services of the library through the suggestions of digital libraries, the connectedness of the system of libraries, better access to information technologies, and better training of specialists.

State-level State Library Authorities or Councils are authorized to enforce legislation in libraries and manage library services at the state level. In general, under their responsibilities, they should also oversee the administration of the state library network, budget, and staff, and make sure that the services are delivered on all levels of the library. The job of these bodies, however, differs depending on the local conditions, namely political will, bureaucratic capacity, and resource allocation.



Implementation Challenges :

The Indian library legislation has been greatly developed in supporting the development of public libraries, but its implementation has always been approached with difficulties. First and foremost is the constant underfunding of publicly operated libraries and an increased tendency in the poor funding of infrastructure, acquisition of books, maintenance, and digital advances. Since state library acts require budgetary assistance and financial planning, most of the jurisdictions still invest inadequate funds in these areas.

The library cessation--usually imposed by local authorities--is not regular, and in most instances, uncollected. Constant understaffing is one more obstacle, as insufficient staffing standards, long recruitment processes, and poor working conditions discourage talent from entering or staying in the public library field.

Even when it comes to state planning, such as educational and cultural policy, there is a tendency to marginalize the task of public libraries, and this slows their development and reduces their profile. At the same time, a lack of accountability and monitoring is widespread: the monitoring of performance systems, impact measures, and routine evaluation of public libraries is mostly not enacted at the state level. Without strong indicators, data-gathering habits, and reporting guidelines, measuring library performance and making it the subject of policy-making on the basis of empirical results proves to be quite hard.

Comparative Analysis of States with and without Legislation :

Indian legislation of public libraries is directly affecting the organization, geographic coverage, and consistency of libraries. In states that have legislated such networks, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, these networks are more formal and elaborate, with state, district, and rural branches. However, these jurisdictions are struggling with the problem of dated infrastructure and inconsistent maintenance regimes, and a sluggish pace towards a digital transformation.

On the other hand, the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Delhi are without comprehensive legislation, which means that there is ad hoc and piecemeal library development based on local governments, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, or a philanthropic foundation. This is not a decentralized strategy as it creates disparity in coverage; cities have large libraries with enough requirements, funding, and resources, but communities in the countryside (rural) and cities (peri-urban) are underserved.

This gap in service provision between cities and the countryside is very evident in the areas of infrastructure, employees, and accessibility to new technology. Metro libraries have better facilities, staff, and equipment, whereas rural branches are regularly sidelined. Such inequalities have also established the need for inclusive policies, such as rural outreach initiatives, mobile library programmes, and active community co-operation to help in bridging the urban-rural divide.



Towards a National Library Legislation :

This is because, to some extent, the current library development in India has been influenced mainly by state-specific legislations that have perpetuated massive differences in infrastructure, services, and accessibility. Responding to this clamour, there is a rising demand for the enactment of a binding National Library Act. These laws would create national standards of library services to the public and would guarantee all citizens quality service of a minimum quantity of library services.

National library legislation may enable the direct involvement in the development of the public libraries by the central governmental financing, and it would be of significant advantage in under-funded states and rural areas. Moreover, it would also bring about the existence of nationwide monitoring and electrical systems to enhance the collection of information, performance tracking, and accountability in library operations.

The Act could also promote the creation and enhancement of digital libraries and the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT), thereby bridging the digital divide in both urban and rural areas. It would also promote the adoption of ICT in the areas of library management and cataloging, as well as user services, a move that would enable the Indian public libraries to be on par with those in other countries of the world.

It would also enhance training and human-resource development in the library sector since the Act would require the creation of national training institutes, continuous professional development, and other training programmes, as well as the definition of standards of qualification of library personnel.

Lastly, the National Library Act may support local organizations, which may become more powerful regarding their responsibilities to serve the needs of the public libraries in the environmentally deprived and distant lands.

Reflections and Way Forward :

The Indian system of public libraries is facing challenges based on the existence of archaic laws, inappropriate accountability, and technological obsolescence. Ensuring equitable access to information and knowledge thus necessitates the revision and modernisation of antiquated library acts, the establishment of robust accountability and performance-evaluation mechanisms, the promotion of public-private partnerships (PPPs), and the expansion of digital infrastructure.

A significant proportion of state library acts, dating from the mid-twentieth century, fail to incorporate provisions for electronic resources, digital literacy, or the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in library management. Renovation of the library facilities, staff development, and introduction of innovative programmes can be achieved through collaboration with non-profit organisations, social responsibility of enterprises, and educational institutions.



Digital infrastructure is also needed to facilitate the spread of India's towards the digital era. Libraries are supposed to provide internet access, computer access, a digital catalogue, and electronic learning materials, especially in rural and distant locations. Besides, libraries can become the centres of knowledge and digital empowerment within the community.

The current reinvention of the role of libraries in modern India depends on their placement in the knowledge economy. It is essential to incorporate libraries in the national systems of education, digital inclusion, skills training, and civic participation. The process of reclaiming the role of libraries in the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century will heavily rely on reinforcing the perception of libraries in the community as places of learning and innovation where they can be able to enhance social inclusion.

Conclusion :

The process of legislating public libraries in India was progressing along a disorganized path toward expanding access to knowledge. In 1948, the first Madras Public Libraries Act was introduced alongside state-level laws aimed at establishing orderly public library systems. The successful implementation was, however, not even being held back by a lack of enough monetary support, poor enforcement powers, or a lack of trained officers, as well as monitoring systems. Regional differences were also worsened by the lack of a strong national system. The national-level institutions and the policy initiatives, including the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation and the National Knowledge Commission, respectively, attempted to alleviate these gaps, but a unified and binding National Library Act did not materialize. This has led to the fact that the public library sector in India still faces structural and functional issues, especially in rural and underserved areas. To attain equitable, modern, and inclusive access to knowledge, the ongoing efforts to modernize century-old library laws, facilitate implementation mechanisms, and digitize physical infrastructure need to be the center of attention. The national policy framework with state-level autonomy can therefore rekindle the importance of public libraries as invaluable educational, empowerment, and social development tools in the confines of the knowledge-driven era.

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