

APPLICATION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) IN CENTENNIAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN VIDARBHA REGION

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Abstract *Public libraries in India are facing challenges in coping with the changing environment in Library and Information Science field. Even Centennial public libraries whom have crossed more than 100 years of their age are also struggling for the same. Considering the importance of IT applications in public libraries, this paper examines the status of IT applications in centennial public libraries in Vidarbha region in Maharashtra. It also tries to substantiate the possible reasons behind the development gap in IT applications at these public libraries. In conclusion, the importance of IT applications and suggestions on its application are included.*

Keywords: *Public Libraries, Centennial Libraries, Information Technology, IT Applications, Libraries-Vidarbha-Maharashtra, Centennial Public Libraries*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of a modern public library has undergone a sea change and is almost beyond recognition. But the development of public library service has not been uniform all over the world and most of the countries including India have yet to go a long way to catch up with the most advanced in the provision of free public library services to all of their citizens.

Few of the existing public libraries were established almost centenary years ago and were expected to follow the above said technology and expected to be crowning the knowledge world in the society. But, actual picture of these libraries ought to be exact opposite and they found to be struggling for their existence in this world. Hence, a need arises to find out the reasons behind this development gap and to determine respective measures that shall be taken in order to revitalize those libraries in the changing technological era.

PUBLIC LIBRARY

According to the (UNESCO, 1995) Manifesto on Public Libraries (1994), "The public library is the local center of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason,

use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison. All age groups must find material relevant to their needs. Collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials. High quality and relevance to local needs and conditions are fundamental. Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human endeavor and imagination. Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures".

CENTENNIAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Centennial public libraries are the pillars of the public library system. They had crossed a century of their age and still serving their users with the information they need. There are thousands of newer and smaller public libraries spread all over. These descendant libraries look at these centennial libraries as an elderly person in the house. Centennial public libraries ought to be a light house for them to which they can concern and approach for help in times they felt need. The novice and smaller libraries follows the path of centennial libraries and functions in line with them. Eventually, it would add a sense of responsibility on the centennial libraries. Also, the expectations of providing better infrastructure and services to readers' community raises high on their side as it would be followed by the younger libraries. Centennial libraries are expected to have with them a huge experience, a treasure of old and rare books and the strength to sustain

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in every situation for years without break and disseminating the right information to the right user at right time and help them to develop their instinct by making them information literate and a consistent and prominent reader. As a treasure of knowledge, these centenary libraries were serving their readers for years and many more to come. Hence, Centennial public libraries have utmost importance and responsibility of providing information resources to their users as well as the public libraries community and thereby maintaining and preserving the study and reading culture alive in the age of information technology.

PUBLIC LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT IN VIDARBHA

Vidarbha is situated in the eastern part of Maharashtra. Vidarbha is said to be comparatively backward region in Maharashtra. Hence, Public library movement takes some more time to reach in Vidarbha.

In the ancient times, this area was known as 'Dandakaranya'. Later on, the 'Gond' community made habitation and established small kingdoms which made this area known as 'Gondvan'. There is not much existence of libraries and mentions about librarians in the record of history pertaining to this period. In the medieval period, especially during the Bhonsle rule, it was said that many Pundits and Vedic scholars were invited and made to write number of treatises. But unfortunately, most of these works must have been lost during the course of time. They may have got destroyed during that period. It also appears that no proper efforts were made to preserve those manuscripts in the library. Hence, in the earlier days, no libraries were developed. Book reproduction was also insignificant. It has been seen that the establishment of public libraries in this region was started only after the British advent in this region. The first library in Vidarbha was established in the year 1860 at Akola. During

1860-1895, number of public libraries came into existence at various places in Vidarbha.

Babuji Deshmukh Wachanalaya was the first library established in Akola. In 1863, Rashtriya Wachanalaya was established in Nagpur. After this, native general libraries were established at various places like Bhandara in 1864, Arvi in 1865, Amravati in 1867, Wardha in 1870 and other places too. In 1895, Rajaram Sitaram Dixit Library was established at Nagpur. This library plays an important role in promotion of public library movement in Vidarbha.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study are as follows:

- To take review of the present condition of Centennial Public Libraries in Vidarbha.
- To find out whether application of IT has been done in these Libraries and if yes to which level.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the study are,

- To study the present status of Centennial Public Libraries in Vidarbha.
- To study the status of application of IT services in these libraries.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of the study was confined to Centennial Public Libraries in Vidarbha Region. 20 such public libraries that have completed 100 years or more after establishment were found in this region. These 20 public libraries were as follows:

Table 1: Centennial Public Libraries in Vidarbha Region

Sr No.	Name of Library and Place	Establishment Year	Short Name hereafter
1	Babuji Deshmukh Wachanalaya, Akola, Dist. Akola	1860	Akola
2	Rashtriya Wachanalaya, Mahal, Nagpur	1863	Rashtriya Nagpur
3	Lokmanya Wachanalaya, Arvi, Dist. Wardha	1865	Arvi
4	Sarvajanic Wachanalaya, Paratwada, Tq. Achalpur, Dist. Amravati	1866	Paratwada
5	Amravati Nagar Wachanalaya, Amravati	1867	Amravati
6	Rajaram Sitaram Dixit Wachanalaya, Sitabildi, Nagpur	1869	RSD Nagpur
7	Satyanarayan Bajaj Sarvajanic Granthalaya, Wardha	1870	Wardha
8	Navyug Wachanalaya, Tehsil Road, Akot, Dist. Akola	1874	Akot
9	Nagar Wachanalaya, Darwha, Dist. Yavatmal	1885	Darwha
10	Deshbhakt Shankarrao Sarnaik Sarvajanic Wachanalaya, Pusad, Dist. Yavatmal	1886	Pusad
11	Nagar Wachanalaya, Yavatmal	1887	Yavatmal

12	Dastur Ratanji Granthalaya, Khamgaon, Dist. Buldhana	1889	Khamgaon
13	Sarvajanik Wachanalaya, Mehkar, Tq Mehkar, Dist. Buldhana	1890	Mehkar
14	Shri Sarvajanik Wachanalaya, Malakapur, Tq Malakapur, Dist. Buldhana	1891	Malakapur
15	Sarvajanik Wachanalaya, Bhandara, Dist. Bhandara	1891	Bhandara
16	Nagar Wachanalaya, Wani, Tq Wani, Dist. Yavatmal	1894	Wani
17	Sarvajanik Wachanalaya, Achalpur Shahar, Tq Achalpur, Dist. Amravati	1895	Achalpur
18	Mahatma Gandhi Sarvajanik Wachanalaya, Hinganghat, Dist. Wardha	1895	Hinganghat
19	Raje Vakatak Sarvajanik Wachanalaya, Washim, Dist. Washim	1899	Washim
20	Lokmanya Tilak Wachanalaya, Brahmapuri, Dist. Chandrapur	1903	Brahmapuri

METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUE

This study was mainly based on the present status of application of IT. Hence, survey method was used in the study to collect information. A survey was conducted to find out the current information regarding the subject. All the libraries mentioned in the above table were visited for collection of relevant data. For current information about the libraries, a questionnaire was designed and got filled up from these libraries.

All the libraries under study were frequently visited for collecting data relevant for the study. Printed literature regarding the libraries was also provided at most of the places. Nearly, all the important documents regarding the research were scanned or copied. They were used wherever necessary in the study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In analysis of the study, 20 libraries were studied as they were the centennial libraries in Vidarbha as per government

records. Questionnaire in a proper format were distributed among these libraries and were received along with the other available records regarding the historical and current situation of those libraries.

IT Based Library Services

In the age of Information and communication technology, libraries were also getting automated as various software were developed for automated library management. Public libraries were also involved in automation, but the ratio of public libraries was very less as compare to other libraries. Hence, a question was asked to find out the number of libraries that have adopted the latest technology to serve their users.

The responses from the libraries were collected and organized in a tabular form as given below :

Table 2: Information Technology based Services 1 – Service Available 0 – Service Not Available

Libraries	Computerised Circulation Service	Online Public Access Catalogue	Computerised Reference Service	CD-ROM Database	Internet Service	E-mail Service	Total
Akola	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rashtriya Nagpur	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
Arvi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paratwada	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Amravati	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
RSD Nagpur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wardha	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Akot	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
Darvha	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pusad	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yavatmal	1	1	1	0	1	1	5
Khamgaon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mehkar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Libraries	Computerised Circulation Service	Online Public Access Catalogue	Computerised Reference Service	CD-ROM Database	Internet Service	E-mail Service	Total
Malakapur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bhandara	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Wani	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Achalpur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hinganghat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Washim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brahmapuri	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3	4	5	1	3	3	

From this table it was found that though 50% of the libraries were having computers in working condition. Further, 75% of the libraries were not having any of the IT based services. Bhandara library responded of having all the IT based

services. Yavatmal library claimed of having 5 of the 6 IT based services mentioned in the questionnaire.

This table was further analysed and put in graphical and tabular form as shown below:

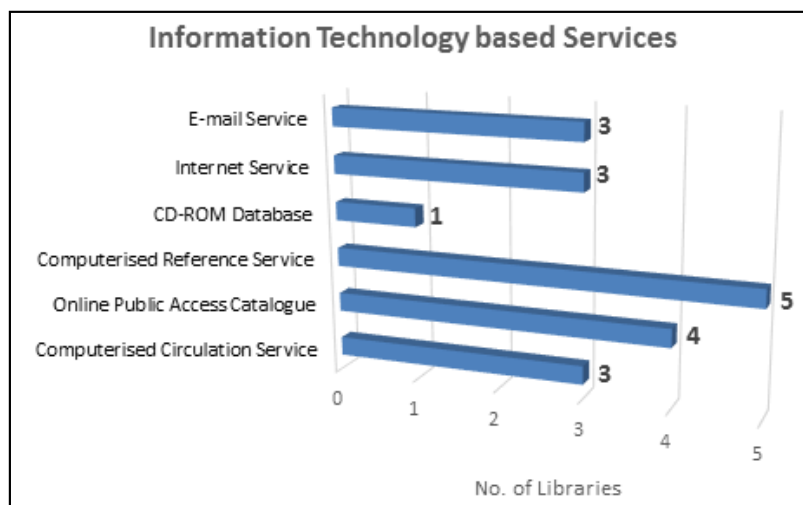


Fig. 1 : Information Technology Based Services

Table 3 : Information Technology Based Services

Sr. No.	IT based Services	No. of Libraries	Percentage
1	Computerised Circulation Service	3	15%
2	Online Public Access Catalogue	4	20%
3	Computerised Reference Service	5	25%
4	CD-ROM Database	1	5%
5	Internet Service	3	15%
6	E-mail Service	3	15%

- 25% of the libraries responded of having the automated reference service in their libraries. It was found that automated reference service was provided through available CDROMs or Internet by these libraries.

Mostly, the specific queries of the users were being sorted out with the help of internet. No evidences were found at actual visit, but it was found that these libraries were having a computer and internet connection and hence they may be providing these services to their users.

- 15% of the libraries responded of having the automated circulation, online public access catalogue services in their libraries. The 3 libraries viz. Amravati, Yavatmal and Bhandara were having a department of library and information science attached to them. This could be the reason behind automation work being done and was active in these libraries.
- 15% of the libraries responded of having the internet service in their libraries. At the actual visit it was found that, Yavatmal library had a department of library and information science attached to them in the

same building where internet services are provided to library science students for practical. No other separate facility of internet was found in this library for public library users. The other two libraries were providing these services through a single computer. A separate computer or internet section was not available at any of the libraries mentioned above.

- 15% of the libraries responded of having the Email services in their libraries. Email services are provided by libraries to inform its users about the new arrivals, sort out reference queries, late book return requests etc. In this service the libraries may send individual mails or in some cases, library software has the facility to send automated emails to the members of the libraries.

On actual visit, it was found that 50% of the libraries were having computers with them. But most of them were using it for office work such as generating letter, yearly reports etc. Most of the libraries were found far from automation

maybe due to lack of technical knowledge, technical human resource, funds etc.

AUTOMATION SOFTWARE AND STATUS

The invent of innovative technologies in IT field had stirred the paradigm shift in library and its services. Like academic libraries, public libraries are also going through the phase of transition due to the invent of technology. The main aim of the libraries is to provide fast and prompt services to its users. The technology has come forward to support libraries in fulfilling their ultimate aim to provide fast and accurate services to its users. A library may opt for library automation by application of any Library Management software thereby providing faster access to the library collection.

Hence, a question was asked to find out the status of automation in public libraries under study. The responses were collected and were put in a tabular format as given below:

Table 4: Automation Software and Status

Libraries	Software	Developer	Price	Automation Process
Akola	SLIM 21	Algorithms, Pune	137000	NO
Rashtriya Nagpur	INHOUSE	-	-	NO
Arvi	No Software	-	-	-
Paratwada	No Software	-	-	-
Amravati	SLIM 21	Algorithms, Pune	137000	YES
RSD Nagpur	INHOUSE	-	-	NO
Wardha	No Software	-	-	-
Akot	Navin Sulabh Granthalaya	Mangesh Alwad, Pune	25000	NO
Darvha	No Software	-	-	-
Pusad	No Software	-	-	-
Yavatmal	SLIM 21	Algorithms, Pune	98000	YES
Khamgaon	No Software	-	-	-
Mehkar	No Software	-	-	-
Malakapur	No Software	-	-	-
Bhandara	I-Lib	Bhushan Mahajan, Bhandara	15000	YES
Wani	No Software	-	-	-
Achalpur	No Software	-	-	-
Hinganghat	No Software	-	-	-
Washim	No Software	-	-	-
Brahmapuri	NewLib	Wordpro, Nagpur	55000	NO

This table was further analysed and represented in the graphical and tabular form as given hereunder:

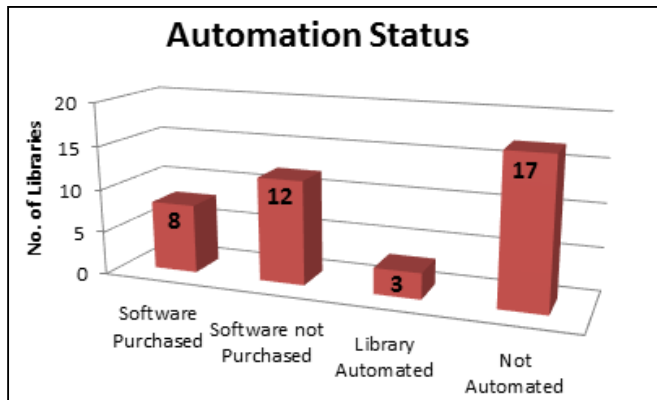


Fig. 2: Automation Status

Table 5 : Automation Status

Automation Status	No of libraries	Percentage
Software Purchased	8	40%
Software not Purchased	12	60%
Library Automated	3	15%
Not Automated	17	85%

From the above graph and table, it can be stated that,

1. 40% of the libraries have purchased the library management software. 60% of the libraries were not having the library software.
2. Only 15% of the libraries have automated their library with the help of library management software. 85% libraries were struggling to get acquainted with the innovative technology.

It was found that 60% of the libraries had not initiated for automation of library functions. The first reason may be because they were receiving fewer amounts of grants from the government and it would be difficult for them to purchase the new technology. But, few libraries which were economically sound enough were also found reluctant of applying the latest technology in their libraries. The other reasons may include technology phobia, un-availability of technical staff and lack of interest of library management committee towards automation.

Further, the table 4 was analysed for finding out which software were mostly preferred by the libraries for their library automation. The following graph shows the status of software purchased by the libraries under study:

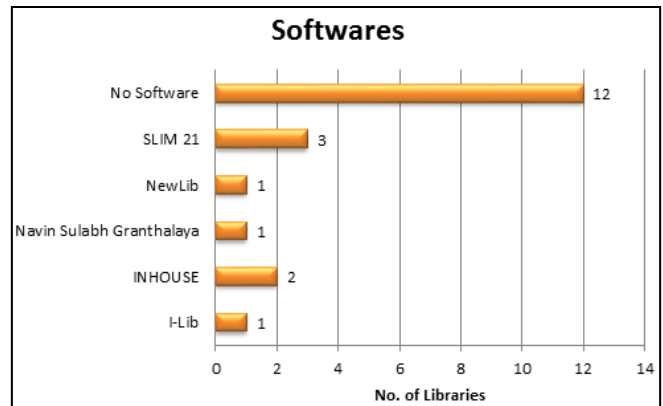


Fig. 3 : Library Management Software

Table 6: Library Management Software

Software	No. of Libraries	%
I-Lib	1	5%
INHOUSE	2	10%
Navin Sulabh Granthalaya	1	5%
NewLib	1	5%
SLIM 21	3	15%
No Software	12	60%

From the above graph and table, it can be found out that 15% of the libraries had accepted SLIM21 for automation of their libraries. 10% of the libraries get developed the in-house software for their libraries. The remaining 3 libraries had selected I-lib, Navin Sulabh Granthalaya and Newlib library automation software.

FUTURE PLANS

In the last question, the centennial public libraries under study were asked about their future plans in respect of Automation, Internet services and digitization of rare books. These options were further divided into three stages as:

- Already completed the optioned work.
- Optioned work in progress.
- No plans yet about the said option.

The responses to this question were recorded and a table was generated as below :

Table 7: Future Plans 2 – Already Completed 1 – In Process 0 – Not Planned Yet

Libraries	Automation	Internet Service	Digitisation of Rare Books
Akola	1	1	0
Rashtriya Nagpur	1	2	1

Libraries	Automation	Internet Service	Digitisation of Rare Books
Arvi	1	0	0
Paratwada	1	1	0
Amravati	2	1	1
RSD Nagpur	1	0	1
Wardha	1	1	0
Akot	1	1	0
Darvha	1	1	0
Pusad	1	0	0
Yavatmal	2	2	1
Khamgaon	1	0	0
Mehkar	1	0	0
Malakapur	1	0	1
Bhandara	2	2	1
Wani	1	0	0
Achalpur	1	1	0
Hinganghat	1	0	0
Washim	1	0	0
Brahmapuri	1	0	0

This table was further formulated in the graphical form as given below:

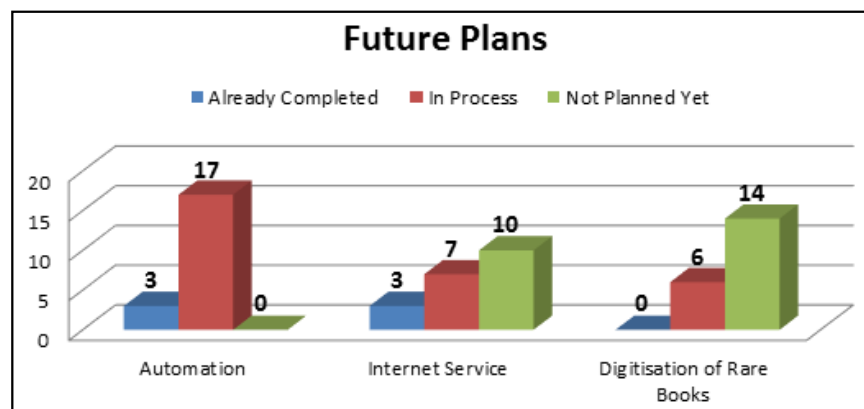


Fig. 4: Future Plans

From the above graph, it was found that,

1. Automation process includes purchase of computer system and other related hardware, software, installation of software, data entry of reading resources and actual use of automated system in circulation of books. The most 85% of the libraries were still struggling to automate their libraries. 15% libraries including Amravati, Yavatmal and Bhandara had completed the automation process and are circulating books through library software.
2. A step further it was asked whether these libraries were planning to provide internet services to their users. The most 50% of the libraries responded that they have not yet planned about the internet services in their libraries. 35% of the libraries were in between the process to start internet services while only 15% of the libraries were already having the internet services in their libraries.
3. The last part of this question was regarding the digitization of rare books. As the libraries had attained

centenary years of age, they were expected of having some rare literature which can be digitized and made available through electronic media. The most 70% of the libraries have denied of any future plans for digitization maybe due to different reasons as lack of space, unknown about the value of rare books, books not used for years, some libraries were put on fire etc. Some of them unknowingly discarded the rare collection from their library. 30% of the libraries responded that there are thinking of digitization of rare books available with them in near future.

CONCLUSIONS

Centennial public libraries in Vidarbha region ought to follow what is necessary and mandatory for them to receive the government grants. Most of the libraries were not ready to accept the innovations in the library science field. It was also to be noted that the centennial public libraries having attached department of library and information science were more developed than other similar libraries. Further, it was found that most of the libraries were having computers with them. But most of them were using it for office work such as generating letter, yearly reports etc. Most of the libraries were found far from automation maybe due to lack of technical knowledge, technical human resource, funds etc. It was also found that most of the libraries had not initiated for automation of library functions. The first reason maybe because they were receiving fewer amounts of grants from the government and it would be difficult for them to purchase the new technology. But, few libraries which were economically sound enough were also found reluctant of applying the latest technology in their libraries. The other reasons may include technology phobia, unavailability of technical staff and lack of interest of library management committee towards automation. Hence, the centenary libraries need to be motivated to develop and change themselves according the innovative technological developments and services and provide better services to their users.

SUGGESTIONS

The major suggestions for the study are as follows:

1. These libraries shall strive to start automation process at top priority thereby implement the automated circulation and other services for their users.
2. These libraries shall serve as the local center of information and a gateway to national and global knowledge providing fair access to knowledge and information to as many users as possible. Hence, they should provide Internet access to link the local library to national and global information.

3. Institutional repositories of reports, institutional publications can be developed using open source digital library software and make it available to the library users.
4. Digitization of rare resources available in the library shall be done after automation. Open source digital library software can be used here for digitization and dissemination of these resources.
5. Any open source web-enabled library management software like E-Granthalaya or Koha should be acquired, installed in a single server at a common place and clients shall be provided to all public libraries for facilitating automation and networking.
6. Photocopying/Reprography services shall be provided by the library by purchasing a dedicated copier for their own premises.

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