CHAPTER I

CONCEPT OF PUBLIC LIBRARY

1.1 Introduction

Man is essentially a social animal. It is this nature of his that is responsible for the coming into being of the society. Though in the beginning, a major part of his life was spent in gathering food and clothing and for having a roof over his head, he could not live by bread alone. Nature has endowed him with the power of reasoning which no other animal is possessing. Thus he has been gathering a lot of knowledge and experience from the cradle to his grave. He is not only satisfying his mental, rather intellectual faculty, but also taking into consideration the spiritual side, by entering into conversation and counselling. All his efforts, which are indomitable, are aimed towards the betterment and welfare of the society, in which he is living. The very survival of his self and his kith and kin was dependent on such knowledge and the experience that he gained in the course of life. Later he felt the need to record this knowledge and keep it for the use of
future generation. This mass of recorded knowledge and experience has been preserved through various media available to him, as aids to his fragile memory. The origin of the library can thus, be traced to this instinct of human being to preserve such recorded materials, for the use of his posterity. Collections of such records came to be regarded later as libraries. The library hence, is not only a product of human endeavour and effort but also a product of social and cultural maturation of the mankind.

A peep into the dim past of the civilisation provides ample instances of the existence of institutions, wherein recorded knowledge was preserved. Though there was no separate place set aside for a library as we understand it today, they used to be found in religious institutions like monasteries and churches, in temples and viharas etc. in the form of manuscripts.

People - both from royal families as well as clergies and the intellectuals from the society, felt the need to have the manuscripts preserved and utilised for the welfare of themselves as well as of the community.

Consequent upon the advent of printing, the spread of knowledge was accelerated, thus making available the
materials of knowledge to whomsoever required them. The importance of learning was felt by all the members of the society and the learning process gained ground, culminating into the establishment of educational institutions like schools, colleges and universities. To support their learning as well as the arguments and the experiments with nature, one had to look back to understand whatever had been available during the past on the subjects and for the furthering of the knowledge based on those facts. Naturally, the heavy and continuous use of the recorded materials necessitated to have a separate treatment so that any one could have easy access to them. A separate place was provided where the materials were preserved and served to the individuals whenever they approached and this in turn became an institution or organization and was called the 'Library' from earliest times. The library which is open to the public irrespective of caste, creed or sex is a public library. This concept is not a new one.

1.2 Definitions

Jesse H. Shera opines that "The library is a product of cultural maturation. It came into being when societies ceased to be nomadic and became urbanized, and when graphic records became important to the effective operation of
organized human relationships. There is no record of when, or how, libraries began, but one can assume, from the scattered and fragmentary evidence that has survived, that early libraries were essentially archival - storage places for the preservation of records that were necessary for the transaction of business or commerce, the administration of the state, and the communication of belief to succeeding generations.\(^1\)

"Today by public libraries we mean a library open to all without the distinction of caste, creed or sex; free of charge and supported by legislation. And which houses books and other reading materials for use."\(^2\)

The written words were used to facilitate the leading of a more effective life in society. So the library is the product of the social organisation. It has become a part and parcel of the scholarship.

The present and the future have roots in the past.

"... the library is an ancient social institution and its

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origin and growth is closely linked with human civilization."

The invention of printing and the effect of industrial revolution have a significant role in moulding the way of life throughout the world. The man-on-the-street realized his existence and justify the purpose of his existence, by being an useful citizen to his society, has paved the way for the mass education. All did not go well. Mankind has had to suffer two world wars. The Second World War in particular, had a devastating effect on mankind, materially as well as spiritually. To live in this uncertain world in perpetual peace and happiness, the intellectual development became an imperative necessity. Both the formal and informal education required could be imparted by exposing the human minds to knowledge. The libraries, especially public libraries, play a vital role in this regard as their important aim is to educate the public to understand and justify their life to the fullest possible extent.

Public library is a vehicle for social and economic mobility. It is an instrument of education, and an

institution, which supplies ideas and inspiration in abundance in a most cordial manner. The libraries are the storehouses of the old and power houses of new knowledge.

The academic institutions are considered as the temples of learning and the public library becomes the altar of the holy edifice of learning. Education and learning are the blood and breath of a civilized society and the public library is the very life of it. The public library is a perennial source of self-education and a centre of cultural recreation. It provides knowledge and recreation in a relaxed and unrestricted atmosphere, simultaneously, people get first hand information as they come in close contact with the mighty minds of the mankind of all ages.

A library is a system of storage and retrieval, a storage of recorded knowledge and experience and it is organised in such a fashion as to make knowledge available to any one at any time. Thus, a public library is one which must be accessible to its citizens most freely. The working of public library in such a situation, where information is sought, makes two significant presuppositions. They are the object of a library and the
S.R. Ranganathan aptly extolled the role of the public library system in these words: "Public library system is the only possible neutral agency to give unbiased political, economical and industrial information to enable the voters to form their own judgement in helping the progress of the country and keeping vigilance over the performance of the Government."\(^4\)

The public library is as important as any other public institution serving for the welfare of the community. It is by and large one of the essential institutions in a society. To quote S.R. Ranganathan again, "Libraries have the power to produce material happiness, mental joy and spiritual delight, they are social institutions charged with the duty of providing the means for the perpetual self-education of one and all."\(^5\)

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5 Ranganathan, S.R.: Library Needs of Recent India, (Presidential Address), Eighth All India Library Conference, 1949.
The public libraries contribute to the circulation of ideas, harnessing of leisure, the demands of democracy, the spread of literacy, and the success of commercial and industrial enterprises.

The stream of social revolution experienced in the past and the fruits of this phenomenon enjoyed by the present as well as future generations can be attributed to the public library as it is a product of human endeavour. The progress of the society is firmly based on the letters and learning of the past.

The public library is a democratic institution as it socializes the knowledge stored in it, enabling a society to flourish educationally, socially, economically and culturally at all levels.

The developing countries of the world have realized the importance of the public libraries on the experiences gained by the West; and the affluence enjoyed by the citizens of those countries. This fact made the Government of India to appoint a committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. K. P. Sinha in the year 1957 to probe into this matter and come out with the prospects of developing the public library services. In this report the internationally
accepted definition of the public library has been clearly brought out covering all aspects. They are as follows:

It is a library

"i) - which is financed for the most part out of public funds";

"ii) - which charges no fees from readers and yet is open for full use by the public without distinction of caste, creed or sex";

"iii) - which is intended as an auxiliary educational institution providing a means of self-education which is endless";

"iv) - which houses learning materials giving reliable information freely and without partiality or prejudice on as wide a variety of subjects as will satisfy the interest of the readers".6

The observation made by Bryan Luckham is worth mentioning at this juncture. He says, "The public library is open to all those who choose to enter. No restriction

because of fees or financial status exists. It might be thought therefore that the nature of the public library which uses the library would be solely a consequence of the decisions made by the potential customers. The public library, however, is a social institution operating in a dynamic environment of aspirations, expectations, and ideologies, manned and controlled by personnel who can modify the character of the service offered is significant, even subtle ways. Further more, it is an environment which can change considerably in relatively short periods of time.7

Taking into consideration the various statements advocated by eminent persons in the library profession, it can be safely said that a modern public library is a free public enterprise, with an infrastructure of social, economical, educational, cultural and recreational organisation, a neutral agency devoid of colour, caste and creed, race, religion and region to enrich the knowledge of mankind.

1.3 Objectives and Functions

The world experienced two phenomena which have revolutionised the way of thinking and the way of living. The first phenomenon is the Industrial Revolution, which changed the agrarian society into an industrial or urbanised society, caused by the factory system. The exodus from rural regions to urban areas posed a number of problems. The agriculturist turned into a machine operator - a skilled labourer. He felt his importance in a factory system and to gain more profit he tried to improve upon his acquired skills. Thus, he felt the need for education. This express desire of the industrial societies throughout the world strived hard to get the mass educated. The intellectually developed persons can perform better in their vocations and trade. The tool to achieve this goal was the mass education. For the self-development of an individual, a need for informal education was felt. To fulfil this need, an agency was necessary and that agency took the shape of the public library.

The second phenomenon, though at first destructive turned the entire mankind towards the constructive process. The phenomenon was the World War II and its aftermath. The entire world rose from the ashes like a Phoenix, with
a new lease of life furnished with better tools and equipments and an enormous amount of knowledge at its disposal. At this point the general attitude of the society turned towards the scientific outlook. Solo research gave place to team research. The fundamental approaches were transformed into applied approach. A single problem began to be studied from various points of view. Inter-disciplinary approach became the fashion of the day. All these have resulted into the production of literature, assuming a mammoth proportion. This phenomenon is popularly referred to as literature explosion. To have control over this deluge of information and knowledge contained in the literature, in order to collect and select, to conserve and to retrieve and disseminate the proper information to the proper reader at the appropriate time, the need was felt to have a well articulated and full-blooded library service.

The early part of the present century witnessed another radical change in the political field. Many countries which were groaning under the yoke of foreign rule became independent. The sunshine of democracy is dancing with its full glory now in almost all the countries of the world. The man became sovereign and he
is forming the governments, aiming towards the betterment of his social, political, cultural, recreational, industrial and informational activities. All these ideas are translated into reality through universal mass education, which provides an unrestricted opportunity to one and all to keep oneself informed about the current affairs of political and governmental upheavals of the world. To have an interface with such activities, a medium was urgently required. And the medium for the inter-communication was public library.

The civilization and cultures in the world have taken a full circle now as the urbanization of population is at its zenith and here are evidences now to bring about a change in the rural population. Both the developing and underdeveloped countries are comprised of rural areas. The outlook of the urban mass has turned towards the rural mass consisting mostly of illiterates and neo-literate. A country can boast of full development only when its rural brethren also get educated. With the help of universal education and adult education programmes this objective can work out into fruition. The success of these schemes of educating the rural population heavily depends upon the efficient and effective working of the public libraries as they are the universal providers.
The present century is playing a productive role in the dissemination of knowledge through a number of communication media such as newspapers, radio, film, TV, Video cassettes etc. These media are collected in such a way by public library so that the every day requirements of the citizens in respect of information, aesthetic experience and high quality of entertainment are attained. The need for a public library system and the vital role it plays in the democratic society is expressed by Berelson in these words, "Conditions of modern life call increasing attention to the importance of public opinion and communication. Growing secularisation has meant that more and more areas of life are open to opinion rather than revelation. Advanced industrialisation has not only extended literacy, it has also provided the technical facilities for mass communication. Urbanisation has not only brought large audiences together, it has also created the need for communication within and between audiences, and among many diverse social groups. The development of democratic processes has widened the public, whose opinions count, and has increased the social and political responsibilities of the communication medias." 8

It is clear from the above statements that there is an urgent need to have an efficient and effective public library services for the overall development of the individual, the country and the world as a whole. Thus, the public library activities must be based on the fundamental objectives and functions of the society which it has to serve. The functions must be well founded so that the image of the public library can reflect the development of the society in which it is situated.

The objectives and functions of the public libraries have been brought out by a number of leading personalities in the library profession.

According to L.R. McColvin the following are the objectives and functions of the public libraries:

1. "The provision of public library services should be the responsibility of appropriate public governing authorities and not that of any private or sectional groups";

2. "They should be administered, governed and financed by these authorities";

3. "They should be freely available for the use of all the people in the community served";
4. "They should be as far as they can, embrace all
the needs and interests of these people";

5. "They should be free not only financially, but
intellectually, i.e. they should be free from
bias and purposive objectives; they should afford
full, free, unprejudiced opportunity to all who
would use them". 9

The Russian library scientist, Leon Carnovsky
explained the objectives of the library in his own way.
He says, "Thus, we find the following forces behind the
evolution of the modern library in a democratic society.

1. The desire to supplement the work of the school.
2. The desire to help the workers to improve themselves.
3. The desire to provide a counter-attraction to vice.
4. The desire to make for peaceful and orderly social
change through democratic processes.
5. The desire to help the individual to develop as a
human personality to develop intellectually, and
culturally as a free man, free of the domination

of caprice and subject only to the rule of reason and intellect."\textsuperscript{10}

Carl M. White, the American expert, put down the following as the objectives of a public library:

1. "To accumulate and make available now and in the future the best work of the mind, regardless of when or where the work was done."

2. "To afford access to all responsible intellectual work without interference from political or religious authority."

3. "To further research."

4. "To aid formal instructions."

5. "To supply the information in the management of practical affairs."

6. "To promote popular enlightenment and enrich human life.\textsuperscript{11}


Coming nearer home, S.R. Ranganathan, the doyen of the profession in India describes the objectives in these words:

1. "Help the lifelong self-education of one and all."

2. "Furnish up-to-date facts and information on all subjects to one and all."

3. "Distribute in an unbiased and balanced way all shades of recorded views and thoughts to one and all; and serve as a help in the discharge of their political in respect of local, national and international affairs."

4. "Contribute to productive drive by informing to management of the latest trends in diverse enterprises by ploughing back into the minds of researchers, designers and technologists every piece of relevant new thought promptly."

5. "Preserve the literary remains of humanity for posterity as vehicles of culture and source materials for antiquarian research."

6. "Provide to one and all harmless and elevating use of leisure", and in general
7. "Work for continued social well-being, as the agency in-charge of all socialised thought."  

The philosophy of librarianship and objectives of the public library have been summed up more elaborately and clearly by Robert E. Coughlin and others in these words, "The general community goals relevant for libraries, are based primarily on the following statement of library system objectives taken from a 1943 publication of the ALA, 'Post-War-Standards for Public Libraries'. Words in parentheses were added and are the titles of community goals". "The objectives of the public library should be to assemble and preserve books and materials in organised collections and through stimulation and guidance to promote their use, to the end that children, young people, men and women may have opportunity and encouragement."

To educate themselves continuously. (Education)

To keep abreast of progress in the sciences and other fields of knowledge. (Education, Income)

To maintain the precious heritage of freedom of expression and a constructively critical attitude toward all public issues. (Civic Consciousness)

To improve their ability to participate usefully in activities in which they are involved as a citizens of the United States and of the world (Civic Consciousness)

To equip themselves and to keep themselves equipped for efficient activity in useful activities and practical affairs. (Equality of opportunity; Income)

To improve their capacity for appreciation and production in cultural fields (Creativity)

To aid in the advancement of knowledge. (Advancement of knowledge)

To make such use of leisure time as will promote personal happiness and social well-being. (Level of happiness; cultural integration)\(^\text{13}\)

1.4 UNESCO and the Public Library

UNESCO is playing a dominant role in eradication of illiteracy, advancement of scientific knowledge, and enrich the cultural activities of member countries. It has supplemented its activities towards the public libraries since inception. Accordingly it published a Manifesto on Public Libraries in 1949 and the same has been revised in 1972 on the modern lines and published as under:

"The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations was founded to promote peace and spiritual welfare by working through the minds of men and women."

"This manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and understanding between people and between nations."

The Public Library.

"The public library is a practical demonstration of democracy's faith in universal education as a continuing
and life long process, in the appreciation of the achievement of humanity in knowledge and culture."

"The public library is the principal means whereby the record of man's thoughts and ideas, and the expression of his creative imagination, are made freely available to all."

"The public library is connected with the refreshment of man's spirit by the provision of books for relaxation and pleasure. With assistance to the student, and with provision of up-to-date technical, scientific and sociological information."

"The public library should be established under the clear mandate of law so framed as to ensure nationwide provision of public library service. Organized cooperation between libraries is essential so that total national resources should be fully used and be at the service of any reader."

"It should be maintained wholly from public funds, and no direct charge should be made to anyone for its services."

"To fulfill its purposes, the public library must be readily accessible, and its doors open for free and equal
use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, language, status or educational attainment."

Resources and Services

"The public library must offer to adults and children the opportunity to keep in touch with their times, to educate themselves continuously and abreast of progress in the sciences and arts."

"Its contents should be a living demonstration of the evolution of knowledge and culture, constantly reviewed, kept up-to-date and attractively presented. In this way it will help people form their own opinions and develop their creative and critical capacities and powers of appreciation. The public library is concerned with the communication of information and ideas, whatever the form in which these may be expressed."

"Since the printed word has been for centuries the accepted medium for the communication of knowledge, ideas and information, books, periodicals, newspapers remain the most important resources of public libraries."

"But science has created new forms of record and these will become an increasing part of the public
library's stock, including print in reduced form for compact storage and transport, films, slides, gramophone records, audio and videotape, for adults and children, with the necessary equipment for individual use and for cultural activities."

"The total collection should include material on all subjects, to satisfy all tastes at differing educational and cultural standards."

"All languages used by a community should be represented and there should be books of world importance in their original languages."

"The public library building should be centrally situated, accessible to the physically handicapped, and open at times convenient to the user. The building and its furnishings should be attractive, informal and welcoming, and direct access by readers to the shelves is essential."

"The public library is a natural cultural centre for the community, bringing together as it does people of similar interests. Space and equipment are therefore necessary for exhibitions, discussions, lectures, musical performances and films, both for adults and children."
"Branch libraries and mobile libraries should be provided in rural and suburban areas."

"Trained and competent staff in adequate numbers are vital to select and organize resources and assist users. Special training will be required for many activities such as work with children and handicapped, audio-visual materials, and the organization of cultural activities."

Use by Children and Students

"It is in early life that a taste for books and the habit of using libraries and their resources are most easily acquired. The public library has therefore a particular duty to provide opportunity for the informal and individual choice of books and other material by children. Special collections and, if possible, separate areas should be provided for them. The children's library can then become a lively stimulating place in which activities of various kinds will be a source of cultural inspiration."

"Students of all ages must be able to rely on the public library to supplement the facilities provided by their academic institutions. Those pursuing individual
studies may be entirely dependent on the public library to meet their needs for books and information."

The Handicapped Reader

"There is an increasing concern with the welfare of the elderly and all handicapped people. Problems of loneliness, and mental and physical handicaps of all kinds, can be alleviated in many ways by the public library."

"Improved means of access, provision of mechanical reading aids, books in large print and recorded on tape, service in hospitals and institutions, and personal service to the home are some of the ways in which the public library can extend its service to those who need it most."

The Public Library in the Community

"The public library should be active and positive in its outlook, demonstrating the value of its services and encouraging their use."

"It should link itself with other educational, social and cultural institutions including schools, adult education groups, leisure-activity groups with those concerned with the promotion of the arts."
"It should be watchful for the emergence of new needs and interests in the community, such as the establishment of groups with special reading requirements and new leisure interests to be represented in the library’s collections and activities."\(^{14}\)

Thus, a public library is a free public organization with a sound infrastructure of socio-economic, cultural and recreational institution, without the artificial barriers preventing its use by the citizens, built on the sound edifice of the objectives and functions to make available the information freely and to keep abreast with the advancement of techno-economic and social matters, by exploring the natural resources of the nation, eradicating the illiteracy among adults and neo-literate, to supply the harmless and unbiased information and increase the level of reading abilities, by preserving the cultural heritage of the community.

The impact of the public library services on the society in consonance with the changing needs of the

community with changing times and how the society is moulded and transformed is dealt in detail in the next Chapter.