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LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN KARNATAKA

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LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN KARNATAKA

3.1 Introduction

Library movement is a saga of organized growth and development of libraries, giving the details of establishment, maintenance and functioning of libraries in a geographical proximity. These aspects, viz., establishment, maintenance and functioning make a library a growing organization. No country in the world can progress without providing free public library services to its citizens. It is imperative on the part of a democratic country like India to establish the service institutions like public libraries in order to strengthen the democratic norms and to promote the social, cultural, historical and scientific and technical tempo in the public at large.

Libraries flourished and were nurtured along with the empires that were built and buried in the early past. The dynasties of Kadambas, the Rashtrakutas, the Chalukyas, the Hoysalas, the Bahumanis, the Adil Shahis and others in Karnataka, have given wholesome patronage to talented and gifted men, and promoted and glorified the existence of libraries of valuable collection. Library movement in Karnataka may be studied by categorizing it broadly into three groups.

- Libraries in Ancient Karnataka.
- Libraries in Medieval Period and
- Libraries in the Modern Period.

Karnataka has had a picturesque, colourful and glorious past. Its language, literature, art, culture, history, etc., go back to pre-historic days. Libraries in Karnataka have been the part and parcel of our cultural heritage. As we have inherited a great culture from the past, so we have inherited a great treasure of learning in the form of libraries. An
appraisal about the state of affairs of libraries through the ages will help us to understand
the role and significance of the libraries of the present day.

3.2 Libraries in Ancient Karnataka

In ancient Karnataka, monasteries as well as temples were the established places
where the libraries were maintained. Temples served as centres of learning in ancient
Karnataka. The Someswara temple was one such temple where its library stored good
manuscripts. The library served the large community of students and teachers engaged in
academic activities. Librarians were there to look after Libraries; librarians were
regarded as Saraswati Bhandarikas, from the point of view of maintenance of a library
and the status of a librarian. It is stated that “Nagai inscription of King Trailokya-malla of
Western Chalukyas is very significant”. The inscription tells us that a residential
educational institution, with provision for boarding and lodging of both teachers and
students was there at Nagai by Madhava or Madusudana, Minister of Chalukya
Trailokya-malla. The place Nagavi or Nagavvi (Gulbarga District, Chittapur Taluk) was
known for its ‘ghatikasthana’ in the 11th century A.D. The ‘ghatikasthana’ were
something like our present-day post-graduate institutions. Along with professors,
librarians were also appointed. The librarians enjoyed equal status to that of a professor.
He himself must have been a learned man in fields more than one (Gunjal, 1966).

At Aihole (District Bagalkot), which was formerly known as Aryapura, another
University, is supposed to have thrived in the past (5th century A.D). More than 500
pandits enjoyed the hospitality of Aihole at that time.

Epigraphic evidences highlight that many centres of higher learning with full-
fledged libraries attached to them existed in Karnataka in the past. The places of their
location were Talagund, Pavittage, Nagavi-Balligave, and Kubatur.
During the 10th century, Pavittage (now called Salotagi, Taluk Indi, District Bijapur), was being administered by Chandrayudhabudha, a Deputy Minister to Gajankusa Narayan, the then Chief Minister for war of the Rastrakuta King Mummadi Krishna Raja who ruled over the whole of South India from Manyakhketa. This Chandrayudhabudha established a university at Pavittage. In 945 A.D. he donated about 125 mattary of land belonging to the Pavittage town to the University for the Maintenance of the students studying at the university. He also gave away 27 buildings for housing the university and for providing hostel accommodation to the students.

The monasteries like Kodiyamatha in Balligave of Shikaripur Taluk (Shimoga District) were a great centre of learning in the 12th century. The monastery was headed continuously by a host of enlightened saints belonging to the Kalamukha Shaiva sect. The place attracted students and scholars from all parts of India. The monasteries must have housed well equipped librararies. Even now, the Veershaiva, Jaina and Brahmanical monasteries at Chitradurga, Mudbidre, Shringeri and other places have maintained excellent collections of manuscripts.

3.2.1 Kannada Rulers

Kannada people have been paying more attention to the cultural development also. They have been attempting to develop their personality to a large extent in every aspect. To extend the horizons of their learning they have been building their libraries with care and reverence. To a student of cultural history of Karnataka, one fact appears to be crystal clear; and that is, kannadigas have developed their own individuality in every branch of culture, such as art, architecture, literature, etc. Karnataka was a centre of learning too. The “Agraharas”, the “Mathas”, the “Ghatika-Sthanas”, etc., stand as evidences.
3.2.2 The Agraharas

The Agraharas were the centres of learning. Usually great scholars resided in these Agraharas. These scholars were known as “Maha-Jana”.

In one of the inscriptions, it has been stated that 200 Mahajans resided at “Kurat Kantra” (Kurtakoti in Dharwar District). That inscription praises the scholarship and genius of those Mahajans (Bombay Karnataka Inscription, AD 1087).

Mahajans of Kuppattur Agrahara had specialised in different fields in literacy circles too (Epigraphy Karnataka, Vol. VIII). The Agraharas of Sthana Kunder (Talagund) was founded by the rulers and was known for its wise Mahajans, Keshava-Danda Nayak- the Ruler had donated a large area near Talagund, to enable these scholars to pursue the Philosophic discourses. Another centre of learning was as University at Balligavi in Shimoga District. During the tenth century A.D. a good Sanskrit College, imparting all the known Shastras, flourished in a village called Kalosa in Dharwar District (Epigraphia Indica XIII). A special study of Sanskrit Grammar was undertaken at Managoli Agrahara, in Belgaum District. Another college to flourish at that time was Salotagi Agrahara in Bijapur District. There were in all 27 hostels and the principal of that college was endowed with a charity of 250 acres of land (Indian Antiquary Vol. X).

At different periods of history, great Agraharas flourished at Bijapur (A.D. 965 to A.D.1075); Belur (A.D. 1077); Sortur (Epigraphia Indica, Vol. IV) (A.D. 975); Habbal (Indian Antiquary, Vol. VIII) (A.D. 1084); Dambal (Epigraphia Karnatica, Vol. VIII) (A.D.1100); Perur Naragund; Sayyadi; Arsikeri; Naralagi; Sarunjnapur Baguvadi, etc.
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3.2.3 The Ghatika - Sthanas

The Ghatika-Sthanas were also great centres of learning where renowned scholars assembled to exchange their ideas and discuss the questions pertaining to philosophy and literature. The intercourse of ideas often produced great works and provided a forum for discussion.

3.2.4 Inscriptions of Nagavi

There are strong evidences for the claim that almost all the above cited temples of learning maintained libraries. The inscriptions now found at Nagavi (Gulbarga District) substantiate our claims. The Chalukya king Trailokya Malladeva gifted the Nagavi Agrahara to his minister Madhava (Madhusudana). He also endowed certain lands for the maintenance. Minister Madhava constructed three temples and also established three schools. Hundreds of scholars studied Vedas, while fifty two scholars studied Shastras. Three professors taught Vedas, while three other Professors taught Bhatta Darshana, Nyaya and Prabhakar Shastra. There were six librarians. Each Librarian was given 120 acres of land (30 Matta). This inscription dates back to 1058 A.D.

The close relationship that existed between Temples and Mathas on the one hand, and the literature, on the other helped the cultural development of Karnataka. These Mathas became the temples of learning and their Mathadhipatis, the rectors. It goes without saying virtually that these Mathas too were libraries. The Mathas encouraged not only the development of religious and spiritual activities, but also the scholastic and library activities. Under the aegis of those Mathas, good libraries too flourished. Even today one can see the large collections of manuscripts and palm leaves at Jaina Mathas of Swadi (Karwar District) and Moodbidre (South Kanara); at the Veerashaiva Mathas of Yakkundi (Belgaum District); Shivayogamandira (Bijapur District) and Gurubasava
Matha (Gulbarga District); and at the Vaishnava Matha of Uttaradi Peetha at Udagatti (Dharwar District).

Another inscription that has come to light states that during the regime of king Bukka II of Vijayanagara, Narasimha Bharati Wodeyar of the Shringeri created an endowment for the reconstruction of “Pustak Bhandar” at the village Perdur in Udupi Taluka. The inscription is dated A.D. 1406.

In those days, when printing press was unheard of and copying was only next to impossibility, such acquisition of scholarship is remarkable. Kings usually gave grants and other noblemen and Knights endowed charities for the acquisition of literary works and their maintenance in the libraries. The inscription of Nagavi upholds the contention that almost every educational institute possessed a library invariably.

During the 12th century, when, Karnataka faced a great social revolution, the great social reformer of all times, Basavanna enkindled the spirit of universal fraternity, equality and justice. He and his followers influenced the course of social activities. It was one such follower of Basava, Vachana Bhandari Shantarasa who was a librarian of the First Free Public Library of the world. He (Shantarasa) has been referred to as “Vachana Bhandari”. Vachanas are sayings or musings of the Sharanas or Shiva devotees which contain their philosophic preachings. A few Vachanas of Vachan Bhandari Shantarasa himself have been traced recently. Intellectual revelation dawned upon him only when he saw blank palm leaves at his large library in Kalyana, the capital of Chalukya Kings. Regarding historical evidences about the first Public library of the world, at Kalyan, the late Rev. Channappa Uttangi has elaborately discussed in his treatise “History of Anubhava Mantapa” (Uttangi, 1975).
3.3 Libraries in the Medieval Period

In the medieval and the renaissance period, many religious institutions prospered with royal patronage. They also imparted religious education to the masses. Each such institution had a library of its own. Numerous collections of manuscripts of palm leaves and copper plates have been discovered in Mathas, and they testify to the fact that the library was a well recognized institution. This clearly indicates that many of the present-day Mathas have large collections of manuscripts and other records of immense value. The Jain Matha at Swadi, near Sirsi (North Kanara District), the oldest of such mathas, has in its stock more than 200 manuscripts. Mudbidre (in South Kanara district), the Viraktimath at Lakkundi, Shivayogamandir near Badami, both of which are Veerashaiva Mathas, have a collection of more than 600 and 300 manuscripts respectively (Kumbhar and Gunjal, 1987).

It is a matter of great shock and misfortune that the libraries which flourished, with patronage of emperors, were destroyed by the frequent wars and buried in the hoary past. Even then the Royal families of Karnataka will always be remembered for their glorious patronage to talented and gifted men, and at the same time, for the building up of many excellent and valuable libraries.

Soon after the decline of Hindu rule in Bujapur, Sultan Adilshah founded the "Adilshah Library". The library was rich with rare and valuable treatises in persian and Arabic. "Asar Mahal" of the present day was formerly known by the name "Dad Mahal". It was a Court of Justice.

In one of the recent works on Tippu-Sultan, Shri Mohammed Shaukat Ali evidences in the background. In his book "Maisure Huli Tippu-Sultan" he has applauded
the scholarship and love of books of Tippu Sultan. Under the heading “Scholarship” shri Shaukat Ali states that the Sultan was a great scholar.

The fondness of Tippu for learning can be gauged from the fact that he founded a University known as “Jani-ul-Umar” at Srirangapatnam. In that University pupils received not only religious teachings, but also teaching concerning other arts and science. The library of that University was very well-organized and it contained enormous treasure of wealth in the form of valuable books. Even after the fall of Srirangapatnam, one could see the following manuscripts in that library: 44 books of Holy Quran; 41 Commentaries on Quran; 35 books on Ahadis; 46 books on Almighty God; 56 books on Metaphysical treatises; 24 books on Etiquettes and Good Manners; 95 volumes on Philosophy; 20 volumes on Astrology; 7 volumes of Linguistics researches; 29 volumes of Dictionaries; 19 volumes of Anthropologies of poverty; 23 volumes of Turkish publications; 18 volumes of stories.

In 1808 Major Stewart published in Cambridge a list of books in Persian, Arabic and Urdu languages found in Sultan’s library. A mention of this book-list and also the list of books kept at the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, can be seen in numerous histories. All Urdu books are still kept in the India Office Library, London.

In A.D. 1472 Mohammad Gawan built a small University ‘Madarsa’, which stands even today in Bidar as a symbol of the wisdom and scholarship of Mohammad Gawan, whom many historians have praised. That school of higher studies had eminent scientists and philosophers on its staff. The library contained as many as 3000 volumes of palm-leaves. The library was situated in the south-eastern wing of the building, the description of which is beautifully given by Mr. G. Yazdini in his book entitled: “Bidar: Its history and monuments” (Yazdani, 1947).
3.4 Libraries in the Modern Period

With the fall of Vijayanagara Empire, however, darkness enveloped the land. Karnataka was split into five parts. Mysore and Coorg were carved into two separate states and the remaining portions of Karnataka were distributed among Bombay, Madras and Hyderabad states.

In Bombay-Karnataka area, libraries were established with the starting of schools and colleges. Native libraries were established at Belgaum and Dharwad in 1848 and 1854 respectively by the British Officers to curb the anti British movement in Karnataka. Though these libraries did not gain popularity, they appear to be pioneers of the public library movement in Karnataka. In addition to these two libraries, many reading rooms were opened in Hubli, Ranebennur and Shirahatti in Dharwad district. At the same time, seven library-reading rooms in Belgaum district and a similar number of libraries in Bijapur district were opened.

3.4.1 The Karnataka Vidya Vardhak Sangh

This noted and premier cultural institution in Karnataka was established in 1890s. Among other laudable objectives, the Sangha aimed at enhancing and giving an effective impetus to the library movement in Karnataka. The official organ of the Sangha entitled ‘Vagbhushan’ started publication in 1896, and played a vital role in the library movement in Bombay-Karnataka. The year 1914 saw the coming into being of the Karnataka Historical Research society in Dharwad. The society which had as its main objective the unraveling of the glorious past of Karnataka soon began to build up a suitable library for the purpose. The other events, like the All India Library conference, held at Belgaum (1924), the first All Bombay-Karnataka Library Conference held at
Dharwad (1929), and founding of Karnataka Library Association helped considerably in giving library movement a momentum.

3.4.1.1 The Library Development Committee (1939)

The Library Development Committee was set up in 1939 under the Chairmanship of shri A.A. Fayzee. The main purpose of this committee was to explore the possibilities of the establishment of State Central Library in Bombay and the regional Copyright Libraries in Ahmedabad, Poona and Dharwad. It was also concerned with the establishment of a network of smaller libraries throughout the state. The committee submitted its report to the government in 1940. The report envisaged a scheme of library development in the province in six stages. The details are as mentioned below:

Stage 1: Setting up of the central and regional libraries.
Stage 2: 15 District libraries in the Bombay Presidency.
Stage 4: 979 Libraries for village of population 2000 and more.
Stage 6: 17753 Libraries for village below 1000 population.

But unfortunately before taking into consideration the recommendations in the report, the Congress Government all over the country had to resign as per the directions of the High Command. The very next year, i.e., 1942 saw the launching of the “Quit India” movement and leaders all over the country were arrested and kept behind bars. This led to the dilution of the spirit of library movement. For a moment, there came a break in the growth of libraries.
3.4.1.2 Dawn of Karnataka Library Association

The establishment of the Regional Library of Dharwad gave the much needed impetus to Karnataka Library Association. The association secured recognition from the State Government (Bombay) in 1950. Its constitution was finalized, and it also started receiving grants from the Government. The association undertook publication and the result was many Kannada Books were brought out. It also conducted Library Training Classes.

Independence brought forth the Regional Libraries and Central Libraries. The Karnataka Regional and Copyright Library was declared open to the public in 1948. The birth of Karnataka University Library (1950) and Department of Library Science (1962) has added a new dimension to the history of the library movement in this part of the Karnataka.

3.4.2 Hyderabad-Karnataka

Hyderabad-Karnataka was not so well off as the rest in respect of libraries. Besides, libraries were attached to a very few schools. There were 7 libraries in Bidar district. Four subscription libraries were established in Gulbarga district with seven public libraries.

3.4.3 Madras-Karnataka

Mangalore now called Dakshina Kannada, and Bellary districts were coming under this province. Bellary was educationally very backward, whereas Mangalore was very progressive. There were 169 Public and Panchayat Libraries in Mangalore district Basel Mission, which was started in 1838, and Basel Evangelical Mission High School have good libraries attached to them. The public library system for this district was
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provided by the Madras Public Libraries Act. It consisted of a District Central Library, 5 Branch Libraries and 28 Book Delivery Stations scattered throughout the district. South Kanara District Library Association formed under the guidance and inspiration of Dr. S.R.Ranganathan acted as liaison body between the public and the Government (Deshapande, 1963).

3.4.4 Coorg

The tiny state of Coorg had some good libraries, viz., The Mercara Club library which was established during 1940s. The Ganapati Public library was established in 1926 at Virajpet. Mahatma Gandhi Public Library was established in 1954 at Mercara.

3.4.5 Mysore State

His Benevolence, Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III of Mysore, started English medium schools in 1833 his own. Later, the Wesleyan Mission established schools in some of the district headquarters. The Department of Education in Mysore Province came into being in 1858. In the same year, the Government established a high school in Bangalore which was later converted into the present Central College. In 1868, the Government took much interest and established a good number of schools in some selected Hobli’s. The Maharani Girls School established in 1930 later developed into a college. The Kannada and Sanskrit Colleges, the Oriental Library at Mysore, the Industrial Schools at Mysore and Hassan, all these were endowed with good libraries.

The most illustrious son and the popular Dewan of Mysore, Late Sir M.Visveswarayya was mainly instrumental in the development of the libraries in the province. The Dewan sponsored a scheme which allowed the sanction of grants to Local Library Committees and a state managed circulating library to feed the local libraries.
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Libraries were soon started in 1914-15 by the Government. They were transformed into aided institutions in 1920. Two important libraries were established, one each at Bangalore and Mysore. Later, the Bangalore Public Library was established.

In 1956, all Kannada speaking areas which were scattered under five different administrations were unified. Since 1956, the new state of Mysore took keen interest in this regard. The government introduced free and compulsory primary education to remove illiteracy and it also aimed at establishing free Public Libraries throughout the state.

Prior to the re-organization of the state, the Madras Public Libraries Act (1948) was in operation in Bellary and Mangalore districts. So also the Andhra Pradesh Public Library Act (1960) was in operation in the districts of Gulbarga, Raichur and Bidar. This factor gave an additional impetus to the then Government of Mysore to enact the public libraries Bill expeditiously. Mysore government was fortunate enough to get the wise counsel of the late Dr. S.R Ranganathan in drafting the Bill. The same was introduced in the State Assembly in 1964. After getting the assent of the President, the Mysore Public Libraries Act in 1965 saw the light of the day. Kudos to Dr. S.R. Ranganathan who spearheaded the whole scene and was able to convince the political leaders, intellectuals and educationalists of the time to plead for the Public Libraries Act. But for him the Act would not have been brought into force.

3.5 Public Library Movement in Karnataka after the enactment of the Act 1965

The Department of Public Libraries came into existence on 1st November 1966 consequent upon the implementation of Mysore Public Libraries Act, 1965. The Act provided for the establishment of the following libraries: (1) A State Central Library at
Bangalore; (2) Five City Central Libraries; and (3) A District Central Library for each of the 19 Revenue Districts in the State.

Thus, the public library movement in Karnataka started with a big bang and a great motto to serve the public in promoting the lifelong education, and increasing awareness of culture, heritage, etc., of the land in particular and of the world in general.

3.5.1 Gram Panchayat Libraries

The Government of Karnataka introduced the Panchayat Raj system in the state in the year 1987-88. Accordingly each Gram Panchayat comprised of 5 to 6 villages. Under which a scheme for the establishment of library for every Gram panchayat was launched with a view to establish Gram Panchayat Libraries in the entire state.

At present there are 5766 Gram Panchayats in the state which are attached with libraries to cater the information needs of the rural folk.

The UNESCO has aptly said: *A public Library is vital force that imparts popular education to one and all by rendering service to all classes of the society without discriminating between castes, religion, sex, age or economic inequalities* [UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994].

3.5.2 State Central Library

The state central library is situated in the historical building Sir Seshadri Iyer Memorial Hall at Cubbon Park, Bangalore. The present building is one of the oldest monumental buildings having 300 Sq. meters of accommodation. This building was built in the memory of Dewan Sir Seshadri Iyer. Sir Seshadri Iyer Memorial hall is in many respects Lord Nathaniel Curzon of Kedleston's contribution. Whose viceroyalty at the
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heady high noon of British imperialism in the Indian sub continent straddled the 19th and 20th centuries, is known for deciding on the construction of the famous Victoria Memorial in Calcutta and Sir Seshadri Iyer Memorial Hall in Bangalore.

Sir Seshadri Iyer was the Dewan of Mysore from February 1883 to March 1901, the longest tenure for any Dewan of the princely state. He died at the age of 56 in September 1901. It was in November 1902 that the Curzon wrote to the then British Resident in the Mysore State, Sir Donald Robertson about Sir Seshadri Iyer and his services, as a posthumous compliment to him, a memorial hall to be designed in the amidst of the greenery and flowering trees of the Cubbon park. The hall and the bronze statue of Dewan Sir Kumarapuram Seshadri Iyer were the result of munificent contributions. One of the contributors was Curzon himself who donated Rs. 500 in 1902. Besides Curzon, the rich and the common people of Mysore State, princes and prominent citizens of other states donated for the construction of the memorial hall.

W.R. Colton sculptured the bronze statue in England in 1907. Apart from Curzon, it was Sir Donald Robertson, a long time British Resident in Mysore State who was instrumental in the construction of the Memorial hall. Robertson laid the foundation stone of the Memorial on October 1, 1903. A memorial committee consisting of prominent citizens decided that it should be a public hall and a library. On November 20, 1913 Viceroy Lord Hardinge opened the hall. In the year 1914, the then Divan Sir M. Visveswaraiah ordered to start Public library in the said memorial building. The public library was managed by a Managing Committee, which was registered under Mysore Registration Act. The first president of the committee was Sri Krishanarao who was Inspector General of Education. In the year 1966, this Library was taken over by the Government of Mysore as a State Central Library under the provision of the Mysore
Public Library Act and started its services to the public from 1.11.1966 i.e. on Rajyothasva Day. State Central Reference Library being at the Apex of the Karnataka Public Library System, which is governed by State Library Authority, of which the Minister Incharge of Libraries will be Chairman. State Central Reference Library also acts as a Copyright centre in the state:

3.5.2.1 Copyright Section

According to Press and Book Registration rules of 1956, Copyright Section of State Central Library will procure three copies of books (books on any subject or any language) published in Karnataka. It is the duty of publisher/author to bestow three copies of a title to the copyright section for registration. State Central Reference Library will forward a copy of such title to Parliament Library, Delhi and National Library, Calcutta respectively. A catalogue, containing detailed bibliographical information of copyright section books, will be prepared and circulated to different libraries in the state. Public may also refer these books in the State Central Reference Library.

3.5.2.2 Different Sections of State Central Library

State bureau of copyright collection,
State library for the blind,
State library for technical services,
State library for bibliographical bureau,
State library for career information,
State library for inter library loan,
State library for reference and information,
State library for children,
Computer services
3.6 Application of Modern Technology

The new information revolution has been absolutely emphasizing the professionals to redefine the concept and role of library and librarians. Information storage and retrieval devices of recent times have promised enormously the task of storing, ordering and dissemination of vast amount of information when libraries are facing the financial crunch, accessing the information through networks saves time, money and space. The time is ripe to convert the public libraries as community information resources centres rather than a mere collection of books. This can be done by introducing rapid computerization of libraries. Networking has to be established amongst all types of libraries at all levels.

However, it is worth mentioning that the public library system of Karnataka is seriously planning the library automation programme. In this direction state central library and the 5 city central libraries located in Bangalore have undertaken the task of computerization. Efforts are also made to get the NICNET connection to provide the database access. Attempts are also sincerely made to establish the GISTNIC booth at different selected libraries in Bangalore and some district head quarters. The efforts are on for the computerization and networking of all City Central Libraries and District Central Libraries.

3.7 Summing Up

All is not well with the Karnataka Public Library System. With the existing provisions in the Act, the development would have been much more marred and the growth of the system as a whole, arrested.
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The Government has shown a kind of step-motherly attitude to the public libraries. There were frequent changes in the post of Director. Many times non-professionals were given the charge, and hence the development was curtailed. There is no noticeable growth of manpower. As a political gimmick, the mandals and other branches are expanding, but no attempt is made to recruit the staff. Lack of incentives, like promotions, new posts, pay structures, etc. has brought down the image of the profession.

On the whole, the rejuvenation of Karnataka public library system is much urgent. Nearly forty four years have passed and the Silver Jubilee Celebrations were held with full promise and assurance. But time is the only judge to decide the healthy and unhealthy conditions of the system. Under the circumstances, the restructuring of public library system in Karnataka is very much needed.
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References


