CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Study

Public library is one of the most 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. It is a social institution owned and maintained by the public of a given area which serves for the socialization of its books and kindred materials for free service to the people of that locality. In many countries across the world, public libraries are often considered essential for educating and to literate population which distinguish it to stands out of other types of libraries. The public library is the most popular of all types of libraries and it is because of its functions and services across the society. Public libraries are different from academic libraries, research libraries, and other special libraries because their consent is to serve the universal public information needs rather than the needs of meticulous academic institutions or research organizations. Public library is considered not only to be a library which used by the public in leisure for passing time in recreational reading but also as an intellectual power which strives to fullfil and meet educational, cultural and information needs of the users. It serves through various kinds of materials. It catter to the varied needs of the people regardless of race, colour, age, sex, status, educational attainment or language. Public libraies are people’s university with a primary purpose to provide information resources to all section of the society. In the modern time, the concept of public library has undergone substantial changes and the changes witnesed in the context of advancement of knowledge, technology, and awareness of importance of the libraries.
There is no single unanimously accepted definition of a public library. Different individuals and institution have defined it in different ways, depending upon the importance given to its objectives.

According to Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, “a public library is an institution maintained for and by community primarily for the social purpose of providing an easy opportunity for self-education throughout the life of every person of the community” (Ranganathan, 1967, p. 135)

The advisory committee for libraries (1964) appointed by the Government of India gave the internationally accepted definition of a public library as “it is a library

i. Which is financed for the most part out of the public funds,

ii. Which charges no fee from readers and yet is open for all use by the public without distinction of caste, creed or sex,

iii. Which is intended as an auxiliary educational institution providing a means of material giving reliable information as well as satisfy the interest of readers” (as cited in Sharma, 2008, p.43)

According to IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1994 elaborates the significance of public libraries as “the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups”, and further stated impact of public libraries for education and society as “a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women” (IFLA/UNESCO, 1994).
Public library may be define that “an organization established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment” (IFLA/UNESCO, 2001, p.2).

Based on the definitions the meaning of public library is a library which is

- Developed and maintained out of public fund,
- Public library is a library which is accessible to all,
- Public library is a library which provides its services freely,
- Public library is a local gateway to knowledge, local gateway to information and a local information center. It is regarded as people’s university and serves as an auxiliary educational institution which support both formal and non-formal education system.

1.2 Public Libraries in Assam

The history of Public Library Services in Assam dates back to 1903. In that year, the British established a public library at Shillong, the Capital town of the Assam province to cater to the needs of a few high ranked officials. Seven district libraries in seven plain districts headquarter of Assam, i.e. Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Jorhat, Nagaon, Silchar, and Tezpur were established in 1955 in order to erect a Public Library Services throughout the state (Sharma, 1997).
After independence, the “First five-year plan for educational development includes a proposal for ‘Improvement of Library Service’. This proposal envisioned a network of libraries throughout the country, co-ordinated by Central Secretariat Library at New Delhi. During the first five- year plan (1952-57), nine state governments, of which Assam was one, decided to set up State Central Library. Accordingly, the State Central Library was set up in Shillong in 1954. In 1965 the old public library which was established in 1903 was amalgamated with the State Central Library. The State Central library established at Shillong was shifted to Guwahati. Consequent upon the shifting of the capital of Assam from Shillong in the year 1973 and resources were accommodated in the District Library building at Guwahati (Das, 2011).

In 1984, the Government of Assam upgraded the State Central Library to the Directorate of Library Services. At present the Directorate of Library Services, Assam acting as the nodal agency in the public library system in Assam. Directorate of Library Services is functioning under the Cultural Affairs Department, Government of Assam. The organizational hierarchy of the public library system in the state at present is as follows:

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Ministry of Culture, Government of Assam
  ↓
Cultural Affairs Department (CAD)
  ↓
Directorate of Library Services (DLS), Assam
  ↓
State Central Library (SCL) District Library (DL) Sub-Divisional Library (SDL)
  ↓
Rural Library (RL) Branch Library (BL)
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*Figure 1.1: Organizational Structure of Library Services in Assam*

(Source: https://publiclibraryservices.assam.gov.in/about-us/history-3)
At present in Assam, there are 246 Public Libraries among them 26 District Libraries (DL), 16 Sub-divisional Libraries (SDL), 04 Branch Libraries (BL), and 199 Rural Libraries (RL).

Table: 1.1 Number of Public Libraries in Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Library</th>
<th>No. of Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Central Library</td>
<td>01 No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Library</td>
<td>26 Nos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-divisional Library</td>
<td>16 Nos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch Library</td>
<td>04 Nos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Library</td>
<td>199 Nos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total = 246 Nos.

(Source: https://publiclibraryservices.assam.gov.in/about-us/history-3)

The Directorate of Library Services (DLS) in Assam initiated the public library Automation Programme in 2004-2005. During this period the DLS Assam received a grant of Rs. 50.00 lakh from the State Priority Fund, Government of Assam for computerization of district and sub-divisional libraries and purchased a set of computers, UPS and printers to 23 District Libraries and 14 Sub-divisional libraries (Das, 2011).

In December 2005 the National Informatics Centre (NIC) had supplied the software e-Granthalaya to 41 Public Libraries in Assam. However, the software was not installed up to June 2008 except a few District Libraries. At present Koha software has been installed in all 18 District Libraries and 04 branch libraries in Assam. The RRRLF,
which is meant for public library development in India has initiated the process of customization of library system under the DLS, Assam by way of using Koha.

1.3 Networking in libraries

Resource sharing is defined as a mode of operation, whereby information resources are shared by a number of participants having the same objectives in mind. Thus the user of one library can have his requirements fulfilled by another library if the local library fails to serve his needs. Some of the essential prerequisites for effective resource sharing include:

- Possession of shareable resources by the participating libraries, willingness to share the resources, a planned mechanism of sharing;
- A precise understanding of the use and information potential of their respective collections and common bibliographic access to the collections of the participating libraries.

The ultimate aim of networking is to achieve maximum results with minimum input. Networking is inevitable in all types of libraries, for it enables users to have access to the resources of many other libraries, in addition to their own (Vyas, 1997).

**The benefits which accrue from resource sharing are the following:**

- Preparation of union catalogues
- Preparation of the cataloguing data
- Bibliographies provision
- Optimum utilization of rare collections
- Cooperative exchange and distribution and storage of documents
• Accumulation of both technical work and collection
• Cost-effective library services
• Low consumption of time with provision for more materials

Networking systems have been developing fast at the local, state, national and international levels all over the world since the 1980s. Thus, libraries have to plan their acquisitions keeping in mind the resources available in other libraries in the area, so that they can get the maximum number of books and publications which are not available in their vicinity. In the past few years, considerable progress has taken place in the planning and building of library and information networks.

1.4 Networking of Public libraries

The public libraries in the west have developed into a true community information and reference system with such computerized data access and facilities for providing a variety of information to the general public from housing and social security to legal and medical aid and temperature and travel schedule.

In India, the development of public libraries has not been a priority and their growth, as a result, is uneven. Public libraries serve as a backbone of literacy mission suffer from want of adequate fund, modern equipment, trained staff, good and adequate collections, proper reading rooms, stacks and user facilities.

Objectives of Public Library and Information Network:

• Establish effective- communication amongst users of member institutions;
• Encourage inter library cooperation and resource sharing;
• Help to member libraries in their amount, retro-conversion of bibliographic records and development of standardized databases;
• Make union catalogues to provide access to the collection available in member libraries;
• Provide access to computerized databases of participating libraries;
• Offer document delivery services to member libraries;
• Rationalization of acquisition of information resources in member libraries and optimize their usage through resource sharing;
• Adapt protocols and standards, guidelines, methods and procedures for bibliographic records, their storage, inter-library loan etc;
• Provide training to members of library staff of participating libraries for effective use of libraries in the network;
• Guide member libraries in the effective implementation and utilization of current and upcoming information technologies;
• Form consortium to provide access to information resources at reduced rates.

1.5 Statement of the problem

The libraries of the 21st century should facilitate the transition of today’s literate society to a knowledge-based one of tomorrow. Libraries have changed from standalone entities to networks from the collection based to access-based one. Services of the libraries are extending from mere document-based to information-based; and from physical existence to electronic and virtual libraries. It is here that the concept of resource sharing and networking has come into picture. Libraries have shared their resources to serve users in a cost-effective manner. The application of Information and
Communication Technology (ICT) in the public libraries in the state of Assam seems to be improved over the last few years as the Directorate of Library Services Assam has paid due emphasis in automation under network.

However, implementation of a network environment is not free from problems and it might invite the following difficulties are stated below:

- Lack of proper planning;
- Inability of the conventional librarians to cope with the tools of the ICT in library operations and services;
- Shortage of the ICT trained personnel;
- Shortage of information resources;
- Limitation of the library fund;
- Lack of ICT infrastructure;

The existence of the aforesaid problems necessitates a careful examination of the prevailing environment and identification of the constraints thereof. To achieve this mission of the public library network in the state a holistic planning with setting a proper road map each of utmost important to realize the same.

It is envisioned the study will focus on the development of the public library network in the state with a particular reference to the establishment of a necessary national network of public libraries in the long run.

Hence the topic chosen for the research is “Problems and Prospects of Networking in Public Library System in Assam: A Study”.

9
1.6 The scope of the study

Though public libraries were established in different times, the present study area concentrates on problems and prospects of library networking, excluding the public libraries which have not been covered by library automation yet. So, for the study 22 public libraries (18 district libraries and 4 branch libraries) have been selected excluding the remaining public libraries from the study.

1.7. Objectives of the study

The broad objectives of the study are to visualize the state-of-the-art public library system in Assam and to propose a model for networking of the libraries towards harnessing the public library movement in the state.

Accordingly, the objectives have been lined up for the study are:

a) To study the present situation of public libraries of Assam: Collections, users, manpower, and services;

b) To study the existing infrastructure facilities available in the public library system in Assam;

c) To study the library automation scenario of the public library system in Assam;

d) To study the problems of library networking in public libraries system in Assam;

e) To propose a model of public library network for Assam.
1.8 Research Question

Following questions are set as guidelines to fulfill the above objectives:

- Is the library environment is congenial/ suitable for extending proper public library services in Assam?
- What are the different library services extended by the public libraries of Assam?
- What are the existing infrastructure facilities available in the public libraries system in Assam?
- How far is automation implemented in those libraries?
- What are the problems faced by public libraries for networking of public libraries in Assam?
- How can a public library network model for Assam be proposed?

1.9 Methodology

In order to solve the present research problem, questionnaire, interview, and observation methodologies have been used to collect primary data from the selected libraries for the study. Keeping objectives of the study in view, a semi-structured questionnaire was designed for librarian as the main technique for collection of primary data (Appendix-I) and forwarded to the libraries covered in the study in a definite time frame ending with March 2018. Personal observations of the surveyed libraries and interaction/personal interview with the librarians also used as supplementary tools for data collection. Data collected from the respondents through questionnaire, observation and interview
techniques are evaluated and analyzed by using proper statistical methods and other qualitative techniques used to interpret the findings of the study (Chapter 4).

Literature Survey is concerned as a most significant job in preparing the research design and principles of different aspects involved in carrying out a study. The literature available both micro and macro on the subject have been studied. The researcher has collected necessary data/information from various sources of information available in libraries, information/documentation centers, and the Internet. The important sources that have been used during the literature survey include journals, books, annual reports, theses and dissertations, newsletter, conference/seminar proceedings, online resources, etc.

To understand different aspects of the problems at hand, the researcher has also participated in a number of seminars, conferences, workshops, training programme, short-term courses, etc.

1.10 Chapter plan

The thesis is structured in six chapters including the introduction and conclusion, besides references and appendixes are also included at the end of the work.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the first chapter, the subject of the study has been introduced illustratively including the field of the study. Other parts of this chapter covered the statement of the problem, scope of the study, objectives of the study, Research questions, methodology and chapter plan including a brief description of respective chapters.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This chapter renders an appraisal of the relevant literature pertaining to the study. A conceptual note work appeared in printed and digital forms are included here. APA (American Psychological Association) 6th edition citation style is followed to cite literature within the text. The literature has been arranged first according to the concept and then within each concept chronologically.

Chapter 3: Public Libraries in Assam: An overview

In this chapter, a brief discussion of various sub-topics has been made. This chapter contains public libraries history in India. Further, trends of the public libraries in Assam, a brief discussion on public library legislation, RRRLF and public libraries in Assam etc. are also included in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Status of automation and networking in public libraries of Assam:

Based on survey

This chapter deals with the analysis of data obtained from the survey conducted among the public libraries in Assam. A detailed discussion on the present status of public libraries in Assam in case of library infrastructure development, library users, library collections, library hours, technical processing, types of access system, library services, manpower strength, library automation, ICT infrastructure, RFID technology, Internet connectivity, reasons for joining library networking programme, barriers faced during library networking has been made on the basis of the analysis (descriptive and statistical) of data and information collected from Librarians, Assistant Librarians etc.
Chapter 5: Network of Public Library System in Assam: A proposed model

In this chapter based on different models studied the researcher has developed a conceptual model on public library network for resources. The structure of the proposed network for Assam Public Library Networking (ASPLIBNET) is discussed in detail in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

On the basis of the study, findings are systematically presented and categorized with a concluding summary. The cited objectives are being reflected in this chapter with the result of the study made. Overall conclusion, recommendations, and scope of further research suggestions are forwarded which may be consulted for further research projects.

References and Appendixes are included at the end of the work. The list of references is arranged alphabetically according to APA (American Psychological Association) 6th edition citation style.