CHAPTER—III
PUBLIC LIBRARY : THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY
"Give a man a fish
He will have a meal
Teach him how to fish
He will eat all his life."

The Old Chinese Proverb.

The public library, considered as an essential part of modern society plays a very important role in the overall development of the community. The importance of public libraries is felt at the time of thinking of education especially in the planning of adult education programmes. Even while setting objectives of public libraries either in India or abroad, the educational part of public libraries is specially mentioned.

The University Grants Commission in its report in August 1949 has discussed the library as "the heart of all the university's work". Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, while inaugurating the Gujarat Vidyapith Library, remarked, "It should be our endeavour to locate at least one library in every village in the country. The use of library should not be limited to a few to read. In fact every library should be a sort of University itself."

The public library is not merely the storehouse of books and reading materials, it is the gateway of knowledge and social
institution for the public without any difference of caste, sex, creed and colour. It is the place for information and education. It is a laboratory for the experiment of the life-long creative activities. It is a social power station where the mind of the community are energized with knowledge content.

C.D. Houle while expressing his thesis on educational objectives of the public library said, "To help the individual to full acceptance of responsibility, for his own self education — this means help in two ways: to aid those who themselves come for guidance and to discover those who are unaware of their needs or of resources available and lead them to a conception of the importance of continued education."

ASS EDUCATION: The basic objective of the public library is to impart informal education and an obligation to provide leadership in stimulating the use of its books and services. In a country like India where mass education is not possible with the existing means and resources of formal education, the role of the public library assumes greater importance. Here education is a state matter and the central government is not obliged to take care of the educational requirements of whole population of the state except for university education. A club of 55,000 secondary, 25,000 middle, 5,00,000 primary schools and about 500 universities and educational institutions together is not efficient to meet the challenge of "Education For All". An army
of 45,00,000 teachers is required to meet the challenge by the year 2000 A.D., when the population will cross the 109 crore mark. The scarce financial resources and other problems come in the way of meeting the educational requirements of the public. Ultimately, other alternatives for mass education have to be found.

FORMAL EDUCATION AND ITS LIMITATIONS: The present set-up of the educational system is based on century old theories. All over the country as also in other parts of the world, it enjoins on the registered students to regularly attend their classes and appear for the examinations at the end of the academic year to prove themselves worthy of the award of certificates, diplomas or degrees. The teachers and other supporting staff facilitate the educational system. But all the schools, colleges, universities and other organisations of higher learning are meant only for the 'registered' students. This registration is not open to all, rather is restricted to seats available and reasonable funds required. This however does not apply to those who, for one reason or the other cannot afford to register themselves in these institutions. An analysis of the limitations of these academic structures will reveal more striking facts.

Lack of Universalisation of Education: Education means direct intercourse with society. The underdeveloped countries face so many problems because of the low literacy rate. In the past education was the prerogative of some individuals.
Even in the developed countries, education was exclusively preserve of a few people. Some sections of society were denied education as they belonged to a classified group of population and those who violated the societal ban were done to death. Even in today's world, education has not yet been declared a right. There is no legislation that commits the government to provide free education for all. Only those who can afford to pay, get higher education.

Age Requirement: The present education system in the developing countries, and specially in India, is based on age factor. From the pre-nursery to the university-level education, age is one of the primary requirements. Even a brilliant boy cannot be admitted in class one unless he is at least five years old. There are technical institutions which do not enrol students after certain age. This leads to frustration among the youths. There are also schools and colleges which admit students only when they come of age. For example, a driving school is open only to as young as 18 years old and not those who are in their late 70s. This age restraint belies the concept of formal education.

Minimum Educational Requirements: Like age requirements, the minimum educational qualification is also required in all spheres of activity. A minimum of 12 years schooling is essential before going in for university education in developing countries. Similarly, certain minimum education as
well as pass percentage obtained in schools and colleges is taken into account for research and higher education. Disciplines like, driving, photography, domestic electric wiring, etc. also require a minimum of eight years schooling for admission. The illiterates are barred from training in these trades.

Territorial Requirements: This is perhaps only in India that the jurisdiction of the universities and other institutions providing higher education is determined on the basis of the geography of the region. Universities have their jurisdiction over colleges as also the boundaries of the districts and blocks. The state universities are limited to the districts, whereas the central universities do not follow this pattern. But there are certain universities which have jurisdiction and do not enrol students from certain regions. The university of Delhi has the jurisdiction over the colleges situated in the Union Territory of Delhi and not in the adjoining areas like Ghaziabad, Faridabad, and Gurgaon. In metropolitan cities, even the schools have a geographical jurisdiction. Schools run by the Delhi Administration follow jurisdiction strictly. These are divided by roads, blocks, colonies, etc. That means boys of South Delhi cannot be admitted in the Shahdara schools.

Legal Requirements: Certain people in the course of their day-to-day work meet with an undesirable situation and find
themselves behind the bars. If the charges are criminal, the gates of the schools and colleges are closed for them. May be they are innocent, but the "blot" on their name does not allow them to pursue higher education in the existing system. Those not convicted by the court can continue their university education. Other legal formalities like date of birth, ration card, income certificate, residence certificate, and affidavits, etc., are to be completed for better education in the developing countries.

When formal education is entirely meant for a limited sector of the population, what will happen to the majority of the people who require not only formal education but also adult and social education? An alternative medium of mass education for the left out sector has to be exploited. The public library is a strong medium of public education. An explanation will help in understanding how the public library can be a strong medium of public education without any extra expenditure and how it can mould society for adult education.

In society, the public library is supposed to function as the people's university, providing life long self education.

SCO PUBLIC LIBRARY MANIFESTO: The UNESCO's public library manifesto clearly states that public library is a democratic institution for education, culture and information. Further, it says, "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 ... to fulfil its objectives the public library must be readily accessible and its door 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." Thus the manifesto emphasises on the educational and cultural role of the public library in society.

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMISSION ON LIBRARIES, USA: The same objectives of public libraries but in different tone have been mentioned by the National Advisory Commission on Libraries in its report. It says, "A library — great or small, private or publicly supported — has two major and unique functions. First, it makes possible meetings of mind and idea which are not limited by our normal boundaries of time, space, and social or economic levels ... to say this is to suggest the second great function of the library, it is the institution in our society which allows, and encourages the development, the extension of ideas — not their passive absorption, but their active generation."

After a survey of adult activities in 1954, two main objectives were set by Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. One, the imaginary function of the library is informational education and at it has the obligation to provide leadership in stimulating
the use of its books and services; and second, the library should cooperate with all other adult education agencies — and provide materials for institutes, discussion — groups, workshops, lectures and similar activities.

In our own country, the same thing has been repeated by the Advisory Committee and the working groups of the Planning Commission in last forty years. The difference between the academic institutions and the public library is the difference of approach towards the readers. In the public library the readers are formal and in informal education the readers are vice-versa. The limitations of the formal education system are no problems in public libraries. It is just opposite to those limitations.

**EDUCATION THROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARIES:**

Education for all: The first two laws of library science enunciated by S.R.Ranganathan are in the spirit of democratization of education. The first law — 'Books Are For Use' signifies that the library is not a storehouse of books. Here the books are for use by the public. The second law — 'Every Reader His/Her Book' compels the library to develop its collection to meet the demand of every type of readers. Indirectly, the emphasis is that the public library is meant for all. Through books and other activities the public library invites all type of persons in the library.
Since the public library is run by the funds of the public, it is bound to serve all the readers, whosoever comes to the library. It does not see from which social, economic, or educational background the reader has come. Its aim is to serve them in the manner in which the readers can understand or found suitable. In case some people like physically and visually handicapped cannot come to the library, the public library reaches them through mobile services and depository stations. The public library serves people everywhere, even in jails, hospitals, schools, industries, rails, clubs, stadiums, slums, community centres, and the offices of the labour unions in association with volunteer organizations. The reach of the library is more than the formal educational institutions. Formal education is not for all whereas the public library aims at education for all and everywhere.

No Formal Educational Requirements: As already discussed, the public library stands for the education for all. The main feature of education through the public library is in the intake of the student-readers. In formal education attained in university and college certain minimum education is required for enrolment. But in public library education, even an illiterate can come and start getting education. Old or young, healthy or patient, social or criminal, driver or sailor, the public library gives them an equal opportunity. The readers can start taking education at whatever level they
desire. The instrumental music classes run by the Delhi public Library require no formal education, children and the old are taught together.

- No Territorial Limitations: Unlike university or school, the public library has no limitations over a geographical area. The territory of the public library starts with the projection of a human being and remains up to the end of that projection. In other words, it is where people live. The Delhi Public Library System is having a network of 178 service points. Anywhere a reader can avail of the services of the library. Through mobile services the public library reaches the community in the remote areas to serve those who cannot come to the central or the nearby library. DPLS is serving on an all India basis so far as the blinds are concerned. Therefore, it requires no territorial limitations.

- Children's Institution: The public library develops reading habits among children by inviting them to participate in debate, competitions, etc. It gives them an opportunity to develop their faculty through reading and story hours. Recently, there was a debate on the children's university in the academic world. Library service to children and adolescents forms a vital part of its services. One of the primary objectives of the services of the public library to children is to inculcate in them the habit of using a library. The library service to children is demanding and
rewarding. Today's efforts enrich the lives of children through books and pave the way for wider adult use of the library tomorrow. The grown up children who 'graduate' from the picture books encourage other children to picture books, and thus make a chain of studentship among themselves.

**ADULT EDUCATION AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Since education is a lifelong process, it does not admit of age, educational qualifications and other barriers. Through the public library alone, education for adults has become easy. There are other agencies like adult education associations, university departments, government sponsored programmes for adult education but despite of their best efforts, the number of illiterates is increasing every year. But due to the functions and extension services of public libraries in certain areas, the growth in literacy has been observed. In India, for example, the literacy rate in Delhi in 1951 was 38.36% only. With the start of the Delhi Public Library and other libraries in Delhi the literacy percentage has gone up. In 1961, it increased to 52.75, and to 6.61% in 1971. It became highest in India in 1981 when the literacy percentage recorded was 61.54%.

The success of the adult education programmes depends on the provision of basic reading materials in close vicinity for illiterate adults for continuing education. No concrete work has been done in India to coordinate public libraries with the
adult education programmes. That is the reason the percentage of literates has increased very slowly. The position of female literacy is very poor. The growth of literacy rose from 9.50% in 1941 to 16.10% in 1951. In 1961, it was 24.20% and rose to 29.45% in 1971. In 1981, the female literacy percentage was 29.45%, which has increased to 39% in 1991.

The international conference on adult education held at Elsinor in Denmark in 1949 recognised the essential contributions of public libraries as, "it is no use teaching people to read unless at the same time an effort is made to ensure that they have books worth reading." Maulana Abul Kalam Azad while presiding over the opening ceremony of the Delhi Public Library in 1951 spoke of the library as a magnificent edifice of service to the people and a community centre for popular education in the locality. The report of the committee on private libraries set up by the Andhra Pradesh Government in 1979 stated the same role of public libraries in adult education. It said that libraries would function as centres of follow-up action of the national adult education programme so that libraries become socially relevant agencies.

The Public library, besides being a centre for the follow-up action, also takes direct part in the teaching and publication of the adult education literature. The Carolonia Public Library started even adult education classes through 'Friends of Society' clubs which provided free tutors for the public library. With the
advent of open university and open school system, public libraries have been declared as the contact centres. The Indira Gandhi National Open University has more than 150 such centres called study centres all over the country. Majority of them are in public libraries.

There are examples where public libraries have demonstrated even a step forward for functional literacy and social and adult education activities. A week-long programme on preservation of spices and jams was conducted by the New York City Library which was appreciated by the public. On the request of the public more such programmes were organised later.

For social education, the public library arranges lectures and film shows on social problems and community health programmes. The impact of such programmes on the public is immense. The public library has helped the public in directly meeting and solving the problems of the farmers. In Mexico City, the public library helped the farmers in knowing the latest seeds and farm technology with the help of Agriculture Librarian.

FORMAL EDUCATION THROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARIES: Formal education through the public library has been a successful experiment at several notable public libraries around the world. The Library of Congress has done several courses on practical training for librarians. The courses which are experimented include book finding, manuscript preservations, personal documentation and
training in library profession. The Delhi Public Library conducted a certificate course in Library and Information Science. The course was attended by students from 14 non-aligned countries. Through music group, regular classes were arranged for those who wanted to learn instrumental music. The experiment can also be made on the students through open university system. Daily classes will help them to earn their certificates through the public library.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND CULTURAL CHANGE: The UNESCO public library manifesto (revised in 1972 by IFLA) lays down the cultural role of the public library in these words, "To be one of the principal centres of cultural life and promote a keen participation, enjoyment and application of all the arts. The aim is to promote and encourage use of public libraries as cultural information centres for individual and other cultural organizations for change and relaxation."^7

Through inviting people from different customs for discussions and sharing their experience with the readers of the public library, the cultural communication is carried out by public libraries. The cultural department of the public library invites people from different cultural background and organises shows for the people of the public library. This helps in cross-cultural communication develop communal harmony and reduces racial conflicts.
The collection of books and the reading materials on culture is an essential function of the public library. That is why it is said that the culture of a country is preserved in its libraries. The Delhi Public Library organises about 150-200 cultural activities every year. The attendance at these programmes is an evidence of the people’s cultural exchange. Thus, culture which is an inseparable part of social education is being successfully developed by public libraries.

PUBLIC LIBRARY AND MASS COMMUNICATION: The mutual intercourse between the public library and mass communication is necessary for carrying out its cultural and educational functions. What the mass media communicate on these two aspects, the public library should collect and disseminate to the people the same through information bearing documents and other means. Electronic media should be utilised by public libraries for direct use of mass communication. In the same way, mass communication agencies like radio and television, press organisations, and other government departments for publicity should also include the public library in their schedules as one of the communicating agencies. A mutual understanding of these two organisations will definitely fulfil the desire of thousands of people for education and culture.

CONCLUSION: The public library is a social and cultural organisation with full of supporting skills and techniques for education, information, culture and recreation. It admits the
users irrespective of their age, sex, caste, colour, creed or any other barriers. It is a democratic set-up being run by the public, 'for' the public and 'of' the public. It involves directly and indirectly in formal and informal educational and cultural activities. It serves as an authentic centre for information and research. It reaches out to such places where no other academic institution can go. It has opened its door to those for whom the doors of the universities and colleges are closed. It is spreading education in jails, hospitals, industries, factories, railway stations, stadiums, slums and everywhere where there are no academic institutions. Keeping in view its potentials for the educational development, the public library is rightly termed as 'People's University'.

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