LIBRARIES IN DELHI

Old Libraries in Delhi

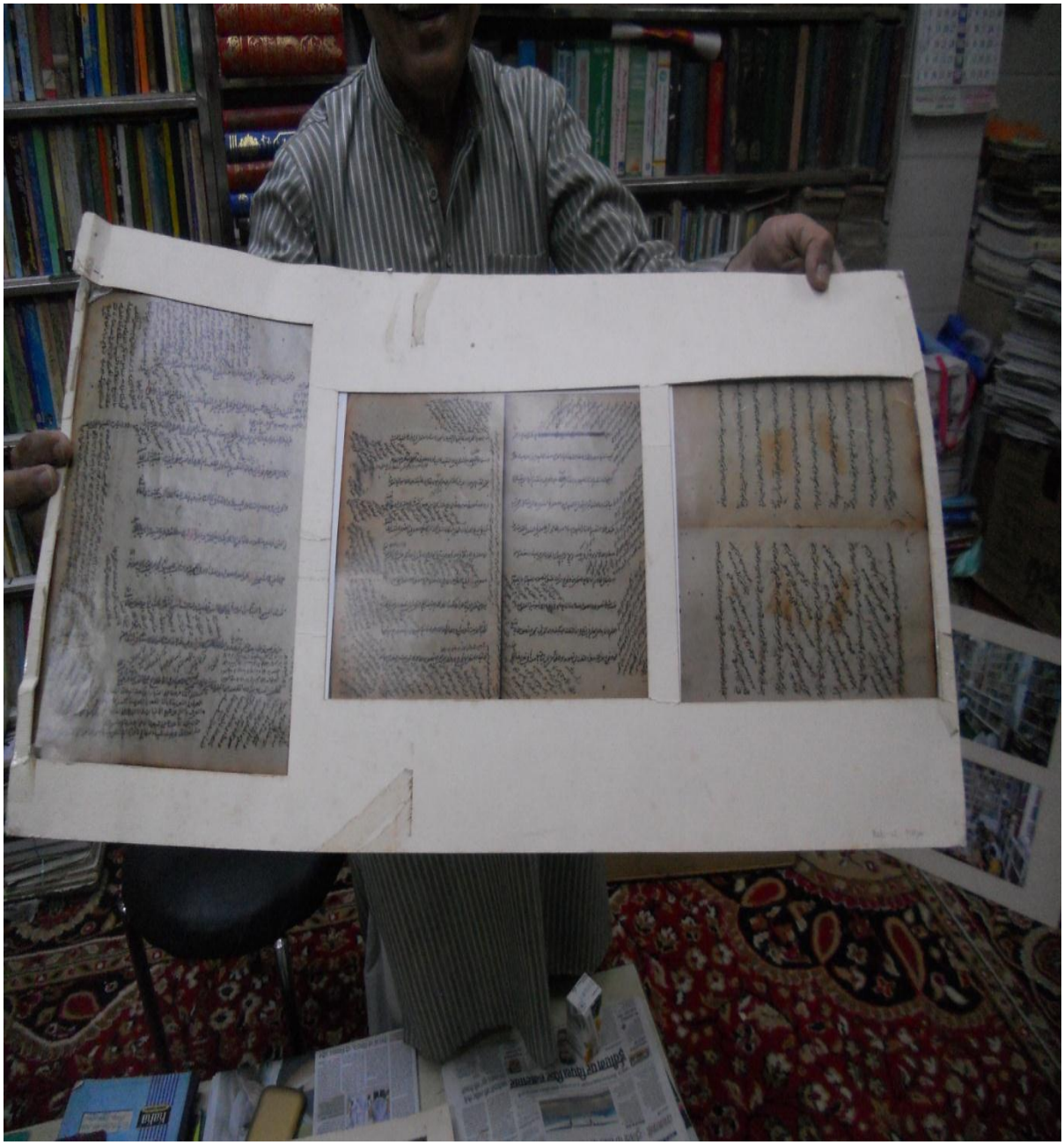
Old Delhi is a fascinating place, not just for foodies or those interested in period architecture, but for lovers of architecture, but lovers of literature. Here in old Delhi we have many old libraries. Located amid this chaos, are several libraries that date back well over a century. Housing some rare books and manuscripts, these libraries are a treasure trove for researchers. The buildings they are located in are landmarks and of architectural importance as well. Sadly, these libraries see few serious visitors, save for researcher and students while the union and state government have set aside funds for their keep up, it's a constant struggle to keep up with the times. As people's reading habits change and technology makes huge strides, these libraries appear to face a bleak future. It seems like the only people who have kept any public library alive in the city are students or some tenacious newspaper-readers. In this research I will try to capture the history of these libraries in Delhi and their present situation. I will also look at the relevance of these library for common masses in the past and how it's changed. What kind of aid these libraries were getting when they established and what is the present situation of the management?

Shah Waliullah Library

This library is one of the smallest libraries in Delhi situated at narrow lanes behind the Jama Masjid. This place we searched for is not even listed on Google maps. If someone has to reach there one has to ask for Pahari imli beyond bulbule khana. Shah waliullah library is a tiny room over flowing with rare books. The library named after shah walliullah, the Islamic scholar, who first translated the Quran to Urdu. The library was founded in 1987 by group of young individuals, who formed Delhi Youth Welfare Associations (DYWA) to help out individuals when communal differences in old Delhi led to a four day curfew. The group does much more than running a library. It provides free

education to children, gives them counselling and helps apply for colleges and sometimes pays their fees also.

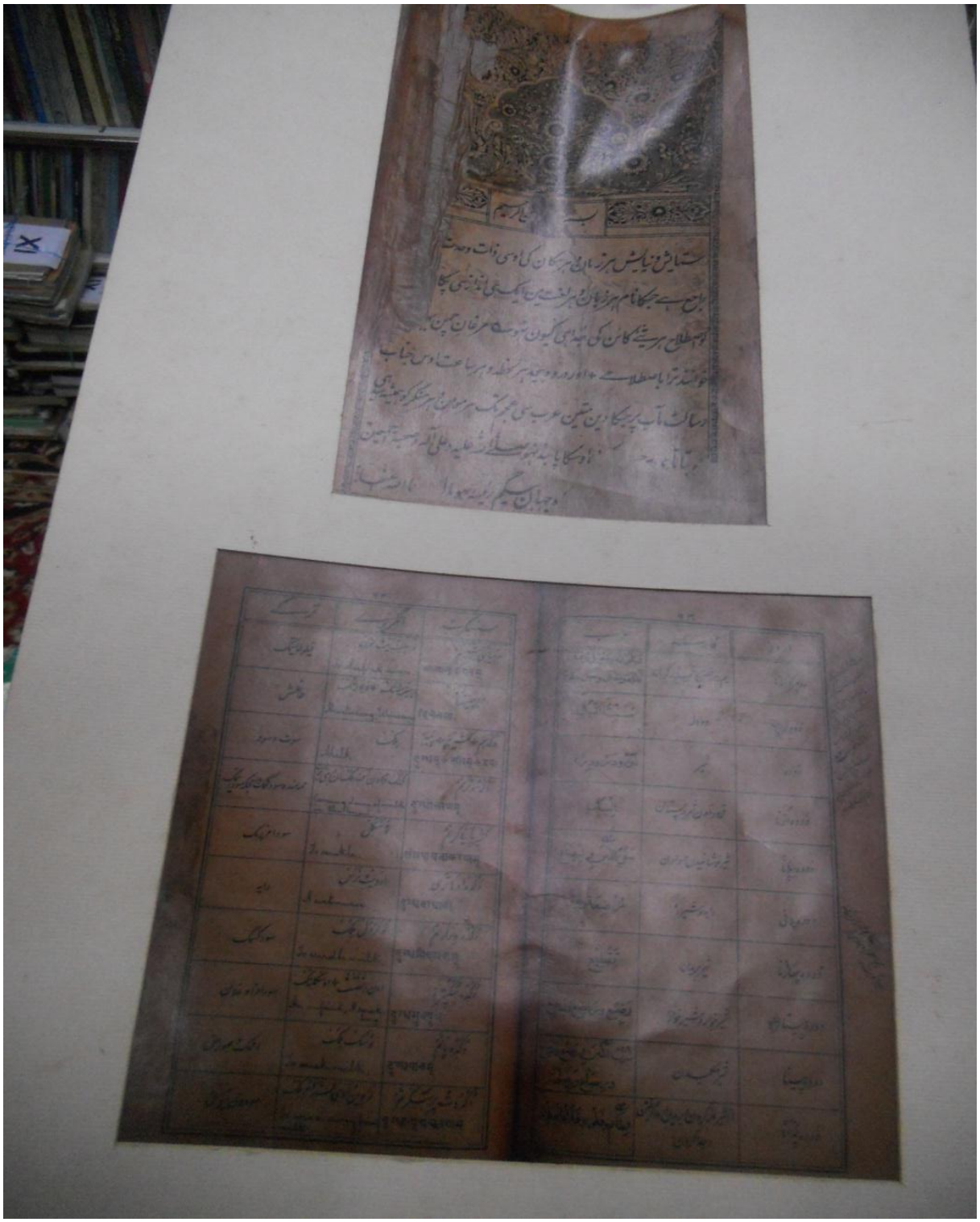
The library started with personal donations from members of DYWA but now more and more people have started donating books. Today this collection has touched about 20,000 books with exquisites like a century-old Quran, which has Bismillah written in 114 styles and an 80-year old Quran. The oldest book in the library is a 600- year old Arabian book on logic. A prized possession is a book of poetry written by the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, in whose presence the was printed at Red fort. Interestingly, towards the end of the book are poetry written in Punjabi. The digital copies of these rare books are available for general public and most of the originals have been carefully wrapped and kept away until a new place can be found for them



Translation of Ramayana in Persian Language.

Main Area of the shahwaliullah Library.

The library is brimming with books and is in urgent need of space for them. In all these years, officials of the union ministry of culture visited the library once to wrap these books. Beyond that, no efforts have been made by the government to preserve or help the library. This place is known only because of the hospitable and generous caretakers there. Their love and fascination for knowledge and books has kept library and other operations alive all these years.



Writings and collection of translated words from Persian to Urdu.

Bhahdur Shah Zafar’s work published at Royal press at Red fort.

ec

HAZRAT
PUBLIC LIBRARY
Ph. : 23265120
1936 - Pahari Imli, Chuna Walan, Jama Masjid, Delhi-6
TIMING : 9.30 PM - 1 PM, 2.30 PM - 5 PM, 9.30 PM - 11 PM

Collections

Shah waliullah library have huge collection of books in Urdu, English, Persian Manuscripts, translated texts from different languages.

History, Geography books in Urdu donated by different people. And new collection also

Old literature in Urdu, Persian, and Punjabi also

anuscript of Bahadur Shah Zafar poetry which was published at the royal press of Red Fort

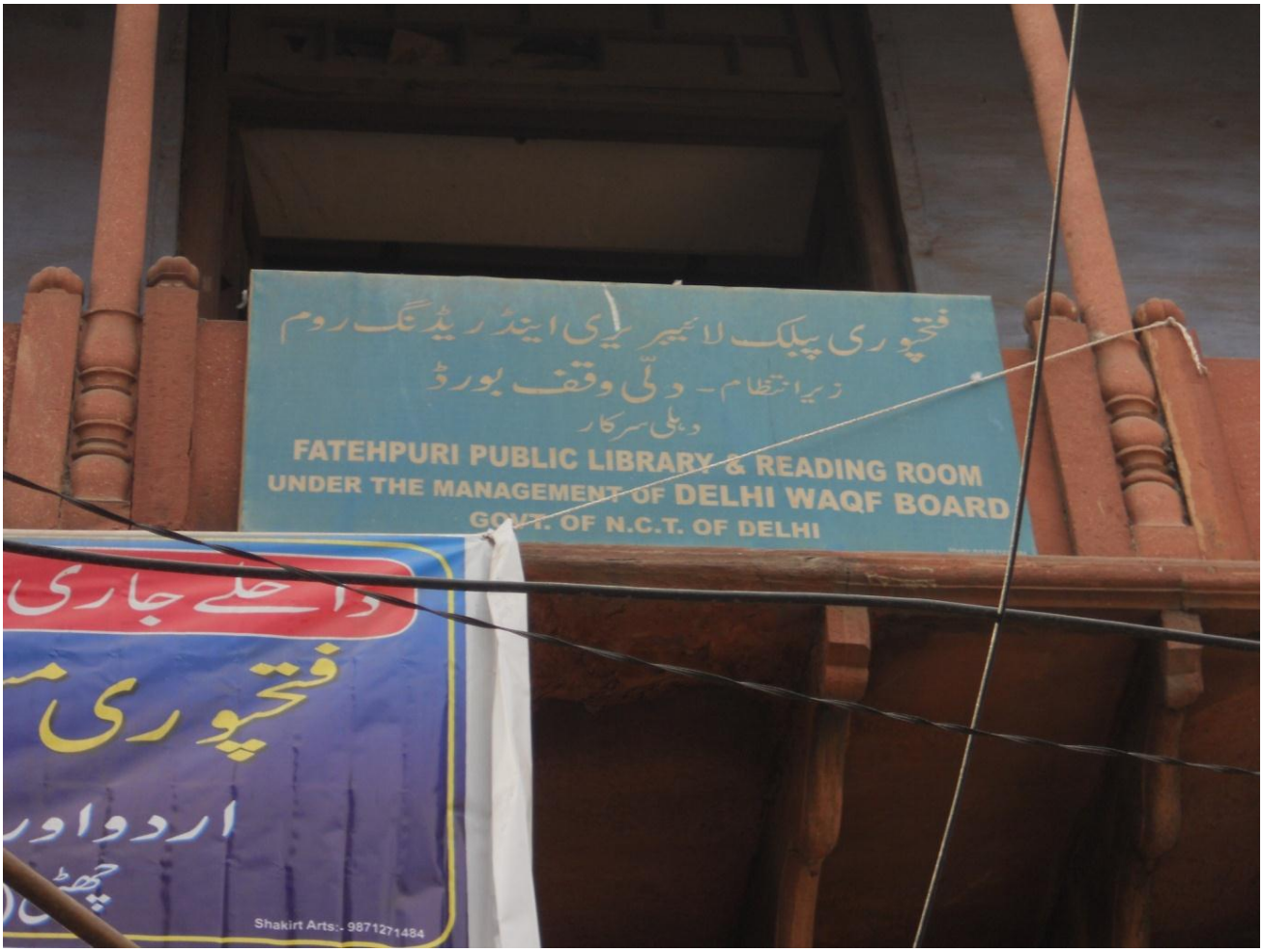
Library also have Mythological texts translated into Urdu and Persian and old copies of Quran.

Members of the library also have a collection of different contemporary courses for commerce, science and humanities. And books related to competition exams for the local students.

Location

Library located at Pahadi Imli, churi walan, Jama Masjid.

Nearest Metro station- Jama Masjid Gate no 1



Fatehpuri Library

This library is part of the Fatehpuri Masjid courtyard, built in 1650 by Fatehpuri Begum, one of emperor shah Jahan's wife. One can easily spot the Mughals lineage from the use of red stone and iconic Mughal arches in the building. The library entrances are difficult to spot even after reaching fatehpuri Masjid. It's as if everyone has forgotten the library, including the courtyard it resides in, the corridor holding the library accords a stunning view of the whole courtyard.

AL-FALAH
UNIVERSITY

The library holds a vast collection of books from pre partition era in all subjects- English, Hindi, Urdu, Arabian, Persian and Farsi. The library has not issued any book for several years and is hardly in a position to be called a library. It has not received any funds and is slowly fading into oblivion. It's difficult to find any mention of the library in the internet and has not received any media attention. The only people who visit the library are nearby residents, who came there to read the daily newspaper, with the exception of occasional students or researcher, who drop by for reference.

Inside veiw of the fatehpuri Library.

Fatehpuri Masjid complex veiw from Library.

Collection

Fatehpuri Library have no of books, history of Urdu literature, Urdu texts, Persian texts, Farsi texts,

Manuscripts in Arabic, Mathematics, Logic books,

Collection of old novels in English, travelogues.

Diaries of Islamic Scholars from nineteenth century.

Location

Straight to the Fatehpuri Masjid form Lahori Gate road Library Situated in the premises of fatehpuri mosque.

Nearest Metro Red fort or Chnadni chock.

Main Enterance of the Marwari Library.

Marwari Library

The story of Marwari Library, situated near Gurudwara Sis Ganj Shaib, is not very different. The library was built by a Marwari seth Kedar nath Goynka in 1915 and has been visited by many notable personalities from Mahatma Gandhi to vijayalakshmi Pandit. Today the library receives about 100 visitors every day, most of them students or people who come to read the newspaper and preparing for government exams. The collection of books mostly comprises Hindi literature and rare early- and mid twentieth century periodicals. The library houses a collection of 35,000 books, among which there are many first

editions of books like Dharmvir Bharti's sooraj ka satwan Ghoda. One can find the earliest edition of the magazines like Hans and Time. The most prized

This Library in the earlier days was one of the most important centres for the political and social activities. Many decisions of national movements taken from this library by nationalist leaders. Now this Library run by Marwari charitable trust and Delhi municipal corporation jointly.

Patrons of the Marwari Library.

Today this library is just not a public library even this is a important monument or symbol of national and historical importance.

Reading Hall of the Marwari Library.

List of the donors of the Marwari Library.

Collection

All most thirty five thousand books collection with Magazines.

Old Hindi Books, Hindi Magazines,

Marwari's history Text from Marwari writers.

Old Manuscripts, Mythological texts Published from Naval kishor Press and Geeta press Gorakhpur.

Books on Economics, Geography, fine arts, children Literature,

Currently Library has Magazines of General studies for the competitive Examination

Location

Main Street from Lahori Gate to Fatehpuri just opposite to Sis Ganj Gurudwara up to Haldiram café.

Nearest Metro station- Red fort, Chandni chock.

Hardayal Municipal Public Library

The library presents a completely different scenario from the streets of old Delhi. Built in 1862 by the British and named Lawrence institute library, it resides in lush green surroundings, untouched by the chaos around. The tranquilly with in this historical library is unique. Hardayal library is the oldest public library in the city and has gone through several names before it was named Hardayal library in 1970, to honour freedom fighter Lala Hardayal. It's interesting to note that the library was named Harding municipal library in 1916 and then reanimated to honour the man who attacked Viceroy Harding. The

library is like a treasure trove of the books with more than 1.7 lakh books of which 7000 are rare ones. Their books are not available for public viewing and can be only availed after submitting a letter to the librarian. Other than these are 20 books, which are just one of their kind. This collection includes a copy of Travail Begvenne's relation of some year printed in 1634; a handwritten Quran by Mughal emperor Aurangzeb; and Persian translated Mahabharata by Abul Raizi.

These books are out of bound for general public and are only displayed on special occasions. Somehow times has managed to stand still inside Hardayal Library since the British left. One can still find hand written catalogues, humongous ledgers and accounts calculated down to passé. However, the library has not been able to buy a single book due to a shortage of money. A

year back, Delhi development authority set aside 3 corers for the preservation of the books and the building. The north Delhi municipal corporation(NDMC) handed over the task of preparing the detailed project report for its restoration to the Indian national trust for Art and cultural heritage(INTACH) The decision was taken after much persuasion and intervention of former Delhi lieutenant Governor Najeeb Jung. A sum of 50 Lakh total budget was set aside for the preservation of the books and equal amount was to be spent in digitalising the rare books. A year later no effort has been made to digitlise the books or preserves the rare texts. A walk into narrower lanes of old Delhi will let you know that Hardayal Library isn't only library that has been perishing in the city.

Collection

Old text in Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Arabic,

History books, Geography books, census Data,

Economic texts from colonial time, Economic Planning Record after independence

Old Magazines, Traveller's Records

Old Visitor’s booklet,

Location

Behind the kotwali police station, Chandni chock

Nearest Metro, Chandni chock

Dara Shikoh Library

Main gate of the library which is now under construction.

Dara Shikoh Library

Dara Shikoh(1615-1659) was the favourite son of the Mughal emperor of shah Jahan. He was believed to be the successor to the Mughal throne. Like his father shah Jahan, he also exhibited a keen interest in art, literature and architecture. He made a mansion of his own near Kashmir gate, which housed the famous Dara shikoh Library established in 1637. Once a personal library of Mughal prince, today this library lies on the verge of decay, inside the campus of Ambedkar University Delhi. If you are on Lothain road and going towards red fort, behind the row of shops on your left is a significant centre for learning. Earlier it was the campus of Guru Govind Singh University. Now Indira Gandhi women's technical university is also situated in this campus area.

The library was believed to be multiple purposes during the Mughal era. Now library has been converted into a makeshift museum under the protection and care of the archaeological survey of India. An old but renovated building sporting a mix Mughal and British architecture is the proud legacy of Dara Shikoh. After the prince death, the library building changed hands several times. The death of Dara in 1659 also meant to destruction of his library as it was

given to the subedar of Lahore, Ali Mardan Khan. The building further changed hands before finally being captured by the British in 1803. According to historian Swapna Liddle, it was given to Donna Juliana, the Portuguese governess of the royal Mughal children and the name behind Sarai Julena near Jamia Milia Islamia. It remained in her family till Nawab Sardurjung purchased it in mid-18th century. After that, the building morphed into first British residency occupied by sir David ochterlony and then in subsequent years into government college, a municipal school, office of the state archaeology department. Liddle said that ochterlony, after buying the building with personal funds, transformed it by incorporating European features while revamping the building. “The original fluted pillars and arches were covered over to produce a façade of pillars in neoclassical style” explained liddle. In 2011, the Sheila Dikshit government decided to convert the library into a city museum in collaboration with INTACH with “the intention of preserving and promoting cultural heritage” He was an erudite scholar, had a huge collection of books. An example of his penmanship is his translation of several Upanishads from Sanskrit to Persian.

Inside gate of the dara shikoh Library Reading hall.

BOOKS/COLLECTION

Old Persian text belongs to Mughal Empire

Sanskrit translation of the Upanishads

Arabic language books, Mathematics, philosophy, Astronomy

Many Mughal Farman’s related to Delhi

LOCATION

Current location of the library is at the Vikas Bhawan part II, at INA

½ Kilometre from Kashmir gate on Lothian road,

Time to visit; open on all days, 10.00 am-5.00 pm

How to reach there

Tourist can either take local buses from various points within the city to reach this place, which is located near Kashmir Gate inter bus terminal.

Nearest metro station; Kashmir gate

Interviews/Conversations

First conversation with Mr Sufiyan who runs a blog on Delhi and associated with shah walliullah Library.

Q- How you Look at all these old Libraries in Delhi?

All these libraries are very important part of the old and past reading culture of the city. And right now these libraries playing an important role in maintain this culture of reading in their local areas. Local people and students come here every day sit and read. Researcher from different universities comes here in the search of old books and documents and foreign students also come here for their research purpose. So over all these libraries are the important part of old Delhi and the culture of this city.

Q- When you associated with the shah waliullah Library? And what kind of work you do for the progress of this Library?

I live in this area where this library is situated and by profession I am an engineer but I have a huge interest in history and culture of Delhi. I associated with the group who founded this library few years ago and for the library program. In the local area we provide coaching, counselling to the local children and student and also provide study material to them. Library has collected many new books which related to the sally bus of college going student and also for those who are preparing for the competition exams. We also have huge material on history of Delhi and British for the researchers. Library progress in terms of books is really good but we have very limited space.

Q- Can you tell us what residents of old Delhi think about these Libraries?

Here in the local area mostly people are happy because of this library because library helps lots of student of local area.

Q- What do you think about the present conditions of these Libraries?

We members of DYWA collect money through donation by the members of the group. But this library is not taking any financial help from government. Presently library has very limited space. We need bigger space to put all the collection at one place and for the setup of a big reading room. These are the main challenges we are facing. If we look at the fatehpuri library and marwari library these libraries also have very limited space. Shortage of funds is also an important issue for these libraries because government is not helping and donations are not enough to maintain the library in proper manner. These libraries have shortage of staff and facilities. Like Xerox, scanning, restoration and preservation facilities of the documents.

Q- How will you describe the reading culture of Delhi?

It is difficult to comment on the reading culture of Delhi because since these libraries established in Delhi during the colonial time or before that Delhi was the cosmopolitan city. And the because of its cosmopolitan nature different type of literature came to Delhi in different languages. Here we have Muslim history texts in the libraries as well as the ancient Sanskrit texts also. Urdu, Persian literature and translated texts of other languages.

In conversation with Mr Aryan, Assistant librarian and care taker of the Marwari library.

Q- For How Many years you are working here in the Marwari Library?

I am working here for the last 25 years.

Q- Do you think being one of the oldest libraries in Delhi Marwari library has its relevance in today's time?

Yes off course it has great relevance even today, first of all this library have many old books and magazines which is important for the researchers. And secondly this library have big reading hall for the daily commuters and readers. Many students and local people come here for the reading purpose. Local traders also come here to read newspapers, and old people also come here for the reading newspaper.

Q- This library has membership system or you allow readers for free?

No we have a proper membership system here Rs 500/ per year for one member. And we also have daily commuters who just come for the newspaper reading. Every day we almost have 100 readers and we have 250 registered members of the library. A researcher also needs to take the membership first then we allow him/her to look at the material which is available here.

Q- Tell us about the historical importance of the library?

This library was founded in 1915, when national movement was going on many wealthy Marwari traders gave donation to the library that time. This place becomes the one of the important centre for the meetings and discussions at that time in Delhi. Many local freedom fighters sit here and make their plans. Many people big national leader's visits this place at that time. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Ganga dhar tilak, And many others also.

Q- How library gets its funding and funds for other expenditure?

Library is governed by Marwari Trust and whatever expenditure of the library is like salaries of the employees, books purchasing, Manintance, all these things managed by the donations given the Marwari society and its members. This library is not taking any kind of support from the Government. All the expense

managed by the trust. We have long list of donors from various places not even Delhi.

Q- How can we say that these libraries are symbols of the cultural heritage of chandni chowk and old Delhi?

Well, this library was established in 1915, almost hundred years have completed. And this was the part of national movement in Delhi and also the part of the great reading culture of the city. So that it is the symbol of the cultural heritage of the city. And all these other libraries also make chandni chock a cultural place. Like old hardayal library, fatehpuri library in the complex of fatehpuri Masjid. And city shahjahanabad also a world heritage city and its monuments like red fort, jama masjid are big heritage. Other important thing is that these libraries are not just the simple library but all these places are the important treasure of the old documents, books, texts, which is important because all these things have something to tell us about our past and important events.

During My visit to these library I have meet few students and visitors of the library and try to ask them about the library.

Vishal, is pursuing B.C.A form IP university and he regularly come to hardayal library because he leaves around this area. He sits in the library and prepare for his exam. He told me about the section of hardayal library on computer books which he used for his studies regularly. He also used other facilities of the library like he read newspapers here and also take part in seminars sometimes organised by these libraries.

Chandrpal, who had a shop at chandni chock, says he comes here at Marwari library daily for 30 mins to read different newspaper to get all the information about country. And he is doing same thing for the last 20 years.

'Marwari library is like second home to me' says kiran who lives at katra neel at chandni chock and preparing for the teaching exams. She said she have proper membership of the library and come here 5 days in a week and read here in the reading room and use this facility with joy. Kiran also says it is difficult to prepare from home but we have here Marwari library that's why she is able to do so.

Wasim, pursuing B.Com, from university of Delhi. He lives at Pahri Imli at choori walan. He also knows sufiyan who associated with shahwalliullah library. He says sufiyan was the one, who introduced me to that library and asked me to come here for reading. However this library has very limited space for sitting but have all the books which are related to my syllabus. He regularly sits here in the night for study. And many of his local friends come to this library for the same.

Changeji sahab, who look after the shahwalliullah library and member of the Delhi youth welfare association says, this library have all the relevant texts related to the Muslim history of Delhi. And also have important manuscripts, translated texts. And later on we have collected all the study material of different graduation courses which helps local students. And all the facilities of the library are for free. There is no charge taken from anyone who uses the library for the reading purpose. Further he says we also helped many researcher students time to time who generally worked on mughal history or history of

Delhi. Overall the library is playing an important role in the making of good reading and research culture in Delhi.

Interview / conversation with Sohail Hashmi

I also meet Mr shohail hasmi, who is a researcher, commentator, writer, and intellectual of Delhi.

Q- How you look at old libraries of Delhi? And also this expansion of reading as a popular culture in Delhi?

He says; there were whole lot small libraries set up by communities. In chandni chock there was a Marwari library. There was a Harding library set up by British. There was a Delhi public library also which is situated in S.P Mukherjee Marg opposite the old Delhi railway station. Marwari library had some very good books. In the every Sundays and local people used to go to these libraries to read newspaper and magazines.

He also talks about the absence of the libraries apart from these libraries where more and more people can go and read. According to him absence of libraries is certainly discouraging. If the city wants its residents to love books it has to create space. Books that I have read or my children read have been bought. But every one cannot and will not buy so many books. Libraries are important as they can be accessed by thousands of people.

There are some private libraries, quasi private libraries in Delhi. But most are either open to members only or are not known by the public. Libraries at the India international centre, Indian council of world affairs, Gym khana club

library scope is very limited. So limited places where the public can go and read. The public libraries should be one of the places can attract people.

Q-Is there a difference in the "culture of reading" between old Delhi or shahjahanabad and New Delhi? Like Darya Ganj and Nai Sarak- where students and middle class flock to buy second hand books.

Students can go to Nayi sarak and Darya Ganj as it specialises in school and college text books at very reasonable rates. That does not necessarily define the reading culture of that area. If we talk about the difference between these two areas of Delhi related to reading I think here is much difference one is the part of new constructed Delhi belongs to British directly and one is very old area belong to mughal era which had strong reading culture in Urdu and Persian.

Q- How has the culture of reading or the lack thereof, impacted the evolution of Delhi as a city and as a society. I would also like you to talk about books clubs, gatherings of book lovers happening in Delhi or even whether it is happening at all.

I don't know if Delhi had a reading culture, it would have grown differently. In any country especially in third world countries people who read are in miniscule minority. And the city is built not by the people who read. It is an impossible situation. That city being built by the builders and they don't listen to people who live here. Even if everybody was reading, with the stranglehold of the builders and the politicians on the juggler of the city. I doubt if there would have been any planning for libraries.

Q- What would you say about Delhi's "popular culture" if not reading?

There is no one Delhi. There is no one culture. There cannot be a single "popular culture"? Especially when it's come to reading. One consuming passion that Delhi has is to watch any tamasha that is on, especially is it free. The numbers that go to book fairs and trade fairs have one passion; and one of the important things is that reading is also one of the personal things to someone who regularly read.

Q- How you look at the organisations like Sahitya Academy, children book trust, and national book trust?

If I look at the NBT is doing good work in the field of publishing and promoting books on different issues and subjects. CBT I don't know about and now children have grown up. Sahitya Academy in any case is bringing out a whole lot of publications. Some work on our shared heritage is important. There is Tulika books who are regularly publishing very interesting books especially in humanities. In Urdu there is this educational book house is old Delhi.