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### Public Libraries in Karachi: A Study of History, Needs and Issues

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#### Abstract

The man has thrust for knowledge in all over the world. The regular habit of reading makes the people satisfy. The libraries have played an important role in the lives of those who wish to gain and spread knowledge. The British also developed various libraries in Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Quetta, Lahore and Karachi are the cities where libraries were founded before the partition of United India. Karachi is the largest populated city of Pakistan and it has its historical value. There are various universities and colleges in the city and therefore, is dire need of the libraries. The libraries have importance due to different factors including provision of public benefit, services on voluntary basis, expansion of information, and provision of access to books to readers. The public libraries provide perfect atmosphere to the readers that is sometimes not available at home. The authors have tried to explain the brief history, role and issues of public libraries in Karachi.

**Keywords:** Library, books, collection, education, research, Karachi.

## **Introduction**

Knowledge, book and libraries are associated with each other. The facts, information and skills are acquired through education and theoretical or practical understanding of a subject, is knowledge.

In western and Islamic theory, knowledge covers both theoretical and practical aspects of life. Awareness is specially attribute to the human because he has been given ability to analyse situation and power of strong imagination with wisdom rather than other creature. Through wisdom and sanity, human being obtain and acquired knowledge to develop the society. Human kept on getting education and made his life more advanced time to time. He made his life comfortable and created many opportunities of survival through knowledge.

Man started his journey from stone-age and reached at the era of internet and information sciences. The source of his unmatched progress is information. He ever coped up the situation through his sanity and wisdom that enabled him to fight with all inflections and hurdles, comes in his way. The mean, from one could get knowledge is “book”. The book is written and printed work that is consist on pages glued or sewn together along one and bound with in cover. What is define here, is traditional form of books that is different from modern soft books or e-books.

All sorts of books give knowledge and entertainment both to reader. It also encourages a reader getting more theoretical or practical knowledge and helps to sharpen his intellect and skill. Books have many kinds like religious books, story books, poetry books, entertainment books etc. Now it’s up to the reader what book or books he chooses to read. The place where books are found or available in form of collection is library. A Library is a building or room containing collection of books, periodicals and some thing films or recorded music etc. The library have a system of service that is controlled or served by a person is called librarian.

The history of library starts from 2600 B.C. On that time clay tablets cuneiform script were used by human beings, but the reading book library first time came to exist in Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. In Classic period Library of Alexandria is very famous the oldest libraries are found in South West Asian Region of the world the example of oldest library is Elba library in 2500 BC. Example Al-Qarawiyyan library found in 859 by Fatima A-Fahri was most organized working Library. The Assyian King created most beautiful and biggest library in Nanavain 7<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Renaissance era, libraries were the part of culture because it was the age attributed to knowledge and discoveries. The libraries played central role to educate and aware masses during Renaissance period. In Modern age, early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century organised and advanced libraries could be seen in United State and United Kingdom. In 1881, 1891 and 1911 most systematic and modern libraries were established in America and Britain. These libraries motivated masses towards scientific knowledge and research.

In subcontinent, the history of library is very rich and remarkable. One of the historical libraries the State Central Library was set up in the 1829 in Kerala, British India. Initially, it was named as “Trivandrum People’s Library” in the early years.

In 1800, The Fort William College was established by Lord Wellesley. This college developed an atmosphere of reading, writing and learning among the Indians as well as in British. According to Parekh (2014):

“Bagh-o-bahar, originally written as a textbook for officers of the East India Company, was penned in 1801 and published by Fort William College, Calcutta (now Kolkata), in 1804. Today, it is ranked among Urdu’s evergreen books: 210 years have elapsed since it was first published but it is still popular and loved not only by common readers, but is also taught to Urdu literature students as a sample of ‘modern’ Urdu prose. Apart from its numerous editions and different annotated

versions, Bagh-o-bahar has been translated into many languages, including English, Hindi, Gujarati, French and Punjabi. Its parts have been translated into Japanese, also.”

In reaction to writers of Fort William College, the intellectuals from all corners of the India wrote the books like *Fasana-i-ajab* by Rajab Ali Beg Suroor. Moreover, Aligarh Muslim University Library, Calcutta University Library and Madrasah Library organised during 19th and 20th century in subcontinent.

When Pakistan came into existence, the presence of various public libraries especially in Karachi and Lahore was remarkable. In Lahore, Christian College Library was founded in 1866 while Punjab University Public Library was established in 1885. Fort Sandmen Library in Quetta was established in 1884. Dyal Singh Trust Library in Lahore was set up in 1908. In Karachi Liaquat Hall Library (previously known as Frere Hall Library) and Khaliqdina Hall Library were set up in 1851 and 1856 respectively (Khurshid: 1974) In Khairpur (Sindh), the Municipal Public Library was opened in 1962 and was renamed as Divisional Public Library in 1965.

The National Library of Pakistan was founded in Karachi in year 1950 and it functioned like a branch directorate. These libraries were not in good condition and the infrastructure was not up to the mark. Even trained librarians were not available to run the library system during that time and Pakistan had been facing a lot of problems regarding the public library affairs and system for a long time.

Karachi was selected as the capital city of the country. If we look towards the history of this well known and well established city; Karachi was also given three to four public libraries by British Government but this quantity was not enough as per city population. On the other hand, unavailability of the administrative structure for libraries, deficiency of funds, lack of trained staff, shortage of material resources were the important issues faced by the public libraries in Karachi.

### **Need of Study**

Karachi is a metropolitan city where a large percentage of common people belonged to educated class. There are various Public and Private Sector Universities and most of these offer the MS/ M. Phil and Ph. D level education. The scholars have to face numerous issues in the libraries. Due to these above mentioned discourse, researcher motivated towards study upon problem of public libraries in Karachi. The Libraries itself have to face a number of problems due to various reasons. It is significant topic but unfortunately not being discussed as a basic social issue of Karachi while it has massive impact upon entire social environment of Karachi city.

### **Need of Libraries in Karachi**

Karachi is the city having population of 20 million, which is more than several countries of the world. Its literacy rate is 78 percent, consist of urban areas mostly. Administratively Karachi is a division of Sindh Province while it has it 7 separate districts. As education concern, prominent and renowned educational institutions are found regarding all levels as schools, colleges, Universities and polytechnic institutes. (Economic Survey of Pakistan)

Many school systems are functional in Karachi like federal school, Private schools, Cambridge schools, Agha Khan Schools and Colleges etc. These schools have their own libraries but most of schools are failed to full fill students demand regarding books study so they need public library as an alternative of study in their off timings. When we talk about colleges, there many chains like Public or Government colleges, private college, technical college etc. These colleges are functioned and providing their services in Karachi. Legally all colleges must have their own libraries but on ground most of colleges either not have library or having library with lack of resources. College students feel need of public libraries where they could spend their time to study and preparing notes of different subjects.

If we look at the institutions of higher education in Karachi, there are public and private universities including University of Karachi, NED University, DHA Suffa University, The Greenwich University, Sindh Madrassa-tul-Islam University, Dawood University of Engineering and Technology, Federal Urdu University and others. These institutions are providing post graduate level education under their capacity. These all universities have their own libraries. The infrastructure of these libraries is better as compare to schools and colleges but still students feel many hurdles to study in university libraries like issuing books, availability of books, and short of library timings etc. So, students want to consume their remaining time in public libraries as per convenience. On university level, public libraries are very much needed because notes are not available in market, course codes are different in every university, most of student task is assignment based and seminars have to prepare their own notes through reference books.

In Karachi, universities offer MS, M. Phil and Ph. D programme where public libraries are inevitable because it's all work is research based and students have to complete research thesis in given time. If libraries are not available in Karachi, research programs will not be proved fruitful. For the students of Madaris, religious books must be available in general public libraries as well. For general people, public libraries are necessary so that common people utilize their leisure time in constructive manner. It is an ideal condition that after returning home or in vacant days people visit nearby libraries sit peacefully, issuing the books to study and come back home with gaining useful knowledge. Same situation could be favourable for retire and veteran citizens. They could also spend their time sitting in public libraries to study religious, historical or any sort of interesting books rather than stay at home in isolation.

Existence of public or general libraries in Karachi is need of the era, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Here in Karachi, thousands of students are studying on various levels. A big amount of students is busy in research work and

thousands of retire persons want to pass the time in positive activities. A society where crime rate is higher and deviant behaviour is rising, only book reading habit and organized restructure could mould individual behaviour into controlled and positive way. Establishing more libraries and restructurings existing libraries could bring positive behavioural change in Karachi dwellers.

### **Role of Public Libraries in Society**

A public library is a place that is accessible by the general public and generally funded from public resources such as taxes.

Public library is an important part of culture and society. It fulfils general need of public and accessible for every class and unit of society. There are some basic features of public library.

- It is governed by the board.
- Its utilization is allowed for all.
- It runs for public benefit.
- It provides services on voluntary basis.
- It works for expansion of information.

Role of public library is multi functional and its impact upon society is lasting or deep rooted. The role of public library mentioned below,

- The public library provides access of books to all its user and readers.
- Access of information is free for all.
- It saves public expanses because books are purchased by paying price and every book could not be bought within limited financial resources so one can read them in public libraries and could save money.
- Public library provides ideal atmosphere of study books that is often not possible at home.
- Public library gives facility to take book home if needed upon a guarantee but one have to return it in time.

- Availability of e-books has made access of information more easy for readers.
- Public library provides books for children like story books, syllabus and syllabus associated books to read.
- Child centred websites and games also accessible for children that helps their mental nurture and relaxation.
- Adult group also be benefitted by public libraries through study of adult grooming literature.
- In this digital age, hard books now transferred into soft books or e-books. In e-libraries, computers with networking system are available to provide opportunity of approaching information into better way.
- The public libraries also provide training of internet usage regarding searching of books and other associated concerns.
- Academic programs like B.L.I.S and M.L.I.S are also initiated in public libraries to produce library management professionals.
- In most of the countries public library is a training institute of information technology where diploma certificate, bachelor and master degree is being awarded to the trainees.
- Public library is also used as a community centre. Beside library, community hall is build where social gatherings are held as seminars, Exhibitions, indoor programmes, literary activities, entertaining shows, religious based activities and cultural events etc.
- It is also helpful for researchers. In public libraries, researchers could find reference books to gather reliable information for their thesis.

The role of public libraries could defines as it is not only a reading place but a source of socialization and mean of guidance for new generations.



### **Public Libraries in Karachi**

In respect of population, Karachi is the largest city of Pakistan. It has many public private libraries. Some libraries governed by government, some are working under trust while some functioned by private donors. The web of public libraries spread around all districts of Karachi division. Famous public libraries of Karachi are Al-Firdos Baldia Public Library situated at Baldia Town, Al-Huda library, Allama Iqbal library, Allama Shabir Ahmed Usmani Library in Nazimabad, Baba-e-Urdu Kutubkhana, Bedil Library Shareefabad, Board of Intermediate Education Library North Nazimabad, Central library Korangi No.5, Children Library Nazimabad, Community Centre Gulshan Town, Defence Central library D.H.A, Doctor Mehmood Hussain Library University of Karachi, Edhi Library Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Faiz-e-Aam Library Lyari town, Ghalib Library Nazimabad, Khaliqdina Hall library Saddar Town, Hashim Library Ranchore Line, Hasrat Mohani Library Liaqatabad, Hangorabad Library Lyari, Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) Library Sadar Town, Kutubkhana-e-Khas Tarqi-e-Urdu, Sadar Town, Liaquat Hall Library Sadar Town, Liaquat Memorial Library Stadium Road, Lyari Municipal Library Lyari, Lyari Textbook Library Lyari, Main Library Hamdard University, Mansora Library Federal B. Area, Hasrat Mohani Library Lyari, National Book Foundation Library, Nawa Lane Library Ranchor Line, Satellite Library Sango Lane, Sheikh Mufeed Library Federal B Area, Shaheed-e-Pakistan Library Lyari, Mehmood Shah library Lee Market, Umar Lan Library Lyari, Faran Club Library, Arif Hussain Library and Research Centre, Rangonwala Hall library, and British Council Library etc.

Few of these are famous and meet credible libraries standard. These libraries are Defence Central Library, Doctor Mehmood Hussain Central Library, British Council Library, Hasrat Mohani Library, and Liaquat Hall library. These libraries are well designed, well decorated, equipped with literature and advanced literary contents and bears improved library system.

The public libraries of Karachi follow standardized structural library system. There are 8 common sections mostly found in public libraries such as circular section, Periodical section, Reference section, Thesis section, filipiniana Section, Children Section and internet section. A head librarian is an in charge of public library that control entire library system. He supervises his junior or sub librarians and sub librarians monitor working of their junior library staff who works upon grass route levels as a worker and manage library system.

Some advanced digital libraries are also working in Karachi as British Library and University of Karachi Central Library where digital based library networking system is controlled by the skilled and experienced staff. The University of Karachi also has established Digital Library with the assistance of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. More digital libraries now are being established in Karachi City.

### **Problems of Public Libraries in Karachi**

When ever you go through Karachi; you could easily watch buildings, flat projects, shopping centres, Parks but hardly be able to see enormous furnished libraries that is misfortunate with the mega city. Traditional and newly built public libraries of Karachi are the pride of the city. Federal provincial and metropolitan administrations used to establish libraries in different tenuresbut it shows dark and pathetic picture, demands to be maintained. Not only limited resourced libraries but renowned libraries as well are facing many problems in Karachi city which is most literate place of Pakistan.

Al-Firdos Library was established in 1980s at Chandni Chowk. It was a well organised library then, has been shrieked now; the whole library space now uses for other purposes as NADRA office and Union Council's office has been built within premises and the library could be seen in the corner of this building. It was a busy library till 90s where all news papers, magazines, books and journals were available; now, the shelves are empty and books are torned. Baldia town is densely

populated area of the city but deprived of a well established public library and students have to go else where for study like Hali library. Hali library is comparatively better in condition but it has limited books. The above mentioned library is situated in Orangi Town block L. at Karachi. Jigar Murad Abadi Library inaugurated in 1988 by Mayor Farooq Sattar, presented same picture and share same issues as discussed above, like lack of resources, shortage of books, limited space and un maintain construction.

When one visits in district west, he could find Lyari Textbook Library which is also suffering major issues. It needs repairing work badly even its building also uses for Union Council's (UC) office. The Ranchor Line Library totally discarded and building is used for other purposes. Hasrat Mohani Library built in District Central in 1985 now is being used as UC office and no space left for library.

In district Malir, Khushal Khan Khattak library built by Nimat Ullah Khan, not existing as library now. Drugs users are using library building while books and other library material have been stolen there. A plot near University of Karachi was allotted for public library in early 90s to Karachi Municipal Corporation but it was not utilized for its real purpose. The reason of plot allocation for library was very simple. University road is centre of educational institutions where NED University, University of Karachi, Sir Sayed University, and other institutions have been established.

There are various reasons of such a pity situation of public libraries in Karachi. Most of libraries are working under local bodies while UCs (local bodies) are not been given enough funds to run library affairs. Another reasons is, peoples could find books on internet and other sources so they need not to visit libraries persistently. Some time mismanagement in library system occurs due to untrained staff working in libraries. Lack of funding allocation in libraries also made the situation worst. Proposals and requests regarding betterment and maintenance of

libraries are send by library authorities to the concern government departments many times but frustrated response comes from their often. The libraries are constructed in schools and colleges, not been keenly used by readers that is why libraries are being discourage.

Lack of Formal training institutions of library Science is a big issue in Karachi city that is why professional library managers not producing in the city so library management problems also existing on the city. Three decays ago, reading culture was alive so as libraries were functioned. Now study habit declines and libraries are suffering badly in the city. Law and order situation of city also effects library functioning. Economic uncertainty cause declining habits of study among Karachi dwellers. Peoples here priors' job security upon study habits. Most of job settlers come towards library with relax mind as compare to job seekers who thinks about his job first and put off other activities behind for a while.

It is also a fact that construction and maintenance of libraries are not in priority list of federal provincial governments cause worst situation of public libraries in Karachi.

### **Conclusion**

Man, knowledge and books go hand to hand. God created man as a superior creature. He is superior due to his knowledge and wisdom that is obtained by book reading. The collection of books is found in libraries where humans could study and increase his power of imagination and skills through study.

Public libraries are the place where a common man could sit in and study books. The concept of public library is very old. When we go through the pages of history we could find well organised libraries. Alexandria libraries, Egypt libraries and sub-continent libraries show how the primitive man was keen about knowledge and wisdom because he knew that knowledge is only source of progress.

After creation of Pakistan we got many libraries around the country. Karachi also bestowed few libraries like Khaliqdina Hall Library. The libraries were not been able to fulfil population demand of the city and showing pathetic picture too.

After seventh decade till date, we could find many libraries in Karachi. Though the city has been making progress quantitatively and qualitatively better but facing many issues like lack of resources, lack of infrastructure, lack of funding, lack of interest using libraries by masses, lack of interest by government towards establishing new libraries, worst law and order situation in the city and political rift etc.

It is inevitable to resolve library issues in Karachi because this is most literate city of the country where thousands of student are studying and a big amount of professionals and skilled workers providing their services to the city and all above mentioned community needs library to enhance knowledge and professional skills. This is the high time to focus upon issues of public libraries in Karachi if we wish to make the city developed.

### **Resolving Measures Regarding Problems of Public Libraries in Karachi**

Intensive problems regarding public libraries in Karachi could be solved by taking below mentioned measures,

- Numbers of libraries should be increased and spread around the city.
- Libraries should be used as libraries and its associated activities. Commercial usage of library buildings should be banned or at least minimised in the city.
- Numbers of books should be increased when reader faces uncertainty factor regarding issuing books or having books, he seldom visit to library.
- Library should be well maintained because it lures a readers to read books in library. Dirty and out dated building discourage readers to step in library.

- Law enforcement agencies and para military forces like police must ensure that no anti social or criminal activities will be practiced within the premises or around the library buildings.
- Libraries should not only be built quantitatively but qualitatively as well. To construct libraries suitable and appropriate spot should be selected where people could easily access to study. Most of public libraries should be constructed near by educational institutions.
- Government should allocate enough fund for the maintenance of libraries. Not only municipal and provincial government but federal government too, should take interest in library affairs of Karachi city.
- Political rift is a big cause of lack of funding concerning Karachi public libraries issue. On educational matter, Political conflicts should be settled through dialogue and negotiations. Public library matter is also linked with educational matter when educational conflicts will be resolved public library issue in Karachi will be solved automatically.
- This is era of internet, furnished and well managed public e-libraries should be established in Karachi city.
- Trained staff should be provided to all public libraries to maintain library affairs in better manner. The staff salary from top to bottom must be revised that could satisfy staff working in library.
- Library proposals regarding its maintenance must be taken up as prompt as possible by higher authorities.
- Formals and academic educational institutes must open around the city that produce trained library staff. On the other side, also open new libraries to consume newly trained staff associated with the field of library and information science.
- Book reading culture among new generation is dying that directly influences upon declining amount of libraries in the city. In this way mass media

communication, teachers, house elders could play their role to motivate this generation towards study in library.

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