

# **The UNESCO Heritage David Sassoon Public Library, Mumbai: A Case Study**

**Pinki Kamble<sup>1</sup>; Dr. Shilpa S. Waghchoure<sup>2</sup>**

Research Scholar<sup>1</sup>; Research Guide<sup>2</sup>; Department of Library & Information Science,  
University of Mumbai, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India<sup>1,2</sup>

## **ABSTRACT**

*Public libraries play a significant role in preserving cultural heritage, providing access to information and promoting literacy in local communities. The primary goal of this research is to assess the current status of an organisation, including its infrastructure, collection, membership and role in the community. The study aims to understand the current operations of David Sassoon Library, Mumbai and its impact on the local community and the challenges it faces in an increasingly digital world.*

**KEYWORDS:** UNESCO, Public Libraries, David Sassoon Public Library.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Public library plays a crucial role in reserving knowledge, fostering reading habits and contributing to the cultural development of a community. In India, where the government has invested significantly in govt. aided public libraries, privately operated public libraries often remain a lesser-explored domain of study. This research aims to evaluate the status services, collection development and infrastructure of the David Sassoon Library.

Established on 1847, this library has been serving the local population for decades, offering a rich collection of books and other resources/services.

Public library is one of the important democratic institutions evolved by the modern society. Like democracy, public library is an institution created for the people, by the people and of the people. You may understand it as a social institution owned and maintained by the public of its area which serves for the socialization of its books and kindred materials for free service to the people of the area. It exists in many countries across the world and is often considered essential for an educated and literature population. Public library is the most popular of all types of libraries because of its functions and service across the Society.

In modern times, the concept of public library has undergone substantial change in the context of advertisement of knowledge, technology and awareness of library importance. In addition to print books and periodicals, you will find

that most public libraries today have a wide array of other media including audio books, e-books, CDs, Cassettes, videotapes and DVDs as well as facilities to access the Internet.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

**Garvita Jhamb and Arun Ruhela (2018)** the study identify the level of satisfaction among the users of Delhi Public Library (DPL) towards the services, collection, staff, building and environment. In this study examine that maximum users are satisfied by all the services provided by the Library. Library needs to add more books on pharmacy, geography, UPSC exams, current affairs and teaching books.

**N. C. Kasimani and Rajendran (2020)** the study brings out resources, services, infrastructure status and development of public libraries in Chennai. The study describe of respondents is 759 (61.4%) were from male and rest of 478 (38.6%) from female respectively and majority of respondent's opinion is satisfied with library resources, services, infrastructure and library professional's helping tendency. The overall satisfaction levels revealed 27.6% is satisfied and 28.5% highly satisfied with the library resources and services.

**B. Mahadevan and K. Kannadasan (2024)** In this study the role of public libraries in India remains misunderstood, resulting in their underdevelopment. For many public libraries have long served as gateway to learning. However recent studies reveal shortcomings, particularly in providing tailored information to users.

**Laxmani, M.B., Talawar, A.B.& Kumbar B.D.(2014).** This paper investigates the present status of District central library, Dharwad and an attempt has been made to re-focusing of public libraries towards the idea of community information Centre, to contribute towards community development by fulfilling the information requirement of community. Study shows that the District Central Library of Dharwad is failed to provide Community Information Service to the Community members of the District also the resources of the District Central library is not adequate to fulfill the needs and requirements to the different community groups.

**Jayaraman, I and Baskaran P. (2020).** This study identify the strength and weakness of the library's services, the difference are judged on different levels such as frequency of use, satisfaction level after having used this services and sources as well as the suggestion regarding improvement in these services. ;

**Chowdhury, Himan (2025).** In this study examine several areas of improvement including lack of Internet Access, automation, and multimedia resources need to be address. In the age of digital information, it is essential for private libraries like Desh Bandhu Smriti Pathagar to modernize in order to remain relevant and continue the educational and cultural needs of their communities.

## **3. DAVID SASSOON LIBRARY -OVERVIEW**

The David Sassoon Library and Reading Room, located in the Kala Ghoda area of Mumbai, is one of the city's oldest and most significant heritage libraries. Built in the Victorian Gothic architectural style, the structure stands as a symbol of Mumbai's rich educational and cultural legacy. The origin of the institution dates back to 1847, when a group of young mechanics and foremen working at the Royal Mint and Government Dockyard in Bombay formed an association to promote technical education and intellectual development. Their aim was to create a space for lectures, mechanical models, and architectural learning.

### **3.1 Contribution of Sir David Sassoon (1863)**

The vision of this educational association gained strong support from Sir David Sassoon a prominent Baghdadi Jewish merchant, philanthropist, and community leader in Bombay. In 183, he donated a substantial amount of 60,000/-for a construction of a dedicated building for the institute. Additional support came from the Bombay Presidency Government and public subscribers.

### **3.2 Construction and Architecture (1867-1870)**

The building was designed by architects J. Campbell and E. G. Gosling in the Victorian Gothic / Venetian Gothic style. Constructed using yellow Malad stone, the building features pointed arches, decorative stone carving, and elegant structure detailing. Construction began in 1867 and was completed in 1870. It was one of the earliest major public buildings constructed after the demotion of Bombay fort walls.

### **3.3 Evolution into a Library (1938)**

Initially functioning as a Mechanics' Institution, the focus gradually shifted toward literature and reading. In 1938, the institution was officially renamed the David Sassoon Library and Reading Room, in honor of its principal benefactor.

### **3.4 UNESCO World Heritage Site: (2018)**

The interior retains its historic charm with Burma teak ceilings wooden shelves, and classic reading tables. The library houses thousands of books across multiple Languages including English, Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati. It serves members, researchers, and readers from various fields.

### **3.5 Restoration and Modern Revival (2022-2023)**

Between January 2022 and June 2023, a major restoration project was undertaken to preserve the heritage structure. The restoration included structural repairs, roof reconstruction, stone façade conservation and interior refurbishment. The project was supported by the philanthropic foundations and conservation experts, ensuring that the historic character of the building was preserved.

### **3.6 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation 2023**

David Sassoon Library and Reading Room, Mumbai is a Grade I heritage building and has received International recognition for its conservation efforts.

The library was honored under UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation for the restoration and preservation of its historic structure. This recognition highlights the library's architectural significance, heritage value, and commitment to maintaining its 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic style.

The UNESCO award brought prestige to the institution and emphasized its importance as a cultural and historic landmark in Mumbai.

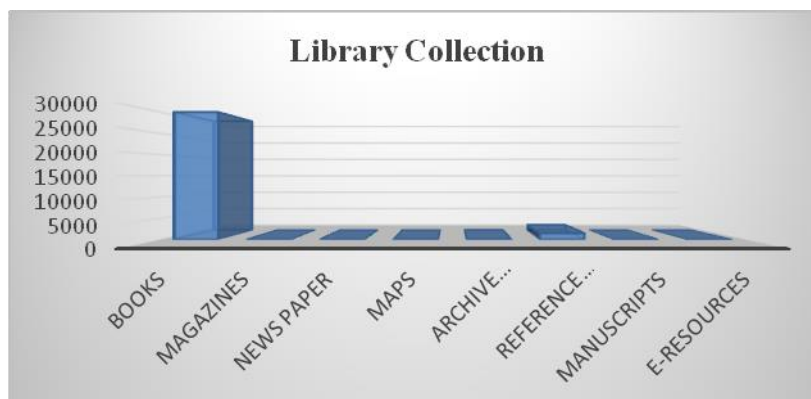
## **4. LIBRARY COLLECTION**

The collection of books and periodicals is a critical component of any library, serving as the foundation for its educational and informational services. David Sassoon Library has a well-maintained and diverse collection.

**Table-1:** Library Collection

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Number of Holdings</b>
1	Books	30000
2	Magazines	15
3	News paper	15

4	Maps	50
5	Archive Collection	100
6	Reference Books	1500
7	Manuscripts	00
8	E-resources	00



Graph No. 1 Library Collection

The library houses a collection of 30000 books, which from the core its resources, this extensive collection caters to a wide range of subject, providing valuable knowledge to its users. The library maintain 15 magazines, which offer users access to current trends, research, and entertainment. Magazines play a crucial role in keeping users informed about the latest developments in various fields such as politics, science, cultural, science and technology.

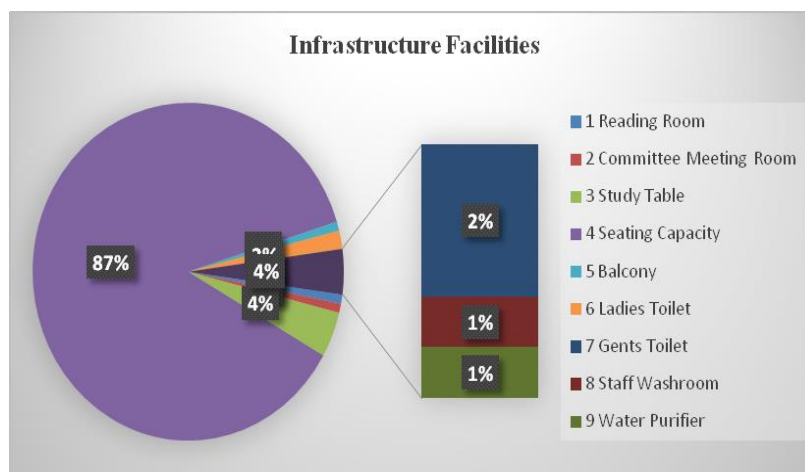
The library subscribes 15 daily newspapers. Newspapers are a vital resources for staying update on local, national and global events.

## 5. INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

The infrastructure of a library is an essential factor in providing a conducive and comfortable learning environment for its users. David Sassoon Library offers several facilities that support its function as a community hub for education, research, and cultural activities.

**Table-2** Infrastructure facilities of the library.

Sr. No.	Infrastructure Facilities	Numbers
1	Reading Room	1
2	Committee Meeting Room	1
3	Study Table	5
4	Seating Capacity	100
5	Balcony	1
6	Ladies Toilet	2
7	Gents Toilet	3
8	Staff Washroom	1
9	Water Purifier	1



**Graph 2 Infrastructure Facilities**

## 6. SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE LIBRARY:

David Sassoon Library offers a range of essential services to meet the informational and educational needs of its users.

Table-3 display the various services provided by the library

**Table 3-** Services provided by the library

Sr. No.	Type of Services	Service Provided or Not
1	Circulation	Yes
2	Reference	Yes
3	Reading Area	Yes
4	Internet Access	Yes
5	Library operations	Yes
6	CAS (Current Awareness Services)	Yes

## 7. VARIOUS FACILITIES AND SERVICES PROVIDED BY DAVID SASSOON LIBRARY

David Sassoon Library, one of Mumbai’s oldest heritage libraries, provides a wide range of facilities and services to its members to support reading, research and learning.

### 7.1, Reading facilities:

The library offers a spacious and peaceful reading hall with comfortable seating arrangements. Members can access newspapers, magazines, reference material in a quiet environment suitable for study and research.

### 7.2. Circulation counters:

Members are allowed to borrow books for a specified period as per the library rules.

The collection includes fiction, non-fiction, Biographies, philosophy, competitive exams, reference, Maps and rare/archive books.

### 7.3. Newspaper and Periodical section:

A wide range of local, national/international newspapers and magazines are available for daily reading.

### 7.4. Research support:

Students, scholars and researchers can utilize historical and rare collection for study purpose.

### **7.5. Internet and Digital Access:**

Members can access OPAC with in premises through internet.

Member can access software for searching books

### **7.6 Membership Facility:**

Different type of membership available for students, individuals

- a) Ordinary Membership (Annual membership) Rs. 7000/-
- b) Life Membership Rs. 50000/-
- c) Patron membership Rs. 100000/-

### **7.7 Beautiful garden facility:**

David Sassoon Library provides a beautiful and peaceful garden for members. The garden offers calm and green environments where member can relax, read, lunch and spend quality time amidst nature. It serves as a refreshing space away from the busy city life of Mumbai.

Members can use the garden for quiet reading, informal discussions and small literary gatherings. The well maintained surroundings, greenery and seating arrangement make it attractive and comfortable place for visitors.

### **7.8 Locker Facility:**

David Sassoon Library provides locker facility to its members for their convenience and security.

Member can safely store their personal belongings such as bags, books, and other valuables while using the reading room. The lockers are maintained properly and are available according to the library's rules and regulations.

### **7.9 WIFI Facility:**

David Sassoon Library and Reading Room provides free wifi facility to members. The free internet access supports students, researchers and regular readers in their academic and professional work. By offering complimentary wifi, the library combines its rich traditional collection with modern digital connectivity, creating a convenient and technology-friendly study environment.

## **8. CULTURAL AND LITERARY EVENTS**

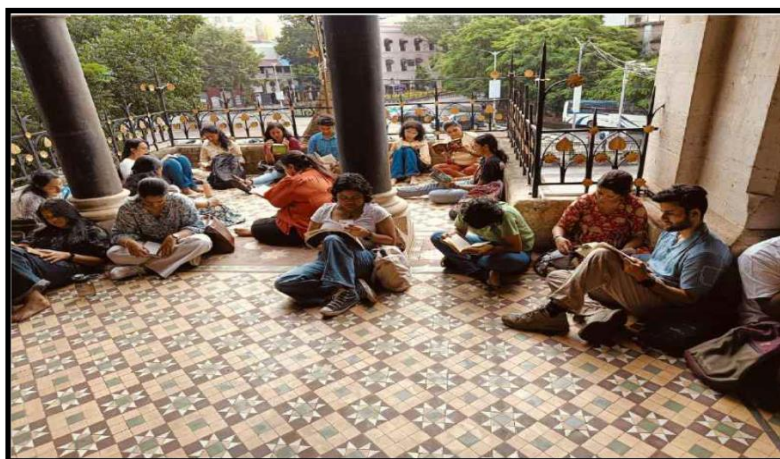
The library organizes book launches, lectures, heritage walks, Art exhibitions, book club and literary program to promote reading cultural and community engagement.

### **8.1 Book Launch**



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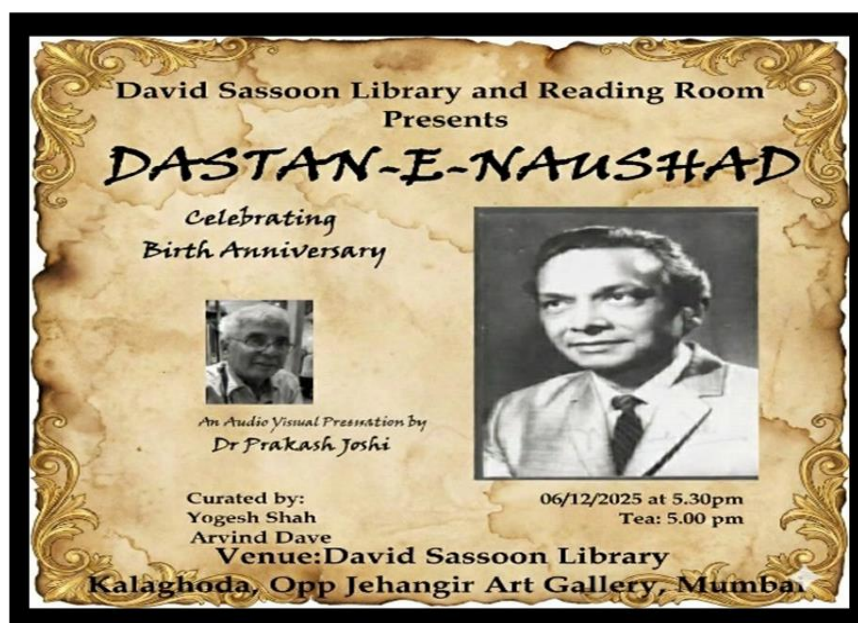
### 8.2 Book Club



### 8.2 Art Exhibition



### 8.4 Cultural Event



8.5 David Sassoon Library and Reading Room foundation day event:



8.6 School/College/ students visit



8.7 Kala Ghoda Art Festival:



8.8. David Sassoon Library and Reading Room-photo



**CONCLUSION**

David Sassoon Library stands as a timeless symbol of knowledge, heritage and Victorian Gothic architecture in South Mumbai, connecting history, books and culture while remaining central to the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival. Library welcomes all the readers and serves its best to the users.

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