

**NATIONAL GRID OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM
BASED ON LEGISLATION
CALL BY THE SILVER JUBILEE YEAR**

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[Public Library System is the only possible neutral agency to give unbiased political, economical, and industrial information to enable the voters to form their own judgement in helping the progress of the country and in keeping vigilance over the performance of the Government. The only source for finance to run public libraries is public fund. Therefore the public library finance should be legislative-based. The need for and the method of providing library service to illiterates and neo-literates, forming the majority of voters in India, are described as a new function of the Public Library System of India. An appeal is made for the passing of Library Acts by the Union Government and by the Constituent States without Library Acts, within 1972—the Silver Jubilee Year of India's Independence which is lifting up the people to a high level of patriotic sense.]

1 Public Library System

11 WHAT OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

“What do we mean by Public Library System ?” We mean by this an integrated nation-wide grid of public libraries, giving free book service to one and all of the citizens—literate or illiterate.

12 WHY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

The function of a Public Library System is to provide Free Book Service for one and all in a country. Therefore, the necessity for a Public Library System depends on the necessity for Free Book Service to one and all. Therefore we shall examine the necessity for Free Book Service to all the persons in the country.

2 Free Book Service

21 REASONS FOR PROVIDING FREE BOOK SERVICE

"Why should there be Free Book Service ?" The answer to this question should be sought in the light of the political, economical, and industrial needs of our country. This is in addition to the old purpose of cultural dissemination.

22 POLITICAL REASONS FOR PROVIDING FREE BOOK SERVICE

221 ULTIMATE SOVEREIGNTY IN A DEMOCRACY

India forms one of the largest democracies in the world. In a democracy, the sovereign power is distributed equally among one and all the voters. But the day-to-day affairs of the Government of the country cannot be discharged by each one of the voters. That might have been possible in the City States of Greece centuries ago. It might have been also possible in a village panchayat in our own country, when life was very simple. But today, the affairs of a large country, such as India, are complex. Therefore it is impossible for each voter to take a hand in the administration of the affairs of the State, in virtue of his having a small share of the sovereign power of the country.

222 PARTIAL TRANSFER OF SOVEREIGNTY TO LEGISLATURE

Therefore, what is it that we do : Each citizen transfers most of his sovereign power to a representative of his in the Legislature. The Legislature itself is asked to transfer most of its powers to the Executive—the Cabinet.

223 RESIDUAL SOVEREIGNTY VESTED IN VOTERS

In spite of the sovereignty of each voter generally passing away from him to the Cabinet via the Legislature, political practice leaves with each voter, a small residual sovereignty.

224 EXERCISE OF THE RESIDUAL SOVEREIGNTY BY EACH VOTER

Each voter has to exercise the residual sovereign power left in him in a very effective way, if the democracy is to be safe. How is he to exercise it ? Here are the various ways in which he can exercise it :

- 1 He should watch whether the policy of the Government is on right lines;
- 2 He should also watch whether the promises of the Legislators and the Ministers made at the time of election are being faithfully carried out; and
- 3 If anything goes wrong, he should step in along with other voters, at the right moment, and should endeavour to set right the wrong.

This forms the inalienable right as well as the duty of each citizen.

23 ECONOMIC REASON FOR PROVIDING FREE BOOK SERVICE

Apart from his rights and duties mentioned in Sec 224, each voter has also duty in the economic sphere. Here are some examples :

- 1 Each voter has to help forward the well-being of his nation; for this purpose;
- 2 He should conserve and utilise effectively and avoid wasting any of the resources of the country—human, natural, industrial, and so on;

3 He should see that he himself and everybody else does his little mite to increase the wealth of the nation;

4 And so on.

24 NECESSARY EQUIPMENT FOR A VOTER

The exercise of his rights and the performance of his duties should be based on the knowledge of facts and ideas which the voter carries with him. If he is going to be effective:

1 He should have a correct knowledge of facts;

2 He should have a correct knowledge about the way in which the Governmental affairs are run in other countries; and

3 He should have a fairly good knowledge of the new ideas developing throughout the world in regard to the governmental machinery and its work—in political, economic, and other social spheres.

25 NEUTRAL AGENCY TO PROVIDE INFORMATION

251 PUBLIC LIBRARY

We want an agency to provide for one and all the voters with the necessary information about relevant facts and ideas. Who can do this? Obviously, we cannot leave it to the political parties. We cannot leave it even to the Ministers, because the Ministers themselves belong to one political party or another. Who else can do it? We want actually an agency that would place before the voters the known facts and ideas without underlining any particular one as valid or invalid. In other words, we want a neutral agency to enrich the knowledge of facts and ideas in each voter, in such a way that he can exercise his own judgement, uninfluenced by anybody else. After trial and error for over several decades, the democracies established all over the world, have discovered that the only possible neutral agency for this work is the Public Library.

252 CANON OF RETICENCE

"Will the Public Library be neutral?", somebody might ask. Well, as a librarian I can assure you that it is one of the important Rules of Conduct for the library profession to observe the Canon of Reticence. What do I mean by this Canon? Whatever opinion or judgement a librarian might have formed about any issue, he should never let that be known to any reader. He should never colour, with his own judgement, any document that he places before a reader. He should place before every reader one and all of the documents as they are, and leave it to him to form his own judgement. It is on account of this—the important self-regulation of the library profession—that the Public Library has been accepted as the only possible neutral agency to keep the voters ever continuously self-educated.

3 Why should there be Library Legislation

31 THE FIRST ANSWER: LIBRARY FINANCE

"Why should there be Library Legislation?" The answer to this is as follows: To run a public library means money. If it is to be free, who is going

to pay for the purchase of books, payment of the staff, and various other expenses. It is here that an important problem arises in respect of library legislation.

32 SUBSCRIPTION LIBRARIES RULED OUT

In the past, the scholarly public tried to have their libraries financed by collecting a subscription from each reader at so much for so many books served. This would have meant that many persons could not get library service. But it is not in the interest of the State to leave any section of the people without library service. Therefore, maintenance of public libraries through subscription from readers is ruled out.

33 PRIVATE BENEFACTION RULED OUT

Another source of finance has been private benefaction—charity in plain words. But in a democracy, with the socialistic pattern as its ideal, the tendency is to equalise the wealth of the country among all. An implication of this is that money will not accumulate in the hands of anybody to such an extent that he can establish a benefaction, as it was possible in the past. Therefore, maintenance of public libraries from out of private benefaction or charity is ruled out.

34 PUBLIC FUND : THE ONLY SOURCE

Where then are we to find the finance for Public Library System ? The only source left over is public fund. To take away public fund permanently—even a fraction of it—year after year for a particular service should necessarily have legislative sanction. If we leave it to the Executive, we know the ups and downs that library finance will have to undergo. Anything based on legislation is more stable, that is our experience. Therefore it is, that the public library finance should be legislation-based. That is what is happening in country after country from about the middle of the nineteenth century.

35 PROVISIONS OTHER THAN FINANCIAL IN A LIBRARY ACT

When an institution is maintained with public finance, the Government should :

- 1 Lay down its constitution;
- 2 Determine the degree of its autonomy;
- 3 Decide its functions;
- 4 Provide for the audit of its accounts; and
- 5 Provide a machinery to examine and report on its work from time to time.

4 Library Service to Illiterates and Neo-Literates

41 CAPACITY OF THE ILLITERATES AND NEO-LITERATES

There is a notion that only literates can benefit by Public Library Service. But this is a wrong notion. Our illiterates and neo-literates form about 70 per cent of our population. It is certainly wrong to assume that this large majority of our people cannot have the capacity to benefit by Public Library Ser-

vice. On the contrary, most of our illiterates and neo-literates are second to none in their general intelligence and in their capacity to evaluate them. I have listened in my village, illiterates discussing very important problems with very great acuteness, even greater than that of a few of us who were educated. Our people are extremely acute in their intellect. They have got stout common sense. They can take part in discharging the duties of voters and in watching the Government in its performance, provided we give them the necessary information—ideas and facts—that is wanted. It is my conviction that this is possible.

42 A NEW FUNCTION OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

This brings us to a new function to be taken up by public libraries. This has been neglected all along by our imitating the work of the public libraries of the West. This new function is:

- 1 To read out books for the illiterates and neo-literates at such stated hours each day as are agreed upon; or instead of reading books;
- 2 To give their substance by word of mouth, as this will get enriched and made realistic by the personality of the person who gives the substance;
- 3 To produce wall pictures and charts representing the news and the latest facts and the ideas in the form of tell tale pictures and charts.

Note :—For this purpose, every city library system and district library system should have on its staff a good artist; and he must be given the necessary facilities to produce copies of all such wall pictures and charts for distribution to each of the branch libraries and travelling library stations.

- 4 To arrange for discussion among the illiterates and neo-literates, at agreed hours, on the basis of the information collected by them by the first three methods; and even
- 5 To arrange for a drama by the illiterates and neo-literates, at agreed hours, of the spontaneous ideas stimulated in them by the aforesaid methods of library service.

That this should become a necessary service of our public libraries is only just now being stressed by me for the first time. This has been due to my having shared with every other literate in the country, our total neglect of the fact that the illiterates and neo-literates of our country are as much entitled to have information about the current facts and ideas, as we ourselves seek to have. But, when I realised for the first time the folly of such an attitude, the full implications of India being a Republic with Universal Adult Franchise, the failure of the Indian library profession in respect of illiterates and neo-literates forming the majority of our voters, came to my mind with very great force.

43 A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

This delay in thinking of this essential duty of our public library system today has been in spite of my having tried out all the new methods of service enumerated in Sec 42, as early as 1951 in Delhi. In that year, the Delhi Public

Library began to function and I was responsible for its establishment. Also at the request of the Delhi Municipal Council, I took some part in their Adult Education work. This circumstance led me to make the Delhi Public Library serve the several Adult Education Centres in the city. My visits to these centres gave me the ideas enumerated in Sec 42. They were tried out. They had a tremendous effect. It was a sight to see the illiterates, going home after the day's work stopping in front of Adult Education Centres and studying together in small groups the wall pictures and charts exhibited there. I was struck by the high level of discussion to which they were led by those pictures and charts. In one of the centres, the illiterates themselves wished to dramatise the ideas developed in them, by a study of the pictures and charts. I attended the drama along with my friend Mr E J Carter, Director of the Libraries Division of Unesco, then guesting with me. The illiterate adults had provided their own songs in the Indian way to make the drama lively. As an accompaniment to music, they improvised a drum to keep time by using an inverted metal bucket. Their performance was so expressive that Mr Carter, who did not know the language of those people, was able to follow the theme of the drama. The thought coming uppermost in our minds was, "What a large mass of able and intelligent voters was running to waste" This experience has taken nearly two decades to impress its moral on me about the essential duty to be taken up by our public library system to play its role properly in our Republic with franchise extended to millions of intelligent but illiterate or neo-literate persons.

5 Influence of Public Library Service on Government

51 SUEZ CANAL ANECDOTE

"Granting all these, is there any instance in which the voters have been able to influence the Government, when it was in tight corner?" you may ask. I shall give but one example in this connection. It happened in 1956, when the Suez Canal trouble was on. At that time, I attended the International Library Conference at Munich. One afternoon, we went out on an excursion, and a few British Librarians were sitting by my side, in the bus. Somehow or other, as it was the topic of the day, our conversation turned on the "Suez Canal Problem". I asked them, "Your Prime Minister seems to take a wrong view. Lord Mountbatten is said to have expressed the view that the stand of England in this matter was not proper. But as the Chief of the Defence Force, he rightly felt that his duty was only to obey the Orders of the Government without expressing his own opinion. Is there any way in which your Prime Minister can be made to give up his policy in the matter?" They told me, "Why not you come to England now, and see what is happening?" At their invitation I went there. I visited many libraries. What did I see? In library after library, I found a long queue of readers waiting for the oldest records available on Suez Canal, for the latest information available on it, and for its history through decades. They were all waiting for their turn. When each reader got his turn,

he read most of the documents with great voracity. Of many of the books just then being published, each library had to buy a number of copies in order to meet the demand. To cut the story short, you know what happened, the Prime Minister of England retired on "grounds of health" ! This one example will convince anybody of the possibility of voters in a democracy controlling the Government when it is likely to go seriously wrong.

52 PERFORMANCE BY THE ILLITERATE VOTERS IN INDIA

The candidates for election to Legislatures in India seldom approach the literate voters for their support. For they know that they form such a minority in voter's list and that their votes will have little effect. On the contrary, all their attention is concentrated on the large mass of illiterate and neo-literate voters and their votes are easily secured—purchased, as the saying goes. After the polling day, the candidate goes scot free without any thought to either of his promises to the voters or to what would be beneficial to the country. However, I gather from one of the latest reports that in the election of 1972, while our demagogues tried to turn the illiterate voters from one party to another, the latter exercised their own independent judgement. This is said to have occurred for the first time since our first election was held in 1952. I think that this is a development in a good direction. They will be able to engage their new urge much more effectively, much more on right lines, if and only if we can give them the facilities through Free Book Service.

6 Attempts at Library Legislation in India

61 FAILURE DURING BRITISH PERIOD

In our country, the seed for library legislation was sown as far back as 1930—even during the British period. It was in the form of my Model Library Act discussed and generally approved by the Library Service Section of the First Asian Educational Conference held in Banaras. From that time till 1946, we have been endeavouring to introduce library legislation in two of our Constituent States. But every time, the foreign Government, not interested in our people being enlightened and informed, somehow or other, blocked library legislation by one means or another. Here are some examples:

611 BENGAL EXPERIENCE

Even in 1930—on my way home from Banaras—Kumar Munindra Deb Rai Mahasay of Bansberia Raj, a library enthusiast and President of the Bengal Library Association, made me spend two days with him in Calcutta and adapt the Model Library Act to the local conditions of Bengal. The resulting Library Bill was presented by him to the Legislature of Bengal. But the Governor-General disallowed it because it had compulsory clauses.

612 MADRAS EXPERIENCE I

In the light of this experience, the Madras Library Association re-drafted its Library Bill changing each "Shall" into "May" ! In 1935, this Modified Bill

was introduced into the Madras Legislature by Mr Basheer Ahmed Sayeed, a Vice President of the Association and later a Judge of the High Court of Madras. As a result of persistent State-wide public contact made by the Association, the Bill had an easy passage through the first two stages. Then it was learnt that the Secretary for Local Self Government—a Britisher belonging to the Indian Civil Service—intended to move an amendment to the Bill to the effect that each Local Library Authority should pay an annual contribution to the Government to meet its additional expenses made necessary by the functioning of the Library Act. The Association did not want “to make a new history” in library legislation. Therefore its representative was asked not to move for the Third Reading of the Bill. And the Bill lapsed automatically as a result of the Government of India Act of 1935, leading to a fresh formation of the legislature.

613 MADRAS EXPERIENCE 2

The Madras Library Association had the practice of inviting the Governor each year to inaugurate its activities for the year. At the Inaugural Meeting of each year, the Association used to request the Governor to get a Libraries Act passed. In one year, his reply was that money spent on public libraries would be a waste until ‘universal education’ was established. In another year, his reply was that all the available money had to be spent on elementary education, and not even a Rupee could be found to maintain public libraries for the educated people.

62 FIRST SUCCESS ONLY ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

We could succeed for the first time only on the eve of our Independence. It was in 1946. At that time, Mr Avinashalingam was the Education Minister of Madras. He took from me a draft Public Libraries Bill for the old composite State of Madras. He put it through the Legislature. The Madras Library Association and the Andhra Pradesh Library Association had already done considerable amount of public relation work in this matter for nearly 20 years. This helped the easy passage of the Bill through the Legislature. In February 1948, it got the assent of the First Indian Governor General—our revered Rajaji. This Act made library history in our country.

7 Library Legislation in Other States and at the Centre

71 SOURCE OF DISAPPOINTMENT

I have only to say that in our country, as I have mentioned already (*Sw Sec 61*), we began to think of library legislation as far back as 1930. But we have so far got Public Libraries Act only in four of our Constituent States. These are all in South India. This is due to the Library Associations of the States in South India having done a considerable amount of public relation work until the Government would take up library legislation. All the other States are still without library legislation. Draft Library Bills have been handed over by me to their respective Governments during the last 20 to 25 years. I remember that

some of these Bills had been commended to their Chief Ministers by our present President Dr V V Giri, when he was Governor in a few States. In spite of such a support from high quarters, those Constituent States have not yet put their Library Acts on their respective statute books. This is a great source of disappointment. I am certain that part of the blame should lie with the State Library Associations not having exerted themselves sufficiently in this matter.

72 UNION LIBRARY LEGISLATION

Let us next consider the library function of the Union Government. The Union List given in our Constitution contains the provision for National Library for the country as a whole. A Union Library System is absolutely necessary as something which binds together and supplements the resources of the library systems of each one of the Constituent States. It has also some other specific functions in the context of today. A Union Library Act is necessary to make the Union Government discharge these functions efficiently.

8 The Challenge of the Silver Jubilee Year

81 USE OF THE HIGH EMOTIONAL PITCH ROUSED BY THE SILVER JUBILEE YEAR

This year is the Silver Jubilee Year of our political independence. Silver Jubilee Year is one of the peaks of eminence in time up to which we ascend and from there we look back to what we have done, and we also look forward to what we should do. This is a general view of the Silver Jubilee Year. During this year, the Government and the leaders of the country naturally endeavour to bring our society to a higher level of existence. The leaders in each sphere of life try to do so.

82 DUTY OF THE GOVERNMENTS IN THE COUNTRY

The sphere of public library service should not be forgotten in this year of enthusiasm, to carry the country forward. The governments of most of the Constituent States and the Union Government have in their files—or is it that they have been buried in the archives—draft Library Bills. It is the duty of the officers of each Government entrusted with the care of universal life long public education, to bring up these Bills for active attention. They should draft Public Library Bills and carry them through their respective legislatures before the end of the Silver Jubilee Year.

83 DUTY OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In a full blown democracy such as ours, the general public, who are all voters, should themselves utilise their high emotional pitch brought out by the Silver Jubilee Year, to help the cause of public library service. It is their duty to exercise their constitutional rights, to hold public meetings in every city, town, and village and make the public demand for the establishment of a Public Library Act before the end of the Silver Jubilee Year. This duty of the general public, should be performed for their own benefit.

84 DUTY OF THE STATE LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

A State Library Association can do a good deal in the promotion of library legislation, even when the public and the Government are indifferent to it. The success of the library associations of Andhra Pradesh, Mysore, and Tamil Nadu in this matter has been already mentioned in Sec 71. What has been possible in the Southern States should be equally possible in every other Constituent State. If there is no Act till now in the other Constituent States surely the Library Associations of those States cannot escape their share in the failure. It is too much to say that they have not played their part properly in the promotion of library legislation? It is the duty of the Library Association of each Constituent State to exert itself in the fullest measure, to make the public insist upon a Public Libraries Act and to make the Government put a Public Libraries Act on its statute book before the end of the Silver Jubilee Year.

85 CHANGING THE NAME OF THE OLD IMPERIAL LIBRARY INTO NATIONAL LIBRARY

The Union Government does not appear to have paid any attention to its Constitutional Duty in respect of library provision at the national level. Perhaps, it is under the impression that renaming as National Library the Imperial Library established in 1902 by the endeavour of Lord Curzon, has exhausted its library functions! But its advisers should make the Union Government realise that :

- 1 The National Library had not been conceived or is being conducted to serve as the apex of the national grid of public libraries ;
- 2 It was only meant to be a national symbol of culture ;
- 3 It was meant to be a version of the British Museum Library founded a few centuries ago—long before the public library idea had emerged ;
- 4 It was meant for the use of scholars rather than for all people of the country ; and therefore,
- 5 It has never been developed to what it should be in the context of today.

86 THE DUTY OF THE UNION GOVERNMENT

It is the duty of the Union Government to re-think its library responsibility in the context of the present day ideas, and political and social requirement. This re-thinking would perhaps lead to the maintenance by the Union Government of the following three kinds of libraries:

- 1 National Copyright Library, for legal purposes and as a representative of our cultural heritage;
- 2 National Dormitory Library, housing at least one representative copy—for the use of antiquarian and bibliographical research workers—of all the books and kindred reading materials discarded by the service libraries in the country, because of the ideas embodied in them having been outmoded ; and
- 3 A System of National Service Libraries—one for each subject area—containing live books for contemporary citizens—the number of subject areas being determined from time to time in the light of the changes in demand.

87 DUTY OF THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION IN THE COUNTRY

To my knowledge none of the library associations in the country—State Library Associations or the national Library Associations—appears to have seized this problem. It is the joint duty of all the library associations in the country to study this question and to persuade the public, the Parliament and the Union Government, to establish a Union Library Act to enable the Union Government to discharge its library duties to the Nation, along lines suggested in Sec 86, or any other better lines they may think of.

88 ALL INDIA PUBLIC LIBRARY SEMINAR

In order to highlight the work to be done in India, in regard to its national-grid of public libraries, before the end of the present Silver Jubilee Year, an All India Public Library Seminar was held in Bangalore from 28 to 30 April 1972. The delegates included the representatives of:

- 1 Officers of the different governments having to do with public library service ;
- 2 State Library Associations ; and
- 3 Library profession of Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Based on the work of the Seminar, a document entitled *National grid of public library system : Comparative library legislation (India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, England and USA)* is being printed.
