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Delhi Public Library System: The Biggest Public Library Network in India

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To perpetuate the sweet memory of its General Secretary and First Registrar of School of Library Science, the EC of Delhi Library Association decided to institute a Memorial Lecture Series in collaboration with Prof. P N Kaula Foundation in the name of Padmashree Prof. Prithvi Nath Kaula.
0 INTRODUCTION

The Delhi Public Library (DPL) was established in 1951 by the then Ministry of Education, Government of India with the financial and technical assistance from the UNESCO. The Library was inaugurated by the first Prime Minister of India Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru on 27th October, 1951. At present, the Delhi Public Library is functioning under the administrative control of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. From a small library located in the Old Delhi, it has since been developed into a premier public library system in the country covering the entire Metropolitan city. Besides providing free library services to the people, children and adult alike, irrespective of any distinction of sex, caste, creed and religion. DPL also looks after their recreational needs to harness the latent potential of the members of the public by providing a suitable platform for socio-cultural activities.

1 BRIEF HISTORY

Delhi Public Library started as a Pilot Project of Unesco “For the development of public library services in adult and fundamental education throughout India and in other countries of South East Asia”. Unesco floated the proposal to start Public Library Pilot Project in Asia and India was the first to respond and express its desire to implement it. Therefore, India was selected for Public Library Pilpt Project to carry out the Policy of Unesco’s Public Library Manifesto. It started as a Model of Unesco’s Public Library Manifesto in Asia. An agreement between the Unesco and the Government of India was made in May 1951; the Terms of Reference for the project were set as:

“It shall provide public library service for the people of the city of Delhi and shall be a model for all public library development in India, and in all countries where similar development of public libraries can be undertaken. The library shall be designed to carry out the policy of the Unesco’s Public Library Manifesto and to serve the needs of popular education”.

Mr. D R Kalia was selected as the first Indian Director of DPL. He was sent to England on one year Fellowship in spring of 1950. Mr. Edward Sydney took up the charge of DPL in December 1950 and continued up to June 1951. Mr. Frank M Gardener, the Librarian of the Luton Public Library, U K joined as the Consultant of the DPL Project in November 1951 and served DPL up to June 1952. He authored the text of “The Delhi Public Library Project”, published by Education Clearing House, Unesco, Paris, 29th December, 1952. (Occasional papers in education. Unesco/ED/Occ./16). This is the master document, which provided details related to the establishment of Delhi Public Library.

11 CHOICE OF DELHI FOR THE UNESCO PUBLIC LIBRARY

(a) Delhi was selected for the establishment of DPL because it is the Capital of India and it had a population of over one million (at that time).

(b) The public library was to be founded with the direct negotiation between the Ministry of Education and Unesco, therefore, it was convenient and desirable to be in Delhi.

(c) It was convenient for MOE to see development of the library, and coordinate with the representatives of its governing body.
12 CHOICE OF DALMIA JAIN HOUSE BUILDING FOR DELHI PUBLIC LIBRARY

(a) Chosen premises was the most suitable because it was near the main railway station.
(b) It was thickly populated area of Delhi and easy to access by public.
(c) The Dalmia Jain House (popularly known as Wavell Canteen) was built as a rest house and canteen for troops during the Second World War. It was a single-storied building having considerable floor area with two central courtyards and its own garden at the back. The location and the layout of the building were very suitable for the purpose of library building.
(d) At that time, the whole of the building was occupied by various departments related to migration of refugees from East and West Pakistan.
(e) Vacating the building was not difficult because Departments related to issues of refugees were not permanent.
(f) In December 1950, The Chief Commissioner of Delhi vacated the South Wing of the Dalmia Jain House for the use of Public Library and placed it at the disposal of the Delhi Library Board.

Special emphasis has been given to the history of the Library building, the Dalmia Jain House from original documents related to the Delhi Public Library (DPL) because the Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delhi_Public_Library has been mentioning some misrepresented facts related to the history of DPL building as given below:

“The Library was established in 1951 as a pilot project sponsored by UNESCO and the Government of India. The library project dates back to 1944, when Shri Ramkrishna Dalmia donated most of the amount required to construct a library building at the request of Gen. Sir Claude Auchinleck. In February 1950, the Indian Government and UNESCO agreed to initiate the project, and the library was officially opened on 27 October 1951, by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The library buildings were acquired between 1951 and 1953, with operations formally transferred from UNESCO to the Indian Government in 1955”.

The newspaper “The Mail Today” dated 09.12.11 has also repeated the same account, which is quite different from the actual facts. Effort has been taken to provide authentic facts related to the organization from original documents related to the subject.

The library was opened on 27th October 1951 by the Honourable Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, supported by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Minister of Education. Messages of Congratulations were received from Dr Rajendra Prasad, Honourable President of India and the Director General of Unesco, Dr Jaime Torres Bodet. It was a grand, enthusiastic and impressive opening ceremony. Government started the library with great expectation and promises.

Mr Frank M Gardner was an experienced professional and he devoted hard work to establish the library at its formative phase. He conducted a survey at the end of his tenure, in which he evaluated readers by their education, age, subject choice and language. His survey found that about 2,300 readers visited DPL every day and around 78% of them were visiting library for the first time. He mentioned that children seem to be drawn to the Delhi Public Library as if by the legendary Pied Piper. Around 30% of the visitors were under 16 years of age. At the end of the report, he concluded that it is the Asia’s busiest and most modern public library.

During 1950s and 1960s, the Citizens of Delhi had very limited option for entertainment, and self education. The opening of DPL played an important role in the life of knowledge seeking Delhi population. The visit of Mobile Vans of DPL was the only option for creative reading for locals including
children. They used to wait with great enthusiasm for the visit of Mobile Vans every week to different localities. Well established Doctors, Engineers, or highly learned professionals, still cherish the memory of DPL services they enjoyed during their childhood. They used to have an emotional attachment with this great library.

15 DO WE REALLY NEED PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE MODERN AGE?

The time has changed due to the advancement of ICT and electronic publishing. The mode of information dissemination has become very efficient and challenging. Even today, very less percentage of population in our society is directly attached/associated with the academic institutions. Library is only accessible to students, teachers and those who are associated with academic research. For rest of the population, library services are not available. They remain deprived of reading literature required for their day to day needs. Even the students perusing their education through distance education do not get access to their essential reading material. Some of them satisfy their reading needs by approaching their friends, who are associated with some academic institutions. Today, the world has become very competitive and we are living in a knowledge based society. Every member of the family needs library services to achieve their goal. Therefore, public library plays an important role for the empowerment of citizen through knowledge.

2 NET WORK OF THE DELHI PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

The DPL network consists of a wide spread library network including Central Library, 4 Zonal Libraries (4 Branch Libraries), 24 Sub-Branch Libraries, 3 Community Libraries, 11 Resettlement Colony Libraries, One Braille Library, Tihar Jail Library, 60 Mobile Service Points and 22 Deposit Stations in the Union Territory of Delhi (Fig.4).

21 CENTRAL ZONE: CENTRAL LIBRARY

Central Library situated at S P Mukherjee Marg, it is the Head Quarter of the DPL. The library has Lending Section, Reference Section,
Computer Section, Book Purchase Section, D B Act (Delivery of Books Act 1957) Section etc. It has the archival collection of Gazettes and News papers including Hindustan Times (English) and Navabharat Times (Hindi) from 1952 onwards. Central Administration, Finance and Establishment services are conducted from the Central Library. Recently the Music Section (Bajaghar) has been added to preserve rare collection of gramophone records. The Central Auditorium has been renovated as per the modern requirement to conduct socio-cultural programmes.

22 SOUTH ZONE: SAROJINI NAGAR LIBRARY ACTS AS THE CENTRE OF SOUTH ZONE

The Zonal Library at Sarojini Nagar was started in the year 1985. It conducts routine library services. It has a well maintained Children’s Section, which is the centre of attraction for the children of South Zone area. There are 9 Sub-branches, 2 Community Libraries and 2 R.C. Libraries working under this Zone.

23 WEST ZONE: PATEL NAGAR BRANCH LIBRARY ACTS AS THE CENTRE OF WEST ZONE

Patel Nagar Branch library was started in the year 1963. The Library has Lending Section, Reference Section, Reading Room, Public Internet Access, DVD Corner and Children Section. There are 6 Sub-branch libraries and one R.C. Library working under this Branch library.

24 NORTH ZONE: KAROL BAGH BRANCH LIBRARY ACTS AS THE CENTRE OF NORTH ZONE

Karol Bagh Branch library was started in the year 1964. The Library has Lending Section, Reference Section, Reading Room, Public Internet Access, DVD Corner and Children Section. There are 7 Sub-branch libraries and 5 R.C. libraries working under this Branch Library.

25 EAST ZONE: SHAHDRA BRANCH LIBRARY ACTS AS THE CENTRE OF EAST ZONE

Shahadra Branch library was started in the year 1964. The library provides routine library services. There are 3 Sub-branch libraries, 1 Community library and 3 R.C. libraries are working under this Branch library.

26 MOBILE LIBRARIES

DPL has been providing Mobile library services through 4 mobile vans. They cater reading resources to the non-reachable readers stationed at remote corners of Delhi. A mobile library service provides books and magazines to 60 service points across Delhi. It follows weekly time schedule for visiting different service points. It has over 5,613 registered members for regular library services. Approximately 85961 books are issued per annum through mobile vans. It operates at 20 Braille mobile points to provide Braille literature for those who cannot reach the Braille library of DPL.
3 SPECIAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DELHI PUBLIC LIBRARY

31 DELIVERY OF BOOKS ACT

DPL was declared by the Government of India as the fourth recipient library under the Deliver of Books and Newspapers Act 1954 (amended in 1956) on 16th December, 1981. Under the D B Act provision, DPL is expected to preserve one copy of the books published in India for the reference of future generation. It has the responsibility of providing safe preservation/custody of knowledge created in India. The DPL receives one copy of the publication of books in English and all other Indian languages from registered publishers in India. DPL processes them through computers and maintains them for public use.

32 BRAILLE LIBRARY

Braille Department of Delhi Public Library was opened in a small room at Delhi Public Library main building, opposite to the old Delhi Railway Station in 1963. Then after it moved to Laxmi Bai Nagar in 1966. Considering the space constraints at the Laxmi Bai Nagar, it was moved to the Blind Relief Association campus at Lal Bahudur Shastri Marg, New Delhi in 1979. Braille Department of Delhi Public Library is the only Braille public library working in the city. It is quite popular among blinds. The membership and the number of books issued are quite high as compared to the size of the library. In order to satisfy the growing need of the clientele and to maintain a variety of book stock, the Braille transcribing unit was started in March 1966. The library also has the facility of transcribing books in Bharati Braille (in Hindi) This unit transcribes books in English, Hindi, and Sanskrit. The library has a collection of over 15,700 books and more than 14 magazines are subscribed per annum. It also disseminates Braille literature through postal transaction to clients from outside Delhi on demand. The library has gained great popularity and made a remarkable progress in catering library services to the blind community. Braille Department of DPL conducted Annual Talent Search Competitions for visually challenged every year.

33 MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICES

DPL has been providing Mobile library services through 4 mobile vans to its readers located at the remote areas of Delhi. The large mobile vans are especially designed to stock about 3000 books on wheel. Periodically the collection of mobile vans is changed, so that readers may get variety and new books. Mobile library services provide books and magazines for children and adults at 60 service points in Delhi. It has over 5,613 registered members for regular library services. Approximately 85961 books are issued per annum through mobile vans. One van is exclusively devoted for Braille collection. It operates at 20 Braille mobile points. The mobile van library service of DPL is very popular in Delhi.

34 JAIL LIBRARY

DPL has a deposit centre at the Tihar Jail, Delhi. It provides reading materials for jail inmates. It changes the collection of books and magazines from time to time to provide variety of collection to library users. It acts as a depository centre and the library is maintained by the jail authorities and DPL. Many inmates pass their formal education by making use of the DPL service.

35 BAJAGHAR: THE MUSIC ROOM

An exclusive Music room “Bajaghar” has been setup to exhibit rare gramophone record collection of DPL. The library has a very rare stock of over 4000 gramophone records representing different forms of Indian classical and light music. It has a collection of speeches of Gandhiji, Pandit
Jawaharlal Nehru (First Prime Minister of India), Smt. Indira Gandhi and many other dignitaries. It has different sizes and colours of gramophone records having variety of labels. Taking advantage of the unique collection, an exhibition room has been set up to show case the historical evolution of gramophone records and the important role played by India in the manufacture of gramophone records by exporting over 80% of the raw material, i.e., Indian lakh for the gramophone record pressing companies across the world. Padma Bhushan late Pt. Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Khan Dagarji inaugurated the Bajaghar as a part of Commonwealth Games celebrations in the library on 3rd October 2010. DPL has digitalized 40 rare gramophone records in CD format which includes speeches of our leaders and some rare music collections. DPL also provides free lending of CD/DVDs in Central library, Sarojini Nagar and Patel Nagar, Janak Puri, Vinoba Puri, Karol Bagh and Narela libraries. The DVDs collection of English, Hindi movies, educational programmes and children’s literature are popular among readers.

36 FREE INTERNET SERVICE

DPL provides high speed free Internet service to the members in Central Library, Sarojini Nagar, Patel Karol Bagh, Vinoba Puri, Janak Puri, Narela, R.K.Puram Sec 8 and Shahadra libraries. DPL plays a unique role in bridging the digital divide in the society. It provided opportunity to those who never touched a keyboard before. And many of them are the first time computer users. It provides the digital lifeline to children and others who have no other option to avail computer access elsewhere. Computer has become the most important communication to find job, apply for admission to schools and colleges, to learn academic lessons, medical treatment, advance information search and knowledge in different profession. It helps to connect with family friends, travel, banking, read daily newspapers, etc. Library provides opportunity to youth to utilize these global intellectual knowledge resources through internet services.

37 ORGANIZING SOCIO-CULTURAL EVENTS TO PROMOTE HIDDEN TALENTS OF DPL USERS

DPL annually organizes debate, essay writing, quiz, music, drama, painting competitions among various categories of members including children, adult and visually handicapped, to provide a platform to explore their hidden talents. It also organizes various activities during special occasions such as Commonwealth Games, 150th Birth Centenary of Gurudev Ravindra Nath Tagore, etc. It conducts book exhibitions on different occasions to develop balanced collection of literature on popular subjects. DPL frequently conducts interactive programmes including story telling sessions and film shows for children.

38 USING INNOVATIVE IDEAS TO PROMOTE LIBRARY SERVICES

DPL makes use of enthusiastic participation of public in its sociocultural programmes to enhance awareness about Delhi Public Library and its services. While participating in different functions and competitions, the children come with their family members, which provides them an opportunity to visit the library and get information about its services.

381 On the Spot Painting Competition at Narela

DPL organized On the Spot Painting Competition’ on 5th December 2010
at the Narela sub-branch library. More than 500 school children of Narela area participated in the competition. The contest was held for junior and senior groups. Winners were given cash prizes and trophies were given to their school. The painting competition resulted in increase of membership of Narela branch to about 2000 members after the programme.

382 Annual Talent Search Competitions for Visually Challenged

Braille Department of DPL conducts Annual Talent Search Competitions for visually challenged by organizing Essay writing, Debate, Poetry recitation, Speech and Music (Instrumental and vocal) competitions. Usually the competition is organized in Central Library auditorium at the S P Mukherjee Marg because of the space constraint. In 2011 the DPL changed the venue of their competition and organized it at the School Auditorium of the Blind Relief Association, near Oberoi Hotel, so that the visually impaired students may not face difficulty to reach their venue of competition due to their limited mobility. Further DPL also printed the programme and invitation card etc. in Braille script and distributed them to the target clients through 20 Mobile Van Braille Points.

The above changes resulted in almost double in the number of participants, as compared to the earlier years. The visually impaired enjoyed their programme and the ambience during the 3 days of the programme remained vibrant and encouraging. The programme also resulted in great increase in Braille membership.
Fig 2: Increase in number of membership in Narela branch

310 SOME SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Delhi Public Library has been winning the first prize under Indira Gandhi Rajbhasha Prize Scheme in P.S.U/Board/Autonomous bodies functioning under Central Government since 2008. In 2012 Shri. Pranab Mukherjee, Hon’ble President of India has awarded the Indira Gandhi Rajbhasha Shield, as a first prize to DPL.

4 HOW TO MAKE DPL SERVICES SUSTAINABLE IN THE ELECTRONIC ENVIRONMENT

DPL has been providing traditional library services for years. The advancement of ICT and electronic publishing has revolutionized the mode of information dissemination. It has removed any geographical barrier. Knowledge created anywhere in the world can be instantly shared by all. It has made knowledge and information sharable, portable, reachable, visible, and cost effective. DPL needs to redesign its collection and services, in order to cope up with the modern ICT developments. DPL can purchase electronic resources and share them between its registered members in Delhi. The same facility can also be extended to public libraries of other states.

DPL is expected to initiate a nation wide Digital Public Library Network. It, being the biggest public library system in the country is expected to play a leading role in this direction. The Digital Anna Library programme for the Tamil Nadu state. The Gujarat state has also taken some initiative in this direction by introducing valuable collection of e-resources to the Veer Narmada Public Library, Surat.
DPL also conducted survey studies to find out the educational level, age and subject choice of its readers so that the suitable electronic resources for library users can be identified. The electronic resources are quite expensive; therefore, their careful selection is necessary.

The Survey study provided interesting information related to the educational level and subject choice of the clients. It has provided data related to the age group of the visitors. The current data reveals that the DPL is utilized by 22% of school level children and 18% of graduate level students. The data of age group shows that it is utilized by 61% of visitors of the age group of 19-30 years of age. The survey study is very useful for the future planning and development of the library.

5 CONCLUSION
DPL is trying its best to improve reading habits and promote creative talents among citizens of Delhi. It is working as the centre for empowering
youth through information and knowledge. The report “Vision 2020”, published by the Planning Commission identified “Information”, as the most important catalyst for the overall development of a nation. A nation, can achieve anything, if its citizens are educated and well informed. DPL envision fostering knowledge based society through its services and

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