

# Public Library System in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala: An investigation

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## Abstract

Public libraries provide a wide range of information products and services to the benefit of its user community. A public library is considered as gateway to knowledge, freedom, prosperity and the development of the society. The individuals in a society must have fundamental human values as per the UNESCO declaration. These are acquired by well informed citizens through playing an active part in social affairs and exercising their democratic rights. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend upon satisfactory education as well as free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information provided by public libraries. This study examines the role of public libraries in Kerala society. An attempt was made to evaluate the use of A-Grade public libraries in Thiruvananthapuram District by the users, purpose of using libraries, and present an overview of public libraries. This study suggests ways of reorienting the public libraries with IT enabled sources and services for the better development of the community as a whole.

**Keywords:** Information Resources, Kerala State Library Council, Library Finance and Management, Library Legislation, Public Libraries

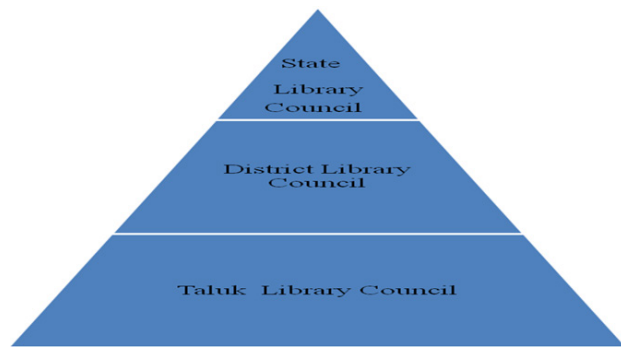
## 1. Introduction

Public libraries are considered as the treasure house of knowledge, cradle of culture and heritage of a country. Essential functions of all public libraries are collection, organization, preservation and dissemination of knowledge to all individuals in a country. The history of public libraries in Kerala started in 1829 with the establishment of Trivandrum public library (the present State Central Library), which is the oldest public library in India. This library was initially used only by the European community in Trivandrum and invitees of the Durbar of the Maharaja. In 1898, a registered society called Trivandrum Public Library Society under the Travancore Joint Stock Companies' Regulations decided to hand over the library to the Government and Sreemoolam Thirunal declared that the library would be open to the public. Prior to independence during 1945-47, rural libraries in the Travancore State organized to

form "All Travancore Grandhasala Sanghom" with nearly 5000 affiliated libraries. The slogan of the Sanghom was "Read and Grow", which later changed to "acquire literacy and get strengthened". It was coined by Panikkar (1974), the architect of Library Movement in Kerala. He led the Sangham for 32 years until 1977, when the Sanghom was taken over by the State Government. It is now known as the Kerala State Library Council(KSLC)<sup>10</sup>.

Development of the public libraries in States is the responsibility of the respective State governments. Nineteen States and one Union Territory in India have enacted public libraries Act enabling smooth functioning of the public libraries. The KSLC is an autonomous body under the higher education department of the Government of Kerala formed as per the Kerala Public Libraries (Kerala Grandhasala Sangham) Act, 1964. The organization of Public Libraries in Kerala has a three tier system, viz, State Library Council, District Library Council, and Taluk Library council and they are classified into six grades from A to F.

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**Figure 1.** Three tier system envisaged in the Kerala Public Libraries Act, 1989<sup>9</sup>.

Figure 1 shows the three tier system envisaged in the Kerala Public Libraries Act, 1989.

The IFLA/UNESCO guidelines<sup>5,6</sup> state that “Adequate levels of funding are crucial to the success of a public library in fulfilling its role”. The cess and government grants are two major sources of the revenue for the public libraries in Kerala. In section 30 of Kerala Public Libraries Act<sup>9</sup>, there is a provision for government grant to the State Library Council. According to this provision, “an amount of not more than one percent set apart for education in the State budget shall be provided to the State Library Council by the State Government”. There are provisions “to collect library cess, the amount equal to 5% of building tax levied by the municipalities and corporations and land tax levied by the Panchayaths”. The State Library Council collects this amount. Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) also provides financial assistance to the State Library Council under matching and non-matching schemes. The other sources of income include revenue from user fees such as membership fee, subscriptions, donations etc.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

The various definitions of public library stress its vital role in the society. Mc Colvin<sup>12</sup> states that “it is provided by the local authority, the town, or country council, entirely or mostly at its own expense; governed and administered by the authority or a committee, wholly or largely appointed by itself; available free of any charge to all who live in its area; and offering a wide selection of materials chosen to embrace as completely as possible the varied interests of the individual and the community, free from bias or religion, political or other motives.” The IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto (1994) defines the public library as “the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups, and a living force for education, culture and information,

and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women”. It exists from civilization of mankind and acts as an important custodian of human culture, knowledge and social customs<sup>7</sup>. It is necessary to maintain well trained and highly motivated staff to make effective use of the resources of the library and to meet the demands of the community.

Public library is a welfare centre which provides useful service to the community by fostering education, promoting culture, providing scope for healthy recreation and disseminates information to all sections of the society<sup>1</sup>.

The objectives of public libraries inherent in the standards for public libraries of U. K. Department of Culture (2004) are, they underpin education, providing essential support for school children, students, and lifelong learners; they enhance public access to the world’s store house of knowledge and information; they promote social inclusion, by helping to bridge the gap between those who can afford access to information and those who can not; they have a role to play in the modernization and delivery of public services; and they provide information which underpins commercial and economic endeavour.

Various statements on the purpose of public libraries confirm that “the public library makes an essential contribution to democracy and citizenship. It is also vital to a nation’s literacy and productivity”<sup>4</sup>. According to Mangla (2011) well accepted axiom that a library for democracy, universal self education and enlightenment is indeed a public library. In view of its vital role in public support and service to the people it is rightly described as a library of the people, for the people and by the people.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To evaluate the sources and services of A-Graded libraries in Thiruvananthapuram Taluk under the Kerala State Library Council;
- To evaluate the role of Kerala State Library Council in the overall development of public libraries;
- To identify the information needs of the users;
- To identify the obstacles, if any, in providing better services to the users; and
- To give suggestions for better services.

## 4. Scope of the Study

The study was limited to the Thiruvananthapuram revenue Taluk only. The data regarding the organisation, administration, resources, services and activities of the

**Table 1.** Total number of public libraries affiliated to KSLC from 1965 to 2013 in Kerala

Year	Number of libraries affiliated	Number of libraries added	Percentage growth in the number of libraries
1965	3297	-	-
1975	4280	983	29.8
1985	4928	648	15.1
1995	5537	609	12.4
2005	6608	1071	19.3
2006	6640	32	0.5
2007	6786	146	2.2
2008	6913	127	1.9
2009	7075	162	2.3
2010	7191	116	1.6
2011	7252	61	0.8
2012	7410	158	2.2
2013	7526	116	1.6

libraries were collected from the librarians working in the A-Graded public libraries and users of the library in Thiruvananthapuram Taluk.

## 5. Methodology

The Taluk of Thiruvananthapuram possesses 57 A- Grade and 74 B-F Grade libraries, with a total of 131 public libraries. Out of this, all A Grade libraries were taken as sample. Extensive literature survey through magazines, journals, books, internet, and annual reports was done to reveal various facets of public libraries. For data collection, structured questionnaire supplemented by informal discussion, telephonic and face to face interviews were used. Data was collected from librarians and users of the library. Observational visits were also conducted to the libraries and information collected on the present set up of libraries.

## 6. Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed using simple statistical tools.

### 6.1 Public Libraries Affiliated to KSLC

Table 1 shows that the decadal growth in the number of libraries affiliated to KSLC was maximum (29.8%) during 1965-75 followed by 1995-2005. The annual growth rate was maximum during 2008-2009 and minimum during 2005-2006 (19.3%). Out of total 7526 public libraries affiliated to KSLC, 131 libraries were in Thiruvananthapuram Taluk, out of which 57 libraries were A-Graded.

**Table 2.** Number of Libraries affiliated to KSLC in Thiruvananthapuram Taluk during 2013-2014

A Grade	57
B Grade	43
C Grade	10
D Grade	7
E Grade	9
F Grade	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>

### 6.2 General Details of A-Grade Libraries

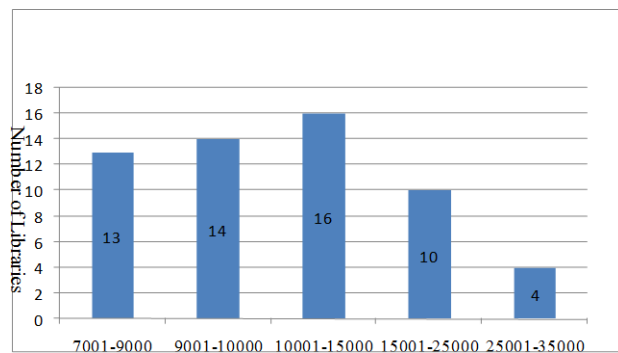
**Table 3.** General Details of A- Grade Libraries

Item	Number of libraries	Percentage
Having Building	54	95
Having Computer	57	100
Professional Manpower	5	9

Table 3 shows that 95% of libraries had their own buildings and 100% of the libraries had Computers. Lack of professional manpower was a major hurdle in the management of the libraries. Only 9% of the libraries had qualified librarians.

### 6.3 Collection Development

Table 4 shows that all the libraries had a minimum collection of 7000 books. Sixteen libraries (28%) had collections between 10000 and 14000 and four libraries (7%) had the highest number of books in the range of 26000-35000. The diagrammatic representation of the collection is given in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of A-Grade public libraries by stock of books.

**Table 4.** Books in A-Grade public libraries in Thiruvananthapuram Taluk during 2012-13

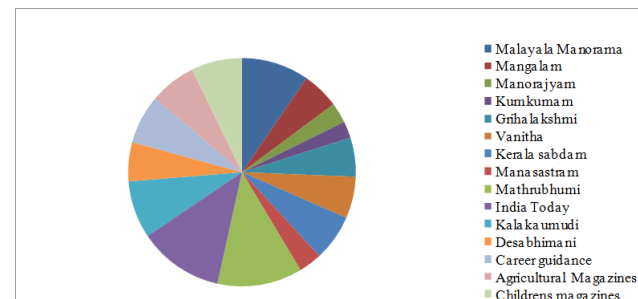
Number of Books	Number of Libraries	Percentage
7001- 9000	13	23
9001-10000	14	24
10001-14000	16	28
15001-25000	10	18
26000-35000	4	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5.** Magazines subscribed in the A-Grade public libraries

Name of magazine	% of libraries subscribing
Malayala Manorama	73
Mangalam	40
Manorjyam	22
Kumkumam	18
Grihalaksmi	42
Vanitha	45
Keralasabdham	50
Manasatram	25
Mathrubhumi	92
India today	38
Kalakaumudi	62
Desabhimani	42
Career guidance	53
Agricultural Magazines	50
Children's Magazine	55

Table 5 shows that most libraries subscribed to the Malayalam magazines. The magazines, which were found most popular, were Mathrubhumi (92%), Malayala Manorama (73%), and Kalakaumudi (62%), Children's magazines (55%), Career guidance (53%), Keralasabdham

and Agricultural magazines (50%). Vanitha (45%), Grihalaksmi and Desabhimani (42%), Mangalam (40%), Manassasthram (25%), Manorajyam (22%), Kumkumam (18%), India Today (38%), also had good readership among the sample libraries. Career guidance magazines and agricultural magazines were recent additions in the libraries. The pie diagram showing the subscription of magazines is given in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Subscription of Weeklies and Magazines.

## 6.4 Library Users

Data were collected from 456 (Table 6) users using the random sample method. It was found that 332 (73%) were males and 124 (27%) were females.

The age wise and category wise distribution of respondents are given in Table 7 which shows that 25% of the users were between 18-25 years, 24% of the users were between the groups of 26-32 years, 22% belonged to the age group of 33-40 and only 29% of the users were above 45 years. Among the users, 30% were in the unemployed category followed by students (27%) and Government employees (22%). Only 21% of the respondents were working in the private sector.

**Table 6.** Gender wise classification of Library Users

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	332	73
Female	124	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>100</b>

## 6.5 Use Pattern

The use pattern was analysed with respect to the frequency of visits and purpose of visit. The results are placed on Table 8.

Table 8 shows that 25% of respondents visited libraries once in a week, followed by 21% of respondents visited every day, 16% of respondents visited once in two weeks and 15% of respondents visited once in a month. It also shows that the main purpose of visiting the library was to

**Table 7.** Distribution of the respondents by age and category

Age-wise distribution			Category-wise distribution		
Age Group	Number of respondents	Percentage	Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
18-25	113	25	Students	125	27
26-32	110	24	Govt. employees	100	22
33-40	102	22	Unemployed	135	30
Above 45	131	29	Private sector	96	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 8.** Frequency and purpose of visit of Users to the A-Graded Public Libraries

Frequency of visit to library			Purpose of visit to library		
Frequency	No. of respondents	%	Purpose	Number of visitors	%
Every day	96	21	Newspaper reading	210	46
Once a week	112	25	Recreational purpose	125	28
Once in two weeks	75	16	To prepare for competitive examinations	50	11
Once a month	67	15	Information about employment news	42	9
Occasionally	106	23	Others	29	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>100</b>

read newspapers (46%), recreation (27%) and prepare for competitive examinations (11%). Most of the respondents opined the need for extending the working hours of the libraries.

## 6.6 Extension Activities of the A-Graded Public Libraries

Major extension activities undertaken by the libraries were Balavedi for Children, a special programme for children; Production of Handicrafts; Vanithavedi, a programme for women empowerment; Agriculture literacy programs, Information technology programme, etc. Some other extension activities organized were given here:

- Jail Libraries;
- Orphanage Libraries;
- Tribal Libraries;
- Heritage Libraries;
- Academic Study Centers;
- Rural Book Circulating Programs;
- Model Village Librarie;
- Taluk Reference Libraries;
- Hospital Libraries;
- Reading contest for the students; and
- Tuition classes for the socially backward students.

## 7. Summary of Findings

- The study shows that majority of the libraries were situated in the Corporation area and their collections mainly consisted of poetry, short stories and novels.

Printed books, mainly of Malayalam fiction, were the materials available in these libraries;

- Majority of the users visited the library for the purpose of reading newspapers and magazines;
- 95% of libraries possessed their own lands and buildings;
- The major information service provided by the public libraries was lending of books. Some libraries provided general information services including career information and user orientation;
- Majority of the libraries did not have any classified arrangement of books using any standard classification scheme and books were catalogued using local cataloguing methods and ledger form of cataloguing was followed;
- Non-professionals were engaged in majority of the libraries for managing the library with no essential computer knowledge; and
- The number of libraries that made effective use of computers was very less and most of them used computers mainly for data entry work.

## 8. Suggestions

- Library timings should be extended to evening hours.
- Collections must be properly classified and organised for effective rendering of service.
- All libraries should collect and provide necessary information in relevant areas such as agriculture, health and education, etc.

- Develop local databases, bibliographical as well as full-text.
- Organize mobile library system to cover all geographical areas.
- Establish Public Library Network System connecting all libraries that come under the Kerala State Library Council with other institutions engaged in rural development activities.
- Establish a new set up of dynamic information centres with the help of the latest information technology to effectively cater to the information needs of the people.
- Qualified professionals with advanced ICT skills, management skills and other competencies should be engaged in these libraries for providing better services.

## 9. Conclusion

Public libraries have always been the door for learning for a large majority of the population that they serve. They are knowledge centers and contribute to lifelong learning. Public library can be described well as people's university. Proper functioning of the public library system will support other libraries, especially academic libraries. It is hoped that this study will provide valuable insights into the effective functioning of the public libraries and public library system in Kerala. Proper development and maintenance of the public library system along modern lines is a basic need of the society.

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