

An Overview of SAARC National Libraries

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Abstract

The paper highlights the functions of a national library as viewed by some authorities in the field. The history, objectives, building, collection and services of the national libraries of SAARC nations are examined. The picture that emerges is that national libraries in the SAARC region are victims of neglect, political interference in administration and lack of understanding of the importance of a repository of national documentary heritage.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, National Libraries, Nepal, Pakistan, SAARC Countries, Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

National library is an institution of national importance – its cultural, historical heritage in documentary form. According to the *New World Encyclopedia*, “A national library is a library specifically established by the government of a country to serve as the preeminent repository of information for that country. Unlike public libraries, these rarely allow citizens to borrow books. Often they include numerous rare valuable or highly significant works. (<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org>). National libraries have special responsibilities, often defined in law, within a nation’s library and information system. These responsibilities vary from country to country but commonly include: the collection via legal deposit, of the national imprint and its cataloguing and preservation; the provision of central services (e.g., reference, bibliography, preservation, lending) to users both directly and through other library and information centres; the preservation and promotion of the national cultural heritage; do devise a system and mechanism for bibliographical control on the publications of the country; acquisition of at least a representative collection of foreign publications; the promotion of national cultural policy; and provide leadership in national literacy campaigns and book promotion programmes⁷.

2. Functions of a National Library

A nation’s apex library performs various vital functions. A

large number of possible functions have been identified. Some of the essential functions carried out by national library are⁴:

- A central collection of material produced about or within the country,
- Maintain a representative collection of foreign research publications,
- Provide national leadership in library and information affairs, including library services policy,
- Be the hub of librarianship and the prime mover in library developments,
- Provide national information system for the economic and social development at national and personal level,
- Receive material through legal deposit legislation,
- Create a national bibliographic record,
- Make its collection nationally and internationally available,
- Undertake to conserve the national printed heritage,
- Provide the national focus to international document supply system,
- Maintain a national referral service,
- Provide a central coordinating point for research in library and information science, and
- Provide a national service for the people on the margins of the society such as the physically and visually challenged.

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Al-Nahari¹, have suggested the following functions of national libraries divided into three priority areas namely, core, by-product, and other possible functions:

2.1 Fundamental Functions

- A1. The central collection of a nation's literary output, built up by legal deposit and in other ways, including duplicates for purposes of loan and photocopy. Manuscripts of major national relevance and importance would also be included;
- A1.1 Collection of information media relating to the country but issued elsewhere.
- A2. Central loan/photocopy collection of foreign literature designed to satisfy a high proportion of the more vital and urgent document needs of the population efficiently and speedily;
- A3. Planning and coordination of interlibrary lending as a supporting system to the duplicate national collection and the foreign collection;
- A4. Publication of the national bibliography, both current and retrospective;
- A5. National bibliographic centre, planning and coordinating access to databases and the use of bibliographic information resources;
- A6. National repository for the receipt, storage and preservation and supply by loan or photocopy of items withdrawn from other libraries in the country; and
- A7. Exchange centre, or clearing house, national and international: E specially for duplicated and other surplus material.

2.2 By-Product Functions

- B1. Publication of catalogues of large or especially important national libraries;
- B2. Exhibitions as desirable;
- B3. Research on library and information management, as necessary, and formulating standards for knowledge organization and information exchange;
- B4. Professional training for the staff of the national library itself, including perhaps some trainees who will be employed subsequently in other libraries. May be especially useful as a practical training ground in developing countries, at least until other libraries are more fully developed;
- B5. Expertise in library technical services which may be called upon as required by other libraries; and
- B6. Establish a museum of book and other documentary media.

2.3 Other possible functions

- C1. Books for the visually challenged; and
- C2. Collection of manuscripts other than those of national relevance and importance.

Ranganathan SR (1892-1972) lists the following functions of the National Central Library in his *Indian Library Manifesto*¹⁹.

The National Central Library should house the copyright collection of the nation. It should be national in the sense that it collects all reading and kindred materials produced in the country, on the country and any book published by its citizens living abroad. It should also be national in the sense that it can find and supply the reading material to any citizen of the country wherever he lives and whatever is the field of his interest. It should be further national in the sense that it affects national economy by centralising all the impersonal processes of preparing the books for all the libraries in the national system. It should, for example, classify and catalogue books in the pre-natal stage and help the book-trade to release them with their call numbers printed in them and their catalogue cards too printed and inserted in them. It should maintain a National Bureau of Bibliography to publish the national bibliography, to do the documentation of all the writings created in the country and to discharge country's share of obligations to international bibliography. It should be the clearing house for exchange and inter-library loan of reading and kindred materials both at the national and the international level. The National Librarian should be the liaison officer between our library system and those of other nations. He should represent the library personality of the country, nationally and internationally.

To perform many functions Ranganathan (1972)¹⁸ proposed an integrated cluster of national libraries instead of one central library burdened with all these responsibilities. He said the days of one single national library are over. As the first step to get over the difficulty of single central national library should be divided into following three kinds:

- 1. National Copyright Library,
- 2. National Dormitory Library, and
- 3. National Service Library.

The National Copyright Library will consist of all the books deposited under the copyright act and will be used only as reference collection. The main purpose of this library is to "show the cultural and authorial progress of the nation". In addition to that for a large country like

India he also suggested state copyright libraries to be maintained by every state on the lines of the National Copyright Library.

National Dormitory Library will consist of one sound copy of each of the books weeded out from any of the libraries in the country. These books are mostly out of date but may be required occasionally.

National Service Library after making the national copyright collection and the national dormitory collection as independent libraries, the volumes left over will be those of current value and fairly in demand. Such a library will truly become a national service library whose

collection may be anything between 300,000 to 500,000 books and other documents, says Ranganathan.

3. Multiple National Subject Libraries

He further suggested the need for a system of multiple national service libraries. The time has already come when even a National Service Library becomes too large and too unwieldy for efficient service. Therefore, a single National Service Library should be replaced by

Table 1. SAARC member countries

Country	Area (km ²)**	Population (millions)**	Literacy Rate* (%)	GDP (PPP)**	GDP (nominal)**
Afghanistan	652,230	32.007	31.7%	\$63.5bn	\$21.3bn
Bangladesh	147,570	159.857	58.8%	\$572.6bn	\$205.3bn
Bhutan	38,394	0.779	52.8%	\$6.3bn	\$2.2bn
India	3,287,240	1,276.2	74%	\$7996.6bn	\$2308.0bn
Maldives	298	0.38	98.4%	\$5.2bn	\$3.0bn
Nepal	147,181	28.4	57.4%	\$70.7bn	\$21.6bn
Pakistan	796,095	190.4	54.7%	\$928.0bn	\$250bn
Sri Lanka	65,610	21.7	91.2%	\$233.7bn	\$80.4bn

Source: *The World Fact book (www.cia.gov)²¹, **Wikipedia.com

Table 2. National libraries of SAARC countries

Country	Name of National Library	Governing Body	URL of National Library Website
Afghanistan 	Kabul University Library	Ministry of Information and Culture	http://ku.edu.af/en/page/9146/9150
Bangladesh 	National Library of Bangladesh	Ministry of Cultural Affairs	http://www.nanl.gov.bd/
Bhutan 	National Library of Bhutan	Special Commission for Cultural Affairs	http://www.library.gov.bt/
India 	National Library of India	Department of Culture, Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Government of India	http://www.nationallibrary.gov.in/
Maldives 	National Library of Maldives	Ministry of Youth and Sports	http://www.nlm.gov.mv/v1/index.php
Nepal 	Nepal National Library	Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal	http://www.nnl.gov.np/
Pakistan 	National Library of Pakistan	Ministry of Education	http://www.nlp.gov.pk/
Sri Lanka 	National Library of Sri Lanka	Ministry of Education	http://www.natlib.lk/

Source: The World Fact book (www.cia.gov)²¹

two or more National Service Libraries, each devoted to restricted subject areas such as, Natural Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences. As time goes on, the number in the system of National Service Libraries may have to be increased gradually¹⁸.

4. SAARC

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)²⁰ is an economic and geopolitical organisation a block of eight sovereign countries. The SAARC organisation came into being on 8 December 1985 in Dhaka. The governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka agreed upon the creation of trade bloc and become the initial members of this bloc. Afghanistan joined this bloc in the year 2006, when the SAARC expanded its membership. The SAARC secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal. The main policies of SAARC are to provide welfare economics, collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia. After the United States and China, SAARC nations have third largest combined economy in the world in terms of GDP (PPP) and fifth largest in terms of GDP (nominal). The geographic area of SAARC nations comprises 3% of the world's area and contains 21% (around 1.7 billion) of the world's total population. The Table 1 highlights the area, population, literacy rate, GDP (PPP) and GDP (nominal) of SAARC nations.

5. National Libraries of SAARC Countries

This study brings to light the objectives, history, collection and services of the national libraries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in alphabetical order (Table 2).

6. The National Library of Afghanistan

Kabul University (KU) located in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan was founded in 1931 but officially opened in 1932. Its library also functions as the National Library of the country as in some Nordic countries. In 1992, the library held 200,000 books, 5,000 manuscripts, 3,000 rare books, periodicals, photographs and calligraphic specimens. Following the civil war, most materials were sold in book markets, burnt, destroyed, or lost. Not much is known about it now in the war torn country.

7. The National Library of Bangladesh¹⁰

A provincial book deposit branch of the Pakistan National Library set up in Dhaka in 1967 became the National Library of Bangladesh which came into being after the Independence of the country in 1971. In deference to the wishes of the people, the Government of the new nation resolved to establish the National Library of Bangladesh to fulfill the cultural aspirations of the newborn nation. It was established to support nation's education, research, scholarly, and cultural activities and to conserve its literary heritage. The National Library is at present under the administrative set up of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries in the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. It has got its own building having sufficient physical infrastructure. It is the single Depository and Repository under the Copy Right Law modified in 2005 as well as the main knowledge content provider of Bangladesh. Its mission is to accumulate and preserve the entire intellectual printed property within the territory of the country each year and develop the national collection to provide up-to-date online access through OPAC to the readers and scholars, and to compile, publish and distribute the National Bibliography. It endeavours to make aware and attract citizens to the services provided to the users.

8. Collection and Services

The National Library of Bangladesh has a collection of about 0.5 million resources on various major disciplines and branches of human knowledge, namely literature, cultural heritage, history, arts, archaeology, medical science, engineering and technology, economics library and information science, law etc. The library provides various services such as reader service, reference service, bibliographic service, photocopy service, one stop ISBN service, e-resources, map service, microfilm reading service and lending service. Since 1973, apart from various publications it brings out half yearly *News Letter of Directorate of Archives and Libraries* (www.nanl.gov.bd).

9. The National Library of Bhutan¹¹

The National Library of Bhutan was established in 1967 with a small collection of precious texts under the royal patronage. The library was initially housed within some rooms of the central tower (*utse*) of Tashichodzong. Later,

due to its growing collection, it had to move to a building in the Changgangkha area of the capital, Thimphu.

Realizing the need for a permanent and suitable building to hold the sacred religious texts in the collection the then Home Minister, Lyonpo Tamzhing Jagar, initiated the construction of the present four-storied eight-cornered traditional building designed in the form reminiscent of the central tower temple of a Bhutanese Dzong. This building, which now houses the collection of traditional texts, was consecrated as a lhakhang or temple in order to provide a spiritually appropriate environment for these religious books which form the bulk of the collection. The inauguration and consecration ceremony of the new National Library building was held on November 23, 1984.

10. Aims and Objectives

The goal of National Library of Bhutan is to provide access to Bhutan's documentary heritage and to the information resources of the world to all Bhutanese, wherever they are. To achieve this, the National Library builds and maintains a national collection of Bhutanese materials with the aim to provide an effective gateway to national and international resources of information in the near future.

11. Services

All books are marked both with an inventory and depository number for classification and shelf arrangement. The library provides various services to its users such as bookshop, reference service, OPAC, microfilming, transliteration service, etc.

12. National Library of India¹²

The National Library of India at Kolkata completed 100 years of its establishment on 30th January 2003. Now it is an autonomous institution of national importance under the Ministry of Culture by a 1976 Act of the Parliament. Managed by a Board and Executive Council under the Department of Culture, Government of India, Director (usually an eminent scholar) is the executive head. The (National) Librarian supported by a large contingent of professional, technical and ministerial staff works under the Director General.

13. National Library Act

After the Independence in 1947 it was renamed and designated National Library of India under the Imperial

Library (change of name) Act of 1948 and shifted to the present building in a 30 acre campus at Belvedere. The new mansion like heritage building, earlier the residence of the Viceroy of India, was inaugurated and thrown open to the public on 1st February 1953 by the then Minister of Education, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958). To provide more space to the growing library "a nine-storey Annexe furnished with all basic facilities and amenities for a good modern library was conceived and designed. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation-stone of the new Annexe on May 8, 1961, and the building was completed for occupation in 1966"³. Now the National Library, Kolkata with regards to its collection, building, budget and staff holds a unique place in the country⁸. The old building which is four kilometers away from the main building now serves as a newspaper reading room. BS Kesavan (1909-2001) who was appointed the first Librarian of the National Library (1948-1963, 1970-1971)¹⁷ is largely credited and remembered for its modernization.

14. Aims of the National Library of India

1. Acquisition and conservation of all significant national printed material, excluding ephemera,
2. Collection of printed material concerning the country, no matter where it is published, and as a corollary, the acquisition of photographic records of such material that is not available within the country,
3. Acquisition and conservation of foreign material required by the country,
4. Rendering of bibliographical and documentation services for current and retrospective material, both general and specialized, and
5. Acting as a referral centre purveying full and accurate knowledge.

15. Legal Depository

It legally receives free of charge a copy of each book (and first issue of a periodical publication) published anywhere in the country under the Delivery of Books and Newspaper Act (Public Library) (D.B. Act, 1954)), amended in 1956. Every year it adds about 20 thousand publications in every form. After Independence in 1947, the library resolved to strengthen its Indian languages collection. The objective was to acquire all the Indian languages publications published before 1954 that is

before the implementation of Delivery of Books Act, 1954. This largest library of India has a very valuable and rare collection of about three million documents in English, Arabic, Persian, a few European and almost all Indian languages including Nepali. It also houses collections of many scholars and has separate subject and linguistic divisions including one on Indology. The library has separate Indian language divisions for Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. Sanskrit language division also collects and processes Pali and Prakrit books. Language divisions acquire, process and provide reading materials in all major Indian languages.

The Library remains open to its 50,000 bonafide members and other citizens for borrowing, reading and consulting books and other documentary heritage. The NL provides a wide variety of services to the common public. It is unusual for a national library to lend books for home reading. It also has a children section. It is considered a vestige of its public library past. Apart from many of its published catalogues and other scholarly publications, since 1958 it has the responsibility to bring out (now almost defunct) the *Indian National Bibliography* (INB).

16. National Library of Maldives¹³

The National Library of the Republic of Maldives was founded on 12th July 1945 as the “State Library” of the Maldives. The Library was renamed “Majeedi Library” in 1948 after one of the most popular statesmen of Maldives, Ameer Abdul Majeed Didi⁵. In the climate of development and modernization that has prevailed since 1978 the library was named “National Library” by the then President Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom on 1st June 1982.

The National Library is the biggest and the oldest institution of learning in Maldives under Ministry of Youth and Sports. The National Library provides both public and national library services. The National Library aims to acquire and preserve publications concerning the country and maintain its national literature.

17. Mission

- Assist and guide the entire nation in all its intellectual pursuits,
- Collect all published materials and documents within the country, and organize, preserve and

- provide for use such collections,
- Annually publish the National Bibliography,
- Act as the focal point of library service in the country,
- Provide library services to the general public,
- Centrally provide adequate library services, including the creation of the National Union Catalogue, List of Serials and other reference tools,
- Build a collection of materials reflecting all needs of the nation,
- Introduce Inter-Library Loan Service and establish network system among all libraries in Male,
- Provide facilities for research make the library a center of individual learning and create a culture of independent thinking and judgment among the citizens,
- Organize staff development programmes for training the librarians in the country to provide efficient and modern services to the users,
- Promote literacy through a network of mobile libraries, etc., and
- Celebrate special days and organize programmes to promote reading habits.

18. Collection and Services

The Library has a fairly good number of books in Arabic and Urdu besides Dhivehi and English books. The entire library collection consists of over 40,000 monographs with an annual addition of about 2,250 books including those got by donation and exchange. The National Library serves as national legal deposit unit since the 1/2006 Act. The library publishes national bibliography every year in print as well as online formats. The library provides different services to its users, namely reference and reading Services, current awareness, mobile library services, local automated database, Internet and photocopying services. Children library services get special attention. In August 2011, “Maldives Digital Library Project” was launched under the initiative of the Maldives Library Association (MLA). This project has two main components: Koha Integrated Library System (ILS), and Greenstone Digital Library (GSDL)⁵.

19. Nepal National Library¹⁴

Erstwhile Royal Government of Nepal established the Nepal National Library (NNL) in 1957 at the Central Secretariat at Singha Durbar. The NNL had an impressive collection of 43,000 books and periodicals, including

those brought in as a result of the amalgamation of the Central Secretariat Library. It is presently housed in Harihar Bhawan, Patan, and is open to all for reading and reference.

20. Objectives

1. Collect, organise, preserve and serve to the public all published material and documents within the country,
2. Provide adequate centralized bibliographic services, including the creation of the National Union Catalogue, List of Serials and other reference tools,
3. Promote literacy through a network of mobile libraries, and through the publication of literature in Nepali language,
4. Assist other public libraries in the country in providing efficient services, and
5. In accordance with the Nepal Copyrights Act the NNL also makes arrangements for the protection of the copyright of intellectual properties including books, periodicals, films and works of art, etc.

21. Collection and Services

The library, which houses 100,000 books and magazines, has the largest collection of ancient Sanskrit literature in the country. The library has collection on various subjects such as literature, religion, history, biography, language and so on, comprising books, maps and photographs, reports, theses and dissertations of Hindi, Nepali, English and Sanskrit languages. The collection, which is on open access, is classified by the Dewey decimal classification. The library has been designated as the "Depository Library" for the publications of Asian Development Bank since August 2001. It provides various services such as mobile library service, reference service, photocopying, document delivery, and conducts various training programs and seminars.

The recent earth quake has destroyed the many libraries in Nepal. The NNL was further damaged by the second major quake on May 12, 2015 said Yadab Chandra Niraula, the chief librarian, to Anadolu Agency (<http://trtworl.d.beyaz.net/>). It has made the National Library building unsafe.

22. National Library of Pakistan¹⁵

After its birth in 1947 a skeleton National Library was established in 1951 under the Department of Archives and

Libraries. In the year 1954, Liaquat Memorial Library was amalgamated with the National Library and named as Liaquat National Library. However, after shifting to the new capital, Islamabad, the Liaquat National Library was again renamed as Liaquat Memorial Library. The scheme for the establishment of National Library of Pakistan¹⁵ at Islamabad was initially approved by Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) in 1963. The construction work was started in 1982 and in 1988 as scheduled library collections and staff moved into the new building in the same year. The caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan Mion-ud-Din Ahmad Qureshi inaugurated the library on August 24, 1993 and its door was opened to the public after 46 years of the birth of the nation.

23. Functions

National Library is a legal depository for all published literary heritage of Pakistan. It serves as top most knowledge resource centre of the nation as well as fountain head of library developments in the country. The library strives to develop significant collection of human knowledge, comprehensive collection of national literary heritage and deliver excellent Library services for promotion of knowledge based society in Pakistan.

24. Collection and Activities

The Library is responsible for national bibliographic control, and preserves the literary heritage of the country for the use of present as well as future generations. The Library has acquired 2,50,000 volumes through purchases, gifts, exchanges and legal deposits. The private collection of some eminent persons which includes 580 handwritten manuscripts and over 10,000 rare books in Urdu, Arabic, and Persian have been acquired through purchases. In addition it has about 1806 donated volumes, 3600 academic theses, 3000 microfiches, 1,30,000 books through purchases and gifts. "Virtua ILS" library management software has been used by the National Library of Pakistan since the financial year 2004-2005.

Library has its own Local Area Network (LAN) with 112 nodes, wi-fi areas, and its Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), website and internet browsing facilities for readers. National Bibliographic Unit has compiled and published 45 annual volumes of Pakistan National Bibliography and one volume of Retrospective Pakistan National Bibliography. The data of translated books published in Pakistan is regularly transferred by National Bibliographic Unit to the UNESCO Head Office,

Paris for inclusion in *Index Translationum*⁶.

The Library is an active member of many library organisations in the world such as the IFLA and Conference of Directors of National Libraries in Asia and Oceania. National Library of Pakistan serves as depository of some international organizations like Asian Development Bank, International Labour Organization, and US Department of Publications, etc. The Library is National ISBN Agency for Pakistani publications and annually publishes National Bibliography of Pakistan.

25. National Library of Sri Lanka¹⁶

Technically the library of last resort the National Library of Sri Lanka¹⁶ is mainly a research and a reference library. It intends to provide library resources as well as information to all Sri Lankans through its library networks, information and resource centres.

Sri Lanka National Library Services Board was established in 1970 by Act No. 17 of the Parliament. The prime objective of this institution is the fulfillment of the long felt need for a National Library. The National Library of Sri Lanka was set up by the Sri Lanka National Library and Documentation Services Board and was opened to the nation on the 27th April, 1990. Under the Act No. 51 of 1998, Sri Lanka National Library Services Board was renamed as National Library and Documentation Services Board, and National Library of Sri Lanka was renamed as National Library and Documentation Centre.

Open to all members of the public, the main task of the Reader Services Division is to provide library and information resources to all Sri Lankans and foreigners who visit Sri Lanka, through the National Library and network of libraries and resource centers; assist citizens to achieve intellectual and cultural advancement supporting the national development of Sri Lanka. National Library is mainly concerned with acquiring books published in Sri Lanka, books published in foreign countries on Sri Lanka and books by Sri Lankan authors.

26. Mission

Its mission is to make Sri Lanka a knowledge society through the preservation of intellectual heritage of the nation; to encourage the utilization of information and communication technology for an effective nationwide library systems and services; and to provide bibliographical services and assist and encourage book publications. It envisions being the national knowledge centre, providing

access to quality library and information services for all.

27. Collection, Services and Activities

The National library has a collection of general, reference, and rare books, newspapers, foreign publications, maps and gazettes, manuscripts, theses and dissertations, government publications, audio-visual, microforms, Braille, and digital resources also. The current book stock of approximately over 500 000 volumes will form the nucleus of the future national collection. The National Library offers various services such as inter library loan service, reference and referral services, CAS and SDI, Internet and web based databases, information repackaging, user education and reprographic services. For automation of the national library following steps have been taken:

- Establishment of the ICT division in 1993,
- Creation of the National Library website in 1997,
- Obtaining internet connection through Sri Lanka Telecom in 1997,
- Establishment of the Local Area Network (LAN) in 1998,
- Obtaining windows version of ISIS (WINISIS) 2000, and
- Obtaining Alice for Windows (AfW) software package in 2000.

Effective planning and steps have been carried out to introduce KOHA library software for the National Library². From time to time it organizes workshops and seminars for all librarians in the country to update them on current developments in the field.

28. Publications

The National Library and Documentation Centre is one of the important centres for the bibliographic control of Sri Lankan literature. Sri Lanka National Bibliography (SLNB) is the only authoritative record of current book publishing in Sri Lanka. The SLNB is compiled and published by the National Library since 1974. On the occasion of its 25th anniversary (2015) the Library was nominated by the IFLA as the IFLA PAC centre for the Asian region to serve as laboratory for preservation and conservation of publications.

The Library publishes Sri Lanka Periodical Articles Index which is a quarterly publication of the bibliographic

control division since 1998. *Index to Postgraduate Theses* and *Index to Research Reports in Sri Lanka* are its other indexing publications. *Sri Lanka Newspaper Article Index*, *Sri Lanka Conference Index* and *Directory of Public Libraries in Sri Lanka* are the other flagship database services provided by National Library.

The Directory of Government Publications and Directory of Public Libraries, Authority List of Cooperative Bodies, Authority List of Sinhala Titles, and Authority List of Tamil Authors and NATNET LANKA Newsletter (1997-) are the other major publications by the National Library. In 2015 the Library signed a MoU with the Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT) to develop an online Book Portal www.kiyawamu.lk that allows the users to search and purchase books online. (MOU, 2015)⁹.

Compilation of the National Union Catalogue (NUC) is one of the major projects of the National Library and Documentation Centre. Eighty three major libraries in the country are currently participating in the UCAT project, including Social Science Libraries, Scientific and Technical Libraries and Information Centers. Presently (December 2015), this database of NUC consists of approximately 461,000 records.

It can safely be concluded from the above survey that the island nation having the highest literacy rate has also the most active national library in the SAARC region.

29. State of SAARC National Libraries

Most of the libraries in the developing countries including the SAARC are in a dysfunctional state. The reasons are mostly common to all the countries as visualised in a different context by Al-Nahari¹:

1. Failure to understand the importance of the national library as the governmental agency responsible for nationwide library development, and a symbol of national culture and repository of its documentary heritage,
2. Poor representation of highly-skilled mature library specialists in the planning of library services,
3. Dispersal of responsibility for libraries among several government agencies,
4. Lack of common objectives, coordination and cooperation between the various governments agencies that claim full or partial responsibility for libraries,
5. Lack of cooperation with other similar agencies,
6. Lack of co-operation among libraries themselves,
7. Failure of library associations and training institutions to raise important issues through their regular channels, such as research, courses and seminars,
8. Lack of national planning for library and bibliographic services,
9. Failure to effectively enforce a legal deposit law,
10. Weak and unorganised library associations,
11. The lack of visibility and appreciation of library services,
12. Lack of demand for library services, almost non-existence of reading habits due to poverty, sultry weather and low literacy rate, and
13. Low financial allocation to this sector and then frequent budget cuts to such services mostly during financial crunch.

30. Suggestions

It is clear that national libraries of the SAARC regions are far behind their counterparts in advanced countries in their organisation, infrastructure and professional services. Not only are they also behind their neighbor countries of ASEAN region. Causes are not far to seek which are both social and professional. Some causes of their backwardness are from the society and include low literacy, poverty, lack of reading and library culture and above all apathy of their governments towards their needs and conditions. Governments have other priorities. Libraries are considered formal and luxurious elite institutions to be provided with least priority. Also there is no social pressure on these governments to address the problems of these institutions of national importance. Library laws such as delivery of books (under the copyright act) are lax, if in place on the statute book. Laws need to be implemented with force and non-observers must invite legal sanctions. Libraries reel under the shortage of staff. Works are in arrear which hardly allows them to be in race with the new trends and look in the future. There is a need of mutual cooperation and the SAARC national libraries stand to gain by a network on the model of Standing Council of National and University Libraries (SCONUL). SCONUL meets regularly for exchange of ideas and to discuss their common problems. In a country like India the national library must act as the apex library for all public libraries to nurture them with books, guidance and provision of centralized technical services. Also there is need to integrate the subject national libraries with the central national libraries along with the Digital National library. Ranganathan model still has some substance.

All these factors conspire to make all libraries in SAARC countries as low priority institutions which exist only symbolically and provide only bare services in countries struggling with poverty, illiteracy, corruption. These are victims of neglect by politicians and bureaucrats who do not see much value beyond decorative reading centres for the elite few.

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