

INDIAN NATIONAL POLICY FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES  
– A STUDY

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**Abstract:**

*This paper investigates the policies of the central government in India, especially regarding the financial outlay in the Five Year Plans, important developments, and their impact on establishment of the public library system, since independence was achieved in 1947. India is a multilingual federal country with 25 states and seven union territories (UT). Re-districting has resulted in an increase in the number of states/UT since independence. Each state and UT is divided into districts and sub-districts called talukas, tehsils, or blocks. Constitutionally, the subject "libraries" is the responsibility of the individual states in India. The central government has jurisdiction only over those libraries which it has established, and those institutions which it has declared nationally important.*

**Keywords:** India, National Policy, Public Libraries, Annual Report

**Introduction:**

**A) Pre-Five Year Plan Period :**

The programs executed by provincial and central governments since 1910 for the social and adult education of the populace have paved the way for the enactment of library laws and rules for grants-in-aid in the country. Hence, public library finance is part of the education budget. The level of literacy in 1941 being as low as 16 percent, universalization of elementary education and eradication of illiteracy in the nation were the aims of the education policy of the government. To fulfil this goal, a variety of programs were undertaken such as extension services, continuing education, social education, part-time education, refresher courses, non-formal education, and adult education. In order to accelerate the pace of socio-

economic development, the government considered public libraries to be an integral part of development projects. In 1948, the first public library bill was passed in the state of Madras (now Tamil Nadu), mainly due to the efforts of the eminent librarian S.R. Ranganathan. One of the earliest Advisory Committees — the Sinha Committee, appointed in 1957 — recommended that public libraries be developed on the basis of a hierarchical network.

**B) First Five Year Plan, 1951–1956 :**

The first plan provision was Rs. (rupees) 140 million (US\$29.5 million at that time) (1) for social education, physical education, and youth welfare, out of the total budget for education of Rs. 1.33 billion (US\$280 million). Libraries were considered to be part of social education. Rs. 5 million (US\$1.05 million) was set aside for establishment of the national central library, but this sum was not used.

Improvement of library services was mentioned in this plan for educational development. The essence of the scheme was to establish district libraries in each state, which were to be supplemented by a state central library. The government of India also initiated a scheme, “Integrated Library Service,” with the support of the state government. The scheme targeted units in every area selected by the governments for intensive educational development. The experimental project was meant to monitor the impact of a number of educational institutions in areas covering 100 villages. Each area was to have five model community centers, plus a main library with branches to distribute books to 20 villages. This pilot project was implemented in 29 areas in the country. Nine states made plans to open state central libraries, and some others were in the process of setting up district libraries in about 100 districts. This cost approximately Rs. 10 million (US\$2.1 million), of which nearly two-thirds was contributed by the government of India. Thus, libraries were considered to be an essential part of the Community Development Program that was launched during the first plan period (Naidu, 1990). Other important developments included establishment of the Delhi Public Library in 1951. The Central Reference Library in Calcutta was established in 1955. Connemara Public Library, in Madras (established 1896), became the State Central Library in 1950 under the provisions of the Madras Public Libraries Act of 1948; in 1955, it became one of the three depository libraries. At the end of March 1954, the country had 32,000 libraries with a book stock of about 7.1 million volumes; an amount of Rs. 9 million (US\$1.89 million) was spent on library services. By 1951, the level of literacy had risen to 18.33 percent.

**C) Second Five Year Plan, 1956–1961**

Of the Rs. 2.040 billion (US\$426.8 million) budgeted for education, Rs. 100 million (US\$20.9 million) was proposed for social education, physical education, and youth welfare: (Panda, 1993). This plan contained the same provisions as the first plan, plus additional provisions for establishing integrated library service. There were three objectives. First, state and district libraries were to be set up in each state. Second, the library services were to be organized on the basis of legislation. Finally, district libraries were to form the link between the state central library and village libraries. As a result, nine states in India established state central libraries and 254 district libraries. But the national central library was still not established. In 1960, the state of Andhra Pradesh enacted library legislation.

During this plan period, a total of Rs. 2.040 billion (US\$426.8 million) was spent on educational development, of which Rs. 9 million (US\$1.88 million) was spent on library development. Even though Rs. 18.6 million (US\$3.89 million) was provided, the states only used 48.6 percent of this amount. Thus, the number of libraries nearly doubled in 1964 as compared to 1951, and the expenditure on public libraries in this period increased three-fold. (This improvement is offset by the fact that the value of the rupee was reduced by half during this period.) According to a UNESCO report published on the occasion of the Public Library Seminar held at Delhi in 1955, India had 24,086 public library service points at the time. The level of literacy in 1961 increased to 28.31 percent.

**D) Third Five Year Plan, 1962–1967**

The amount of Rs. 5.6 billion (US\$1.178 billion) was budgeted for education in this plan period, but the amount to be spent on libraries was not clearly indicated in the plan. Of this amount, Rs. 620 million (US\$130.53 million) was expected to be available for social education. During this plan period, the system of central government assistance to the states was changed, and funding for libraries was kept to a bare minimum. Thus, it was up to the individual states to take the initiative and develop their public libraries. With the beginning of this plan period, the scheme to assist state governments in establishing state central libraries, district central libraries, and block development libraries was abandoned. The central government decided to let the states decide on the development; the decision was a major setback that hindered the development of public libraries.

During this plan period, four national libraries were to be established at Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. District-level libraries were to be established in all the states. A sum of Rs. 32.3 million (US\$6.8 million) was made available to the states for this purpose.

**E) Fourth Five Year Plan, 1969–1974;**

The education budget was estimated at Rs. 7.120 billion (US\$949.3 million), of which the social education component was Rs. 100 million (US\$13.3 million). Thus, the tempo that had built for the development of library services slowed. However, Rs. 130 million (US\$17.3 million) was provided in this plan period for provision of information services, which included information centers, radio transmitters, film production, mobile cine vans, and other media. The literacy level rose to 34.45 percent in 1971. In 1972, the Working Group on Development of Public Libraries was constituted by the Government of India Planning Commission to make recommendations for library development. These recommendations were to be included in the Fifth Five Year Plan. The group submitted detailed proposals for:

In 1972, during this plan period, the central government established the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation. The foundation was created as an autonomous body under the Department of Culture, controlled by the Ministry of Education, for the development of public libraries in India. This foundation matches the funds of the states for purchasing furniture and books, organizing conferences and seminars, and providing mobile library service to the rural areas. It also advises the central government on all matters relating to library development in the country (Sharma, 1985).

**F) Fifth Five Year Plan, 1974–1979**

An adult education program was the emphasis of this plan. The program was to be supported by a network of libraries at the village and block levels, and various community centers. Thus, steps were taken to strengthen not only the village and block libraries, but also the central and state libraries, and the district libraries. The states were assisted by the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation, which was established in 1972. During this plan period, the amount of Rs. 15.620 billion (US\$1.927 billion) was allocated for general education, and Rs. 350 million (US\$43.2 million) was budgeted for social education. The only state that enacted a public library law during this plan period was West Bengal, in 1979. In 1978, the government adopted the National Adult Education Program, but it did not recognize the

public library as an agency that could be assigned a role in solving the literacy problem. Rather, the public library was relegated to the role of post-literacy work. This view was also promulgated by the Draft National Policy on Education (NPE), 1979. However, the need for the rural public library system to play a role in continuing education in the villages and rural areas was recognized (Draft NPE, 1979).

#### G) Sub-Sixth Five Year Plan, 1980–1985

This plan emphasized minimum essential education of all adults, to be achieved by inter-sectoral cooperation and inter-agency coordination. These efforts were to be supported by post-literacy, continuing education through a network of rural libraries as well as instructional programs conducted through mass communication media. The amount allocated for general education was Rs. 21,622 billion (US\$2.749 billion). The art and culture component was Rs. 839 million (US\$106.7 million).

1. Twenty-six states/UT out of 31 existing in 1982 had established/designated state central libraries;
2. Out of 401 districts, 291 had district central libraries;
3. Out of 5,027 blocks, 1,798 development blocks had block libraries;
4. Out of 575,936 villages, 41,828 had village libraries;
5. Out of 2,643 towns, 1,280 had town libraries.

Of the 29 metropolitan cities with a population of 400,000 and above, only four — Madras, Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Delhi — have city public library systems with central libraries, branches, and deposit stations. Thus, it is estimated that approximately 20 percent of the literate population has access to public library service (Agrawal, 1985). A Working Group on Modernization of Library Services and Informatics in the Seventh Plan was appointed by the Planning Commission in 1983.

#### H) Seventh Five year Plan, 1985–1990

During this plan period, the Planning Commission's objective was to address the needs of 90 million people, ages 15–35, in the Adult Education Program. The network of libraries was to play a role in the development of literature for neoliterates. Library systems were to be strengthened with specific attention given to improvement of facilities at the

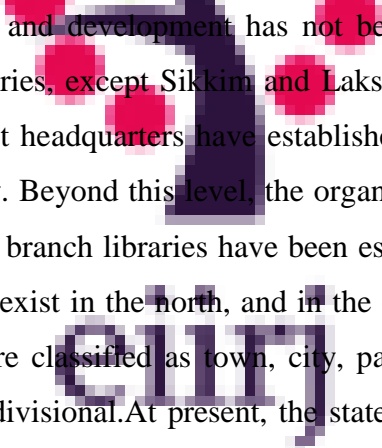
national-level institutions. The general education budget was Rs. 47,753 million (US\$3.860 million); Rs. 4.821 billion (US\$389.8 million) constituted the art and culture component (Seventh Five Year Plan). An important development during this period was the 1986 adoption of the National Literacy Mission, which emphasized the education of women and also the establishment of rural libraries. In 1989, there were 7,180 main libraries and 18,000 service points (branches, mobile stops, etc.) (Mangla, 1993) The collections of the National Library of Calcutta were increased significantly. The Central Secretariat Library started creating a database on the epic "Mahabharata." The Raja Rammohun Roy Foundation set up an "Integrated Research Cell-cum-Computer Unit" for promoting research in librarianship, and also started a database of public libraries in the country. A Committee on National Policy on Library and Information System was appointed in 1985 by the Government of India, Department of Culture. The resulting final report (based on two drafts previously submitted by the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation and the Indian Library Association) was submitted in 1986 (Barua, 1992).

#### **I) Eighth Five Year Plan, 1992-1997**

The money allocated for this period for general education is Rs. 168.133 billion (US\$6.487 billion); for art and culture, Rs. 7.276 billion (US\$280.8 million) has been allocated. Universalization of elementary education, eradication of illiteracy in the 15-35-year age group, and strengthening of vocational education in relation to emerging needs in urban and rural settings are the major thrusts of the plan. These goals are to be achieved by using formal, non-formal, and open channels of learning. The plan states that in those states with an advanced library system, rural libraries should become the focal points for post-literacy and continuing education programs. Book promotion is also emphasized in this plan, to be promoted by the organization of a National Center for Children's Literature, which should produce 3,000 titles annually. Important books are to be translated into the various Indian languages, and books for neoliterates published. Publishers and voluntary agencies will be given assistance, and the school library program, undertaken as part of the "Operation Blackboard" scheme of the National Policy on Education — 1986, will continue. Public libraries of national importance are to be provided funds for improvements/innovations such as the following:

1. The Khuda Baksh Public Library proposed establishment of an Institute of Oriental Studies and open regional units for research on Indo–Islamic and comparative religion;
2. The Rampur Raza Library would acquire sophisticated equipment for preservation of its collections;
3. The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, is to open an art gallery, introduce a desktop publishing system, and construct a new building;
4. The National Library proposed making microfilms available, producing a national union catalogue, and providing book production statistics;
5. The Central Reference Library is to be reorganized into a National Bibliographical and Documentation Center with a computer center; and,
6. The Delhi Public Library is to open two new libraries within its service area.

### Conclusion ;



The pattern of organization and development has not been uniform all over India. Most of the states and union territories, except Sikkim and Lakshadweep, have set up state central libraries. Most of the district headquarters have established district libraries, but the ways in which they are funded vary. Beyond this level, the organization varies even further. For example, in the southern states, branch libraries have been established. In the west there are taluka libraries. Tehsil libraries exist in the north, and in the east there are subdivisional libraries. Other types of libraries are classified as town, city, panchayat, urban, municipal, regional, rural, village, block, and divisional. At present, the states that have enacted library legislation are Tamil Nadu (1948), Andhra Pradesh (1960), Karnataka (1965), Maharashtra (1967), West Bengal (1979), Manipur (1988), Kerala (1989), Assam (1989), and Haryana (1989). Not all of these acts conform to a standard hence legislation should be implemented at the national level to provide even development and funding for all states. The remaining states and territories maintain regional state libraries, district libraries, and their branches either directly through a government department, or through a system of grants–in–aid to private libraries, which are designated as district libraries.

It is clear that since independence, the important relationship between library services and implementation of educational programs has been recognized. In spite of constraints — shortage of funds, non–implementation of policies, low literacy rate, and lack of recognition regarding the value of reading and information — India has made considerable progress in

the establishment of public library service, as shown graphically in The present government's emphasis is on use of modern technology to serve the public. Because of this, the future of libraries is bright. Libraries as institutions which serve the public should benefit and help bring India into the 21st century, while also helping to preserve the country's rich cultural heritage.

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