
BOOK REVIEW

A Veritable Treat

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Nair, R. Raman. *People's Library Movement*. New Delhi, Concept Publishing Co. 2000.151p. Rs.200/-

The District Ernakulam of Kerala State is the first fully literate district in India. According to the Government of India Census 2001, Kerala continues to occupy the top slot in the country, with a literacy rate of 90.92 per cent. It enjoys the first rank in both male and female literacy at 94.20 per cent and 87.86 per cent respectively.

Libraries, specially public libraries, play an important role in the promotion of literacy and in attracting the masses towards books. One hundred years back Melvil Dewey rightly said that a public library is like a university where people of all standards can broaden their horizons of knowledge either on their own or with the help of the librarians.

The book under review is an attempt made to study the development of public libraries in Kerala. There are more than 5000 public libraries in Kerala, i.e. one in every eight square kilometers, mostly established with the sole initiative of the public. The book is divided into 14 chapters. The first chapter of the book gives a general introduction and substantiates the method by which the topic is dealt. Chapter 2 discusses education, literacy and the library scene in the State. In the next chapter the author discusses the evolution of library movement the world over as well as in Kerala. Chapters 4 to 7 provide in-depth study of public library movements in Kerala.

Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Manipur, Haryana, Mizoram, Goa and Kerala are the 10 States in India that have public library legislation. The author provides brief information of these Public Library Acts and recommendations of Chattopadhyaya Committee Report(1986) recommendation on National Library and Information Policy in the context of the expanding library movements in India.

Chapter 9 discusses the specific roles of libraries in the development of society, political, educational,

social or cultural. The objectives of public library as enunciated by S R Ranaganathan, American Public Library Enquiry Committee, UNESCO Public Library Manifesto and Public Library Research Group, London are discussed in this chapter.

Chapters 10 and 11 depicts the evolution of library legislation in Kerala. The author starts the discussion with the Library Bill for Tranvancore, 1947. The first legislative enactment in the New World was in 1696, when the Maryland Assembly passed several laws to ensure establishment and maintenance of libraries. But the legislation which influenced all later enactment throughout the world was the British Public Library Act of 1850. The two basic principles that it sets out were: first that public library in a community should be freed from dependence on private gifts, subscription or charitable donations; second, that they should be free to include whatever available materials were needed by readers, and therefore that they should not be controlled in such choices either by political or by religious influences. Chapter 12 discusses the principles of library legislation like, the system concept, national network, resource sharing, system legislation, evaluation and revision and provides guidelines for library legislations.

Chapter 13, points out the need for a uniform national pattern for library legislations. Chapter 14 analyses the People's Library Movement in Kerala as well as the Kerala Public Libraries Act 1989 which is the fruit of the Movement.

After going through the whole book one has to conclude that the author has taken pains to bring out a comprehensive study on Library Movement in Kerala. The author proceeds step by step. At the end of each chapter a comprehensive list of references is given and the book ends with a detailed bibliography and index. But for the absence of up-to-date data on government expenditure on public libraries, the book is a veritable treat for any one interested in Public Library Movement in India. □