

# AN ESSENTIAL LOOK AT PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY AND THEIR POSITION IN SELLING SOCIAL HARMONY

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**Abstract:** The public library is commonly referred to as a supplementary educational institution and a vital component of the cultural fabric of any community. The research delves into providing insights on the various resources, services, library personnel, multiculturalism, and outreach initiatives offered by the central libraries in Karnataka state. Ultimately, the study presents significant discoveries and recommendations pertaining to the research domain.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Public libraries, Library services, Harmony, Society and Library

## 1.0 Introduction:

The public library is commonly referred to as both a supplementary educational institution and an integral component of the cultural fabric of any society. It serves as a social institution where individuals from all walks of life, regardless of their race, religion, or economic status, can freely access the accumulated knowledge of humanity. Acting as the primary resource center for the community, it aids its citizens in the pursuit of their fundamental rights to life, liberty, and happiness. Carlyle characterizes the public library as a "people's university," a social institution owned and maintained by the local government to provide free access to books and related materials for the benefit of the community. The Sinha Committee views the public library as a supporting educational institution that facilitates self-education. The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto of 1994 comprehensively outlines the objectives of public libraries, emphasizing their role as dynamic agents of education, culture, and information, contributing to peace and spiritual well-being. Public libraries serve as local gateways to knowledge, fostering lifelong learning, independent decision-making, and the cultural development of individuals and social groups. In a global context, the term "ethnicity" encompasses diverse sources of obligations that demand recognition of uniqueness and identity. It is evident that throughout the discourse of global nation-building, ethnicity has been acknowledged as a vital force for group solidarity and a persistent manifestation of cultural pluralism.

The demands for recognition from various groups with different socio-cultural commonalities can disrupt the idea of accommodation and the formation of pan-nationalism. Depending on the extent of these demands, it is possible that disintegration and disharmony may arise among the communities. Ethnicity itself can lead to conflicts, which have been the main focus of this study. These conflicts become more fragile when they occur in a diverse society and ultimately contribute to segregation and disillusionment. In light of this, it is important not to contradict the principles of multiculturalism, which refers to the process of acknowledging, understanding, and appreciating our own cultural identities in relation to those of other cultural groups. Multiculturalism is a democratic policy that aims to embrace diversity. The concept of multiculturalism emerged relatively recently, starting from the 1960s. Notable scholars such as Charles Taylor, Bhikhu Parekh, and Will Kymlicka have provided significant insights into multiculturalism, viewing it as a means of political recognition for both majority and minority groups, a representation of cultural diversity, and a supplement to citizenship rather than a replacement. Considering these arguments, it is clear that multiculturalism promotes a higher level of tolerance and respect for all individuals in contact situations, both oneself and others. In this context, it can be assumed that Karnataka has a multicultural and pluralistic society, where various socio-religious groups coexist.

## 2.0 Review of the Literature

Bhui and Sahoo (2018) present a study on the research trends in public libraries in India. Public libraries play a

crucial role in providing information and disseminating knowledge in both rural and urban areas. Therefore, it is essential to closely examine the research being conducted in these libraries. This paper aims to investigate the research conducted on public libraries on a yearly basis, the core areas of research in public libraries, keyword analysis using Zipf's law, supervising patterns, university rankings in contributing to public library research, and the future trends in public library research. The data collected for this study has been organized in an Ms-Excel sheet according to the study's requirements. The year 2013 witnessed the highest number of contributions to public library research, with 7 theses being conducted. Heshmati, Bahram (2020) conducted a bibliometric study that focused on articles published in public libraries over a span of 50 years, from 1968 to 2017. The study utilized the Scopus citation database to gather the articles, including all those indexed in Scopus. The collected records were then analyzed using Excel and VOS viewer. The findings of the study indicated a steady increase in the publication of public libraries articles, with the number of documents rising from 4 in 1968 to 97 in 2017. Tanveer, Haq, and Mahmood (2022) conducted a study that focused on evaluating the bibliometric parameters of documents published in the renowned journal, "Public Library Quarterly," from 1979 to 2021. The researchers found that the most frequently used keywords in these documents were "public libraries" and "public library." Interestingly, approximately 20% of the citations were attributed to just 15 highly-cited papers. Public Library Quarterly has emerged as a leading publication in the field of public library research worldwide. Notably, the United States has played a significant role in this research, as more than 75% of the literature published in Public Library Quarterly originated from the United States.

### **3.0 Need for the Study**

Karnataka, one of the progressive states in India, has achieved a Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) growth rate of 7.4% for the year 2018-19. It is renowned for being a hub of the Information Technology Industry and Research & Development Institutions. The state boasts a literacy rate of 75.35%. With 30 districts and 227 talukas, Karnataka is well-equipped with a comprehensive public library system that is considered as the people's university, promoting lifelong self-learning among its citizens. This study holds immense significance as it explores the compatibility of multiculturalism with nationalism. Additionally, it delves into the redefinition of public libraries to cater to the information needs of culturally diverse societies. Furthermore, it emphasizes the endorsement of multiculturalism by all sectors of the state to foster an international order based on inclusion, justice, equality, equity, human dignity, mutual understanding, respect for cultural diversity, and universal human rights. It also calls for the rejection of exclusionary doctrines rooted in racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and intolerance. Multiculturalism, in essence, necessitates that all states ensure their political and legal systems reflect the multicultural diversity within their societies.

### **4.0 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The study focuses solely on the public library system in Karnataka, specifically encompassing all 26 city central libraries and their branches. However, the study does not include the district central libraries as they do not offer services to users at the district level, despite being located at the District Headquarters. It is important to note that the challenges related to multiculturalism and multilingualism are predominantly experienced in urban areas. Therefore, the present study exclusively considers the city central libraries.

### **4.1 The objectives of the study are:**

To know the different types of resources available, services, library staff, multiculturalism and extension activities of city central libraries of Karnataka state.

### **4.2 Hypothesis:**

H0: The central libraries in the city of Karnataka State lack sufficient library staff, do not organize extension activities, and there is no connection between multiculturalism. Users are dissatisfied with the availability of e-resources and are unaware of library services.

H1: The central libraries in the city of Karnataka State have sufficient library staff, conduct extension activities, and there is a correlation between multiculturalism. Users are satisfied with the availability of e-resources and are aware of library services.

### **5.0 Methodology:**

The present study utilized the survey method of research to gather data. A questionnaire tool was employed to collect data from both the Deputy Directors or Chief Librarians and the users of city central libraries in Karnataka. Two separate sets of questionnaires were prepared, covering all the important aspects of the research topic while also considering the previously stated objectives. The researcher distributed questionnaires to the Chief Librarian and 100 questionnaires to users for each of the 26 city central libraries. In total, 26 Chief Librarians and 2600 users received the questionnaires. The response rate was 100% from the Chief Librarians and 91% from the users, with all the questionnaires being duly filled in and returned.

### **6.0 Important Findings:**

1. The study shows the distribution of respondents by gender. Out of the 26 respondents, 16 (61.54%) are male and 10 (38.46%) are female. The study suggests that there are more male respondents in the profession than female respondents.
2. The survey reveals that 8 city central libraries have 1 to 10 branch libraries, 6 have 11 to 20 branch libraries, 5 have 41 and above, 4 have 21 to 30, and 3 have 31 to 40 branch and other libraries. The data shows that 8 city central libraries have fewer branch and other libraries.
3. The study indicates the languages known by the City Central Library staff. Language is crucial for sharing ideas, thoughts, and feelings with others. Although much human communication is non-verbal, language is important for personal communication. It is evident that all 26 (100%) respondents are proficient in Kannada, 23 (88.46%) are familiar with English, 20 (76.92%) have knowledge of Hindi, 8 (30%) know Telugu, 6 (23.08%) are familiar with Marathi, 4 (15.38%) know Tamil, 3 (11.54%) know Urdu and Tulu, Malayalam, and 2 (7.69%) are knowledgeable in Konkani. The table demonstrates that library staff working in city central libraries need to learn different languages that are relevant to their geographical conditions and the diverse users they serve.
4. The survey indicates that library staff members participated in training programs. These programs can assist employees in learning and acquiring the necessary skills for their current roles, as well as introducing skills in areas such as leadership and software knowledge that will be needed in the future. The data reveals that 22 (84.62%) respondents attended orientation programs, 17 (65.38%) attended in-service training, and 12 (46.15%) attended workshops. Participation in training programs will undoubtedly help employees update their knowledge and acquire the essential skills needed to enhance their efficiency in the evolving ICT environment.
5. The questionnaires were distributed to all 26 city central libraries (CCLs) of Karnataka, and all of them were returned with a 100% response rate. According to the respondents, all 26 (100%) city central libraries in the state are situated at the center of the city, allowing users, including those with disabilities, to conveniently access them.
6. Out of the 26 city central libraries, the majority, 16 (61.54%), of the officers are male professionals. The research study also noted that, among the 26 city central libraries, the majority, 12 (46.15%), of the librarians are aged 51 and above. Additionally, all city central libraries, 26 (100%), are providing multicultural resources and services to the users.
7. The research study revealed that the majority of the city central libraries, 23 (88.46%), are offering awareness programs for social and economic development. It is evident from the research study that the majority of the city central libraries are meeting the needs of the diverse multicultural users.
8. The research study noted that the majority of the city central libraries have an adequate collection to help users maintain social harmony. According to the research study, the majority of the city's central library buildings and user spaces help promote social harmony. The research study found that, according to the respondents, the majority of the city's central libraries are providing multilingual and multicultural services

to their users.

9. The research study revealed that the most commonly used languages are Kannada, English, and Hindi. It was observed from the research study that the majority of the 20 (76.92%) CCLs are offering specialized services to their users.
10. The research study observed that 26 CCLs are providing electronic resources to their users through the Digital library portal. The research study found that none of the CCLs are providing interlibrary loan and compilation of bibliography services to their users. It was found from the research study that the majority of 22 (84.62%) city central libraries are organizing different cultural activities to promote social harmony among the users.
11. Out of 2600 questionnaires distributed to the users, 2366 questionnaires were received with a response rate of 91%.
12. It is found from the research study that out of the 2366 respondents (Users) covered under the study, 1462 (61.79%) are male and 904 (38.21%) are female. It is evident from the research study that, only 234 (9.89%) respondents were under the age of 21.
13. The research study revealed that, out of the 2366 respondents, majority of the 2004 (84.70%) respondents are of the opinion that library provides information relating to multicultural society.
14. The research study revealed that, out of the 2366 respondents, majority of the 2145 (90.66%) respondents are of the opinion that they are getting information for maintaining social harmony through the library among the users.
15. The research study revealed that, out of 2366 users, majority 1613 (68.17%) are the registered members who are accessing the public library collection and its services.
16. The research study revealed that, out of the 2366 respondents, majority of the 2158 (91.21%) respondents are of the opinion that, they are library collections meet the user needs related to multi-cultural information.
17. The research study revealed that, out of the 2366 respondents, majority of the 2145 (90.66%) respondents are of opinion that, they are maintaining social harmony through library collection.
18. The research study revealed that, out of the 2366 respondents, majority of the 2198 (92.90%) respondents are getting electronic resources from the city central libraries. The research study revealed that, out of the 2198 respondents, majority of the 1218 (55.41%) respondents are of the opinion that, they are getting electronic resources related to social harmony and multicultural society.
19. The research study revealed that, out of the 2366 respondents, the majority of the 2145 (90.66%) respondents are in the opinion that, the library building/ space is encouraging for maintaining social harmony among the users.
20. The research study found that, out of 2366 respondents, the majority 100% are of the opinion that, they are totally happy with the assistance given by the library staff in city central libraries.
21. The research study revealed that, out of 2366 respondents, the majority 2234(94.42%) are of the opinion that, they are totally happy with the newspaper service rendered by city central libraries.
22. The research study found that, out of 2366 respondents, the majority 2231 (94.29%) of the respondents are of the opinion that, they are satisfied with cultural activities organized by the city central libraries of Karnataka.
23. The research study revealed that out of 2366 respondents 2196 (92.81%) are of the opinion that, they are fully satisfied with the resources and services of the city central libraries as well as they directly reflect on the diverse needs of the multicultural society and its users.

### **7.0 Suggestions and Recommendations**

1. The research study revealed that the city central libraries of Karnataka are striving to obtain reading materials that represent the multicultural makeup of society and promote an understanding of cultural diversity, racial harmony, and equality among users. However, the actual practice in these libraries is quite different. They acquire reading materials based on the recommendations of the state book selection

committee, with 80% of the books in Kannada and 20% in English and other languages. To cater to the needs of the multicultural society and its users, reading materials should be made available in multiple languages. It is the responsibility of these libraries to obtain reading materials in regional languages other than Kannada. Therefore, it is recommended that the authorities of the public libraries in Karnataka and the state book selection committee choose high-quality books in multiple languages to serve the users of the multicultural society and its community.

2. In a society focused on lifelong learning, public libraries will serve as connections between local learning environments and global information and knowledge resources, playing a crucial role in the development of lifelong learning systems. They provide guidance and training on searching for and utilizing information, as well as evaluating the quality of information sources. As a result, public libraries are essential for a well-informed democratic society. It was found that the majority of city central libraries encourage and support language learning, particularly for self-directed learners. Public libraries offer a cost-effective infrastructure for lifelong learning and provide easy access to necessary reading and learning materials. Therefore, it is recommended that all city central libraries work closely with local educational agencies and language communities to best meet the diverse information needs of their users.
3. The advancement of information and communication technology has established the foundation for information networks, providing even small local public libraries with access to global information sources. Research also reveals that city central libraries primarily aim to promote lifelong learning and social interaction through community education and training programs, as well as cultural activities. Therefore, it is recommended that all city central libraries in Karnataka partner with local educational and cultural organizations to arrange diverse activities for the multicultural society, fostering social harmony among the public.
4. The human resource is a crucial aspect of public libraries and plays a central role in delivering high-quality services to users. By effectively utilizing other resources such as collections, finances, and infrastructure, the human resource contributes significantly to the overall functioning of libraries. Research indicates that there is a severe shortage of qualified professional staff in all 26 city central libraries, as highlighted in Tables 5.7 and 3.2 of Chapter Three. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the State Government take immediate action to hire fully qualified professionals to work in these libraries. This step is essential for central libraries to provide quality services to the diverse users of our multicultural society.
5. The library's physical space will encourage communication between patrons and employees as well as between users and information. The architecture has the ability to pique employees' interest in reading and working while also arousing their physical and virtual curiosities. The conversation may also be influenced by shifts in the local economy, social trends, and demographics. The community's preferences from the library's previous service plan can limit how services are provided now. The study concludes that the space and library building that Karnataka's city central libraries provide are insufficient or inadequate for hosting a variety of events, including cultural gatherings, in a changing environment. Thus, it is recommended that the State Government consider.
6. Most of the rules pertaining to collection, finances, staff, and other resources included in the Karnataka Public Library Act of 1965 are quite antiquated. Assume they will be regarded as the most crucial in order to provide its people with high-quality services. Therefore, it is recommended that the Karnataka Department of Public Libraries take the initiative and show interest in amending the current Karnataka Public Libraries Act, 1965 as soon as possible. The modification ought to address some of the crucial element(s) that the Karnataka public library system needs in an entirely evolving ICT environment, including collection resources, human resources, financial resources, and infrastructure.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

In today's globalized world, understanding and appreciating cultural diversity is essential. There are over 7,000 languages spoken worldwide, reflecting the richness of human culture. For businesses expanding globally and individuals developing professionally, knowledge of multiple languages opens new horizons and opportunities to expand cultural awareness. With rising mobility and immigration rates, many countries now have increasingly

multicultural populations, where complex identities thrive. Globalization, increased migration, faster communication, ease of travel, and other 21st century forces have boosted diversity in nations where it was previously limited. "Cultural Diversity" or "Multiculturalism" refers to the harmonious coexistence and interaction of different cultures. Libraries of all kinds should reflect, support and promote cultural and linguistic diversity on global, national and local levels. This facilitates multifaceted dialogue and active citizenship. Cultural and linguistic diversity is humanity's shared inheritance and should be valued and safeguarded. It drives innovation, exchange and peaceful understanding among peoples. Respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, exchange and cooperation in an environment of mutual trust and understanding are crucial to global peace and security.

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