Research Paper   **Library Science**

Library and Information Policy at the National Level

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Library and Information Policy at the National Level: A Policy is a statement of commitment to a generic course of action necessary for the attainment of a goal which in our case is library development. A policy is conditioned on the political, economic, social, and cultural milieu. Policies are value in a number of ways such as they standardise activities, facilitate decision making, minimise confusion, coordinate the activities of various units, conserve time in training etc. Policy statements are to be formulated at the institutional, regional, state, national and international level. It comprehends a set of basic issues which are infrastructure development, information services development, utilisation of new technologies, manpower development and other general recommendations. Many countries have adopted a library policy which helped them undertake library development with a certain commitment and assurance. Policies in certain sectors of the national economy have also had their implications for library development.

1. Meaning and Definition: The concept of Library and Information Policy is new. Here, we are going to discuss, how the concept of "Policy" originated in the field of Library and Information Science. Today's society is known as an Information Society which require information at every step. In modern society, information is treated as a very important source in all areas of development whether it is social, political, economic, cultural etc. The progress of any nation depends on the information generation, disseminating it to the users, and putting it to work. Lack of information is going to adversely affect the development. It is because of the ever increasing demand for information from all walks of life that the need of a policy is felt. And since, this information is being imparted or disseminated via the Libraries, Documentation Centres, Information Analysis and Consolidation Centres etc. they are the means for collecting, storing, and organizing information. Thus, the policy had to be formulated on Libraries and Information Systems. In almost all countries, national governments are the major investors and disseminators of information. As such, each country should evolve a national policy of its own taking into consideration the developments at national and international level.

In the context of India, a National Information Policy must necessarily be governed by and form an integral and harmonious part of the social, economic, educational, research and development and other related policies, which get formulated at various stages of our national development. Further, the Information Policy needs to be properly made compatible with the Five Years National Plans of the country.

"A National Information Policy is a set of decisions taken by a government, through appropriate laws and regulations, to orient the harmonious development of information transfer activities in order to satisfy the information needs of the company. A National Information Policy needs provision of necessary means or instruments such as financial, personnel, institutional for concrete implementation". (UNISIST: II Main Working Document).

A National Information Policy would ensure access to professional and specialized knowledge at the global level as the development of any country directly depends upon the planning and policies followed by the government of the country.

2. Library Information Policy at National Level for India: Libraries in our country function under a variety of ownerships and jurisdiction. There is generally no coordination in their development. The progress of libraries has been very slow because of the following factors:

a) Neglect of library services during the British period
b) Resource constraint in the post-Independence era
c) Sole dependence on Government funds for library development.

Due to above said reasons and many more, the need for an integrated library system or policy for India was felt and in this direction, first step was taken by Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, Father of Library Science, in 1944. He suggested that "library edifice of postwar India should be so planned that primary libraries are attached to regional centres, regional centres to provisional central libraries, these again to the national centre libraries of other countries and international centres".

The Government of India made various attempts to improve library services. Under the National Library of India Act, 1948, the Imperial Library was renamed to National Library. In 1951, Delhi Public Library was set up. Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC) was established in 1951. Five Year Plans included funnels for their improvement. In 1957, the Advisory Committee suggested library services "free to every citizen of India."

National Policy on Library Information System was formulated by the Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) which was set up in 1972 and also by Indian Library Association.

The Department of Culture, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, appointed a Committee of senior library scientists and other specialists with Prof. D. P. Chattopadhyaya as Chairman, to prepare a draft document on the National Policy on Library and Information System in October 1985. The Committee completed its assignment and submitted a draft document to the Government on May 31, 1986. The draft policy document consists of 10 chapters.

To implement the recommendations of the committee, Government appointed an Empowered Committee under the chairmanship of Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyaya, in October 1986. The committee submitted its report in March 1988.

The recommendations of the committee are:
a) Constitution of National Commission on Libraries.
b) Creation of All India Library Services.
c) Active role of Central Government in Public Library De-

velopment in State.
d) Public Library Development has also to be supported by agencies involved in education, social and rural development.
e) National Library of India, Calcutta should be strengthened.
f) Development of system of national libraries.

3. Salient Features: A number of features that constitute the National Information Policy are given below:

i)   To establish, maintain, and strengthen the free public libraries. A network of libraries would result with a district library being the apex library in district, with public libraries at city, town and village levels. These would, then be part of the national network with each state having its own library legislation.

ii) Every school or college established should have a library and a qualified librarian. The policy states that science libraries are essential part of education. There must be a state level agency for proper development of school libraries of the state and a national agency for coordination at the national level. The policy gives University Grants Commission, the authority for college and university libraries and suggests that all these institutes form a network and share the resources by signing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

iii) Expansion of national, regional, sectoral, and local levels of NISSAT (National Information System for Science and Technology). The policy recommends that national, regional, sectoral, and local levels of NISSAT scheme should be further strengthened and expanded.

iv) Similar systems are organized in Social Sciences, Humanities and Languages.

v)   Development of information system and data banks in different fields.

vi) Parent bodies should be committed to provide support and infrastructure for libraries.

vii) The policy recommends for a system of national libraries consisting of The National Library at Calcutta, National Depository Libraries, National Subject Libraries and National Documentation/Information Centres, National Databases of Manuscripts, etc. A National Library Board should be set up by the National Library of India for effective inter-relation among all these national libraries and also between libraries, archives and museums.

viii) Manpower, planning and development. The policy also recommends specialized information personnel who could apply modern management techniques to Information Services.

ix) Library legislation and regulation of information flow. To meet effectively, with the changing information needs of society, the policy recommends a national library act to be enacted and supplemented by model library legislation at the state level.

x)   Use of technology. Information revolution is undisputably caused by the unprecedented advances in technology. These advancements have made accessibility to world information and knowledge possible, almost from any part of the world. All these developments in information technology have far reaching implications for National Information Policy. It recommends the access and use of technology for enhancing the existing services and to exploit and utilise the available resources to its optimum.

xi) Removal of communication barriers. Information, being an important resource, any barrier in its free flow should be removed for easy access and maximum use.

xii) National network of libraries. The National Information Policy recommends the setting of a National Commission for Libraries and Information System by the Government. This would take charge of the national network of libraries, within which, would be accommodated libraries of different levels from the rural society to the modern society, from the school to the research organisations. The policy states that the necessary financial support 6 to 10% of the education budgets for systems will be made available by the Government of India and state of governments.

4. Other Library and Information Policies: UNESCO has been advocating the adoption of a National (Science) Information Policy by all the countries of the world. In this connection, UNESCO held some regional meetings and seminars in India. NISSAT, which is the focal point in India for the UNISIST/UNESCO programme, is expected to take interest in framing information policy. The Society for Information Science in India has done considerable spade work for preparing the National (Science) Information Policy.

Even, in India or other nations, there are various Associations formulated at state and district levels for e.g. Library Association for Chandigarh and so on, contributing in formulating and implementing the Library and Information Policies for the betterment of the Nation as a whole.

The policies which have been adopted by Government in a few other sectors have direct impact on Library field such as National Policy on Education 1986, National Book Policy 1986, Scientific Policy Resolution 1958, Technology Policy 1983, Information (Communication) Policy, National Knowledge Commission, 2005.

The primary objective of a national policy is to achieve a progressive upliftment of the socioeconomic development of the country through the provision of access to and availability of information and knowledge with speed and efficiency to all those who are involved in activities for national development. Planning and programming endeavours are essential to aim at a systematic and assured development. The formulation of a National Policy on Library and Information System are epoch-making measures in the library movement in the country. If the policy recommendations are faithfully implemented, a new phase in library development in India towards a far better performance and achievement is sure to come about. A National Library Policy is also necessary to have a commitment to provide library service to all the people as it is suggested by the Advisory Committee. The Five Year Plans have given a great deal of attention to library development and informatics and the Ninth Plan has made appropriate provision. If implemented rigorously library development will get assured success.