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Poor reading and library culture in Pakistan

By Abid Hussain



Without a reading and library culture, the nation cannot move forward

Reading culture refers to the attitudes, behaviours, and practices within a community or society, whereas library culture reflects how frequently individuals in a society or community use library resources. Both reading and library cultures encourage people to read regularly, whether for leisure, education or personal grooming. These cultures play a crucial role in shaping individuals' and communities' intellectual and educational development.

Unfortunately, like other developing countries, Pakistan also faces the same challenges. A robust reading culture includes a wide range of reading materials such as books, magazines, newspapers and online content. Readings explore new horizons and take you to the height of your success. Dr. Seuss (American children's author,

novelist and cartoonist) rightly said, “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.”

The cultural environment has a deep impact on human personalities. An ecological reading culture injects a hundred ideas into minds. The library is the best place for readings on leisure, education and personal grooming. Walter Savage Landor, an English writer and poet, articulated that “Nothing is pleasanter than exploring a library.”

Both reading and library culture are interconnected, as libraries are essential institutions which foster a positive reading environment. Libraries provide access to a wide range of reading material, create space for community engagement, and contribute positively to the community’s intellectual and cultural life. A society with a sound reading culture and rich libraries can lead a nation in a more informed, educated, and progressive direction.

In short, sustained effort, community involvement, and constant strategies based on the population’s evolving needs will truly promote reading and library culture in Pakistan. There are multifaceted challenges to Pakistan in both reading and library culture. Here are some key reasons why Pakistan lacks poor reading and library culture. Socioeconomic factors include limited access to education, leading Pakistan to a lower inclination towards readings. The lack of educational opportunities affects the literacy rates of our youth. The other factor includes economic challenges; the people facing hiked prices prioritize basic needs over educational and cultural pursuits. People do not find time to visit libraries or buy books for reading. Infrastructure and Resource Constraints: in Pakistan, most districts need well-established and well-equipped libraries, and the absence of adequate infrastructure hinders people’s access to reading materials and library services.

Limited availability of books: in Pakistan, libraries in some regions lack sufficient books to fulfil the demands of the local communities. Such limitations prevent people from visiting libraries and reading books of their choice. Similarly, in every district,

very few book suppliers exist, and these do not offer the desired books as per the demand of their society; this can also affect the reading and library culture.

Cultural priorities: the entire culture of Pakistan needs to have reading habits; in every big city, you will find cinemas, hotels and parks, but very rarely can you find a library for the general public; this can also affect the reading and library culture. Most people in developing countries prefer the latest fashion instead of buying books. The language barrier also hinders our society's reading habits; very few people can read and speak English, and libraries need cultural books in Sindhi, Pashto, Urdu, Hindko, and so on. This can also affect the reading habits of our youngsters. Technological changes have badly affected the reading habits of our youngsters; every individual in Pakistan has a costly smartphone and full internet access. They are browsing entertainment stuff other than reading materials; this culture has left no stone unturned in Pakistan's decline of reading habits. Lack of awareness and of promotion of library services hinder the reading habits among the masses in Pakistani culture. What is to be done? The question, however, arises in minds.

The Pakistani community should be engaged by conducting outreach programmes in schools, colleges, and universities to raise awareness about the importance of reading habits. Libraries play a pivotal role in promoting education and literacy programmes; they should strive to initiate literacy programmes to promote reading habits—collaborate with local community leaders, educational institutions and NGOs to organize reading events and workshops. Digital engagement like library websites, social media platforms and other similar online services may bring the community together for readings. Multilingual collections at every shop and library will further enhance the reading habits in Pakistani communities. Promotions of local authors, study spaces, mobile libraries, and so on are the best tools to empower the youth of Pakistan in terms of reading and library culture.

In short, sustained effort, community involvement, and constant strategies based on the population's evolving needs will truly promote reading and library culture in Pakistan.

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