Situation of Libraries in Nepal: an Overview

Historical Background

Collections of reading materials were also found in the era of the Lichhavi kings in stone, palm leaves and in many other forms. But the history of book libraries in Nepal is not long. The Ranas who ruled over Nepal from 1847-1951, kept people in complete darkness by prohibiting them from politics and education. People were not allowed to open schools and libraries. "The Library Parba" was a most remarkable event in the history of library in Nepal. The people involved in opening public libraries were arrested and fined Rs. 100 each by the then Rana Prime Minister Bhim Shamsher in 1930. The Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota was also one among the youths trying to open a public library in Kathmandu. Before the public movement of 1951 to overthrow the Ranas some personal libraries like Bir Library, Singha Library and the Keshar Library as their personal collections. These libraries were not accessible to the public. Bir library was taken over by the National Archives. Singha collection was handed over to Tribhuvan University Central Library. Many public libraries opened after the democracy in 1951. Introduction of Dhawal Library in Palpa is an example. In 1956, the report of the National Education Commission highlighted on the establishment of the Central Library. There was an agreement between HMG/N and USAID to open a central library under the leadership of Dr. E.W. Erickson. The library was formally opened in June 1959. The Tribhuvan University Act of 1959 made a provision for the library, which is now Tribhuvan University Central Library. The collection of the then Central Library was handed over to this library. In 1957, the Nepal National Library was opened by purchasing the personal collection of the late royal priest Hem Raj Pandey. Madan Puraskar Library was opened in 1956 to preserve each and every publication published in Nepali language.

Chronology of the Libraries Opened in Nepal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Library Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Palpa</td>
<td>Dhawal Pustakalaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Biratnagar</td>
<td>Adarsha Pustakalaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Kathmandu</td>
<td>Pradeepa Pustakalaya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Butwal</td>
<td>Mahabir Pustakalaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Kathmandu</td>
<td>Nepal National Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Kathmandu</td>
<td>Tribhuvan University Central Library</td>
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Dasharath Thapa
Chief Librarian
Nepal National Library
Education and Libraries

The present literacy rate of Nepal is 57.6 percent but the variation in literacy rate is glaring in terms of a rural-urban and male-female comparison. At present there are more than 700 libraries of different types. This includes all the Tribhuvan University affiliated college (61) libraries and some school libraries. There are also 140 private colleges, four other universities and schools running ten plus two classes having their own libraries. Except the academic libraries other types of libraries are struggling to survive. The special libraries and the libraries run by foreign missions are doing their best to provide better library services among users.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of libraries by development regions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Development Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Development Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Development Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Western Development Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far-western Development Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
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<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public Libraries

Public libraries have a long history of meeting the learning needs of the adult. In the real sense there are no public libraries as such. Small public libraries have greatly increased in numbers since 1990, after the restoration of multi-party democracy and the establishment of a new constitution upholding the freedom of access to information. There is no public library system as yet in Nepal supported by the national government. There are a few libraries supported by the local government. The "public libraries" are almost entirely the tiny local community or club based resource collections and reading centres, run by local initiative and seeking to provide recreational or educational materials for the use of club members or the immediate neighbourhood in areas ranging from city courtyards to remote hill villages. Typically, library provision is one of a number of community service activities carried out by such groups. Some groups have registered with the Social Welfare Coordination Council of HMG/N as nongovernment organisations. New libraries are being opened from time to time but they are short-lived.

Special Libraries

National Archives

There used to be a royal collection since the Malla kings of Nepal. The government collection was later named as Bir Library by the then Prime Minister Bir Shumsher in 1900. This library was located near the Tower Clock in Kathmandu. Now the collection of Bir Library is in the National Archives. The collection includes an ancient and rare collection. The majority of the collections are manuscripts. The valuable literature has been preserved in microform with the help of some German aid.

Government Libraries

Although, there are no public libraries funded by the government, there are a number of libraries in the Ministries’ Departments and in research centres. Only a small amount of money is allocated for their acquisition budget. Such libraries have one or two staff members. Some of the libraries have professionally qualified staff and others have semi-professional junior staff.

Keshar Library

This is a personal collection of the late Field Martial Keshar Shumsher JBR. The collection was handed over to the Ministry of
Education in 1970 along with the building Keshar Mahal and the 31 Ropanis of land occupied by the building. This library also has a rich collection in various disciplines.

**Other Libraries**

Apart from the departmental libraries and the libraries mentioned above various institutions like NGOs and INGOs have their own libraries for their own sake.

**Madan Puraskar Library**

The secretary of Madan Puraskar Trust Mr. Kamalmani Dixit opened this library in 1956. The collection of this library is only the literature published in Nepali language. This library attempts to preserve each and every items published in Nepali language but the library has complicated rules for the users community.

**Academic Libraries**

The libraries in Tribhuvan University colleges and in Mahendra Sanskrit University have properly trained staff. The regular budget allocated for these libraries is not sufficient to acquire the reading materials to satisfy the students, teachers and the research scholars. Attempts were made by the universities to make the college libraries efficient but these libraries are still not successful in fully satisfying the users. The libraries in the campus needs moral support and help to uplift them.

The Central Library of Tribhuvan University is one of the best libraries in the country with more than 2.5 million documents. The library has better physical infrastructure and a good number of qualified staff. Tribhuvan University is allocating a good amount of money for its betterment every year.

**School Libraries**

Although there are higher secondary schools in Nepal, only a few have their own library. Some schools having ten plus two level now started thinking about libraries.

**Mission Libraries**

Libraries opened by the foreign countries are providing their best services to public in Kathmandu. The absence of the public libraries in Kathmandu could not be felt by the people because of these libraries. The libraries are Nepal Bharat Sanskritik Kendra (India), American Centre (USA) and the British Council Library (UK), the Association for Theological Education in Nepal (ATEN), etc.

**National Libraries**

Nepal National Library (NNL) was founded in 1957 by the government by purchasing the personal collection of the late royal priest Hem Raj Pandey. The total collection at that time was 45,000 titles. At present the library has 25 staff members with about 76,000 documents. The library is being automated with the CDS/ISIS software. The library provides training frequently for the working librarians. Publishing the National Union Catalogue, Accession List and the Newsletter are the regular activities of the library. To preserve the national heritage, the library recently acquired micrographic equipment through the Japanese Cultural Grant Programme. The annual budget is 1.8 million Nepalese Rupees, which includes 100,000.00-acquisition budget. The NNL is also serving as a public library for the people in Kathmandu valley. The mobile library service is being provided by NNL in Kathmandu district. This library has supported four public libraries in each development region.

**Physical Facilities and the Collection:**

The existing physical facilities as well
as the collection of the libraries is not satisfactory except in TUCL.

Professional Staff

In Nepal, there were not remarkable numbers of library staff having professional degree. The mid 1970s was the best occasion when Tribhuvan University decided to trained some 20 persons (B. Lib Sc.) each year to provide professionally qualified staff in its colleges. Afterwards the CTEVT designed a paraprofessional training of a shorter period for the junior library staff. Another important event was the establishment of the Department of Library and Information Science in Tribhuvan University in 1995. Now many libraries have trained manpower except the small public libraries in the villages.

Library Use

The reading habit of the people of different age groups is not above the satisfactory line. People use library only in the case when there is no other way. The library itself is not able to satisfy the user even if they wanted too.

According to the survey, public libraries circulate less than 500 books a month. The following are some factors for low use:

- Very small target communities are served
- Restriction of loan privileges to “club” members
- Small book stock in a limited subject range
- Unsuitable book stocks when these are acquired by donations
- Low rate of acquisition of new books due to limited budgets
- Irregular opening hours because they are staffed by volunteers

Budget

Budget allocated for the library out of the total government budget allocated for the education sector:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal year</th>
<th>Education budget</th>
<th>Library budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>4,729,367</td>
<td>1,233 0.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>5,079,010</td>
<td>2,122 0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>5,455,476</td>
<td>5,395 0.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/99</td>
<td>6,403,340</td>
<td>2,841 0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>6,879,510</td>
<td>3,195 0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>8,262,986</td>
<td>3,937 0.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the public libraries have had no regular source of funding except in 1997/98 in which Rs. 25,00,000 was allocated for the public libraries. Otherwise they depend on raising local donations and membership fees as their income. The academic libraries are running out of the budget provided by their parent body.

Management Responsibilities

In public libraries, management is generally carried out by the user groups through library committee. Public libraries are typically staffed by a number of voluntary workers who contribute their time in providing services. Some of the public libraries have staff from the local municipalities. The academic libraries focused especially on teachers and on students. The management never cares about the library development.

Legal Provisions

There is no statutory provision to govern the library system in the country. NNL is still functioning without the legal depository act. The present copyright act of 1965 is in a process of amendment. The self-governance
act of 1999 has made a provision for a library in each VDC, municipalities and the DDCs. But the regulation of the act has no such provision.

### Basic Issues

The public library survey conducted by Nepal Library Association shows that most of the public libraries were not established to meet specific information needs of the community. The small collection of books and newspapers does not satisfy the needs of the general public. Some of the basic issues are:

**Financial Constraints**

- Inadequate infrastructure
- Inadequate government support for public libraries
- Lack of trained manpower
- Poor collections
- No government policy.

Under the multiparty democracy system of the government, "right to information" has been included as one of the fundamental rights of the people in the New Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1991.

For the first time the National Planning Commission, in its Eighth Plan has outlined the importance of libraries for the development of the country.

The National Education Commission 1992, HMG/Nepal has recommended that the creation of the library and information services system should be given due priority to raise the standards of education, research and development programme. It has also emphasized that there should be a well equipped library in every VDC (Village Development Committee), municipality and district. The high level education Commission Report 1995 also supported the recommendation of 1992 commission.

In order to strengthen the library system in Nepal, UNESCO and DANIDA supported NNL with a five-year project entitled Reorganization of Nepal National Library in Support of Literacy Programme. During the project period, four public libraries one each in every development regions except the central development region were designated as the branch of the national library. Nepal National Library is also providing public library services to the general public in Kathmandu Valley. Nepal National Library organized a "National Conference on Role of Information in National Development" 24-27 August 1997 in order to raise awareness of the role, image, status and potential of libraries in Nepal.

Similarly National Seminar on national Library and Information Policy for Nepal was held on 5 April 1992. The seminar on National information policy (4-6 September 1986) held in Kathmandu also suggested the development of National Library in Nepal.

The mobile library service has been successfully launched by the Pokhara Public Library in Kaski District. Similarly, NNL is also providing this service in Kathmandu district.