

Public Libraries in Malabar: Genesis and Development

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Abstract

This article aims to study the genesis and development of public libraries in Malabar. It is people's movement. Organized movement started with the formation of library organizations. With the enactment of libraries Act, the development of public libraries flourished in Malabar.

Key words: Public libraries, Malabar

1. Introduction

Malabar is the northern part of Kerala, a State in southern India; comprised of six districts of Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Malappuram, and Palakkad. The library movement in Malabar is part of the nationalist movement. During that period many reading rooms were established in various parts of Malabar.

These reading rooms became the meeting places of people in the evening and they discussed various social, economic and political issues. They were the centres for holding study classes, night classes, political discussions, and many cultural activities. They also made people conscious of irreligious works and superstitions.

2. Library Movement in Malabar

The organized library movement in Malabar started with the formation of Malabar Vayanasala Sanghom (Malabar Library Organization). The first Malabar library conference was held in June 1937 at town hall, Calicut. K. Kelappan, the president of Malabar District Board was the chairman of this conference. The meeting recommended forming "Vayanasala Sanghom" to coordinate the works of all libraries in Malabar. Accordingly the "Malabar Vayanasala Sanghom" was formed at Calicut town hall on June 11, 1937 with E. Raman Menon, president; Maduravanam C. Krishna Kurup, vice president; K. Damodaran, secretary; P.T. Narayanan Nair, joint secretary; and A. Balagopalan, treasurer (Mathrubhumi 13

June, 1937).¹

3. Kerala Granthalaya Sanghom (Kerala Library Organization)

The Kerala Granthalaya Sanghom was formed to extend the works of the “Malabar Vayanasala Sanghom” all over Kerala. “Malabar Vayanasala Sanghom” was registered as “Kerala Granthalaya Sanghom” on December 6, 1943 (Mathrubhumi 10 December, 1943).²

This organisation did a lot for the establishment and development of libraries in Malabar. It organised the first north Malabar library conference on November 30, 1946 at Calicut town hall. This meeting resolved to take the following decision: 1) To give a memorandum to the government describing the existing condition of the public libraries in Malabar, 2) To request the government to draft and pass a public library bill in the legislation, 3) To appoint a committee to enrich the children’s literature section in the libraries, 4) To establish a research library in Calicut, 5) To increase the women membership in the libraries, and 6) To consult with the library associations in Travancore and Cochin for implementing one administrative structure in all libraries in Kerala (Mathrubhumi 4 December, 1946).³ The Sanghom organised several meetings of library workers and conducted training programmes for them.

4. Malabar Local Library Authority

In order to manage, administer, and run library services in the Malabar region a Local Library Authority was constituted under the provision of Madras Public Libraries Act (1948) in 1950 (Madras. Education and Public Health Department 1949).⁴ Calicut was the head quarter of Malabar LLA. K. P. Kesava Menon was elected the first chairman, and K. Kunju Kaimal was the first secretary (Local Library Authority, Malabar 1950).⁵

After the reorganisation of States and after the formation of the present constituent State of Kerala, the State government split Malabar region into three revenue districts viz. Calicut, Cannanore, and Palghat and consequently three Local Library Authorities were constituted on April 1, 1959, one for each district as per

government notification no. Ed (d) 3-2447/57/EHD dated 18.6.57. A district central library, branch libraries, rural libraries, and book delivery stations were functioning under each Library Authority.

4.1 Local Library Authority, Cannanore

The first meeting of the LLA, Cannanore was held in 1959 and Govardhan Das was elected the chairman. The head quarter of this LLA was at Tellicherry. The District Central Library was functioning at Kannur. Many libraries in Cannanore such as Victoria Memorial Municipal Library, Tellicherry; the Firka Central Library, Tellicherry; the Firka Central Library, Kumbala, and Hajee Memorial Library under the Cannanore municipality were transferred to the Cannanore LLA (Local Library Authority, Cannanore 1959-64).⁶

4.2 Local Library Authority, Kozhikode

The first meeting of the LLA, Kozhikode was held on May 24, 1959 at the office of District Educational Officer, Kozhikode. A. Balagopalan was elected the chairman. The Calicut Municipal Library which was handed over to the LLA, Kozhikode on July 15, 1959 functioned as District Central Library (Local Library Authority, Kozhikode 1959).⁷ After the formation of the new Malappuram district, the activities of the LLA, Kozhikode were extended to the Malappuram district also. The District Central Library, Malappuram was opened on October 2, 1977. (Local Library Authority, Kozhikode 1977).⁸

4.3 Local Library Authority, Palghat

The first meeting of the LLA, Palghat was held in the office of District Educational Officer, Palghat on May 30, 1959. K. Narayanan Nair was elected the chairman. The district central library, eight branch libraries, and nine rural libraries were functioning under the LLA, Palghat in 1959.

The government in the notification no. 24769/A3/84 H. Edn. dated 1-11-85 has ordered to reconstitute six LLAs, one each for the revenue districts of Kozhikode, Malappuram, Wayanad, Palakkad, Cannanore, and Kasaragod (Kerala Gazette 1985).⁹ But the proposed six LLAs did not come into existence. The LLAs,

since its formation has tried its best to form public libraries in the urban and the rural areas under its jurisdiction

5. Early Established Libraries

Some of the libraries established early in Malabar are the following:

Calicut Public Library (1890) which was later handed over to Calicut municipality and it functioned under its control till 1952; Victoria Library, now renamed Maulana Kalam Azad Memorial Library, Tellicherry (1901); Sree Narayana Vilasam Vayanasala, Alavil, Kannur (1926); Cannanore Public Library, Kannur (1929); Samadarshini Library, Kozhikode (1929); Sanmargadarshini Library and Reading Room, Kozhikode (1929); Mahatma Library, Palghat (1931); Thozhilali Library and Reading Room, Chovva, Kannur (1932); Sengupta Library, Kozhikode (1933); Paral Public Library, Paral, Tellicherry, earlier known as “Kerala Chandrika” (1934); Aikyakerala Library, Kozhikode (1934); Tagore Library and Reading Room, New Mahe (1934), Kodiyeri Public Library, Tellicherry (1936), Gurudeva Vilasam Library and Reading Room, Pathayakunnu, Tellicherry (1936); Deshaposhini Vayansala, Kozhikode (1937); SJM Library and Reading Room, Kandakkai, Kannur (1938); Sree Vagbhadananda Gurudeva Smaraka Vayansala, Eranhipalam, Kozhikode (1939); Sanjayan Smaraka Library and Reading Room, Payyannur (1944); Chathamangalam Public Library, Chathamangalam (1944) etc.

6. Kerala Granthasala Sanghom (Kerala Library Organisation)

In the meeting of north Malabar library conference under the chairmanship of K.P. Kesava Menon in February 1956, initiative was taken to form “Kerala Granthasala Sanghom.” The activities of the Sanghom were then extended to Malabar. Though the Madras Libraries Act was in force in the Malabar area, a number of libraries in this area were organised and administered by the Sanghom. Public meetings, symposia, seminars, and workshops were periodically held under the direction of the Sanghom.

The government dismissed the Sanghom on the issue of mis-management by an ordinance on March 16, 1977 and the powers of the Sanghom were transferred to the newly constituted “Control Board” (Lenin 1982).¹⁰ It was a nominated body.

The Control Board was reconstituted several times and it was abolished in 1991 with the enactment of Kerala Public Libraries (Kerala Granthasala Sanghom) Act.

7. Kerala Public Libraries (Kerala Granthasala Sanghom) Act, 1989.

Kerala Public Libraries (Kerala Granthasala Sanghom) Act, 1989 came into force in Kerala as per government notification no. 1951/ Leg.C1/89/Law dated 18-5-1989. The rules and regulations of this Act were published in 1991 for the working of the libraries affiliated in the State Library Council (Kerala Gazette 1991).¹¹ As per this Act, three tier systems of library councils are controlling the library functions in the State. They are State Library Council, District Library Council, and Taluk Library Union. Every library has a library committee to manage its functions.

8. Kerala State Library Council

The first elected State Library Council came into existence on April 27, 1994. (Das 1997).¹² The important duties and powers of the State Library Council are:

1. To advise the government on all matters regarding library administration,
2. To co-ordinate the works of the district library council and the taluk library unions,
3. To supervise and direct all matters relating to library services in the State,
4. To carry on propaganda on the importance of library development in the State by providing lectures, conference etc., and
5. To conduct other activities such as imparting training to librarians, promoting distance education, adult education, and eradication of illiteracy (Kerala Public Libraries Act 1989).¹³

It organises various programmes and services such as conducting certificate course in Library Science, children's section, women's section, jail libraries, sanatorium libraries, juvenile home libraries, reading contest, book banks, orphanage libraries, academic study centres, rural book-circulating programmes, rural information centres, career guidance centres, and model village libraries.

9. Present Situation

As per the State Library Council's record, more than 6500 public libraries are affiliated to the State Library Council and they are classified into six grades from A to F based on standards formulated by the Council for the purpose of giving grants.

The public libraries in Malabar fall under five categories. They are 1. Libraries run independently, 2. Libraries run by local bodies, 3. Libraries formerly under the Local Library Authority, 4. Libraries run as part of Sports and Arts Club, and 5. Libraries run by other governing bodies. The first four categories of libraries are affiliated to the State Library Council and are provided grant-in-aid by the Council. But for the libraries run by the local bodies, the grant is provided only for books. The libraries under other governing bodies get the revenue from different sources such as donation, membership fee and private agencies.

10. Conclusion

Changes in the socio-political context in the first half of the 20th century, especially during the nationalist movement helped the genesis of public library movement in Malabar. It was a people's movement. This movement flourished with the establishment of several reading rooms in different parts of Malabar which created national consciousness among them. When Kerala Granthasala Sanghom became the apex body of the public libraries in 1956, there was a rapid growth of public libraries in Malabar in its number.

The Kerala State Library Council formed as per the Kerala Public Libraries (Kerala Granthasala Sanghom) Act, 1989 assumed the charge of public libraries in Kerala adopted several development programmes to convert the libraries into a social institution to fulfil their educational, cultural, informational, and recreational role.

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