

## Public Libraries Legislation

*Public Library Legislation in Pakistan: Textual Sources* compiled with an introduction by Mumtaz Ali Anwar. Lahore: Library and Information Management Academy, 1996, ISBN 969-8234-02-0, 287pp.

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Public libraries are an important tool in supporting government efforts to improve the quality of education and reduce the level of illiteracy. Yet, as often pointed out by the Pakistan Library Association, Pakistan has not produced systematic public library legislation to create a nation-wide public library system. The book under review, in a sense, reveals the history of public library legislation in Pakistan.

Mumtaz Ali Anwar has compiled a total of 109 items with full citations for each document. It is spread over 254 pages and includes: extracts of legislative provisions related to public libraries, executive orders, extracts of related professional writings, resolutions passed by various bodies and full texts of actual and proposed laws. These items could also be subsumed, as is done in one-page index, under five-fold categories: executive initiatives and orders; legislative provisions; legislative proposals; professional input (group as well as individual); and, citizen support. These documents span a period of 186 years (1811-1996) and are presented in a chronological order. Out of 109 items included, 12 are from the pre-independence period (i.e. before 1947), 42 documents belong to the period when Pakistan was composed of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan; and the remaining 55 documents cover the post-1971 Pakistan. Published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the independence of Pakistan, the compilation allows the library professionals to analyze their achievements so far, and should help them to chalk out an alternative strategy for a countrywide library system.

The purpose of this compilation is to bring the scattered documents in one place and make them easily accessible to those interested in promoting the cause of public libraries in Pakistan. Arranged in chronological order, these documents also narrate the history of the development of public libraries in Pakistan. Mumtaz Ali Anwar, however, wanted additionally "to demonstrate the wide gap between the intentions of the ruling elite and the ideals held by librarians in Pakistan" (p. 11).

Mumtaz Anwar demonstrates a clear understanding of the complex power structure of Pakistani society and argues that the failure of Pakistan's ruling elite to pass legislation for the establishment of nation-wide public libraries is not by chance or default, but rather by design. He argues that the power elite in Pakistan, composed largely of the feudal lords, manipulates the system to maintain the status quo. They would thwart any attempt at the spread of education and thus the establishment of a knowledge-based society as it would threaten their own economic power and undermine political authority.

Mumtaz Anwar goes further and argues that there is no hope for the development of public libraries in Pakistan unless people having their roots in the middle class occupy the ruling institutions. One support for this hypothesis is the six-year (1951-57) National Plan of Educational Development in Pakistan. It targeted 524 public libraries all over Pakistan but allocated the lion's share of 484 to the middle-class-led East Pakistan; 22 for the federal capital of Karachi and the remaining 18 were to be spread all over the four provinces of West Pakistan. Likewise, the military, dictatorial regimes of the middle class rooted Ayub Khan and Ziaul Haque were more favourable to the cause of education and libraries. On the contrary, the bureaucracy which enjoys the benefits embedded in a feudal political system militates against educational opportunities for the masses. Given this reality of inimical feudal and bureaucratic forces, Mumtaz Anwar thinks it prudent to make maximum use of the laws supporting public libraries at the provincial levels, especially in Sind and Punjab where such laws already exist. The resulting achievements will become a base to mobilise support for legislation, in future, to create a country-wide system of public libraries.

All in all, the book is a good source for the student of library legislation. The advice to the library profession not to chase emotional and impractical ideals but to study history scientifically and to actualise the potentialities that pragmatism offers should help the cause of public libraries in Pakistan.