CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Human beings, in their onward march to create a better world, have observed nature and acquired knowledge from it. Then they felt that the knowledge should be made available to the future generations by preserving, and for this task wrought their acquirements on the material of their choice and availability such as stone, clay, metal, leather, cloth, and paper. This process of recording of knowledge helped the future generations to gain a faster pace in the building up of civilization. The practice of preserving graphics and writings was thus born in archives in an era when archives and libraries did not possess much distinction.

In the long history of human civilization, it can be observed that importance of libraries and knowledge sharing have grown along with the developments in civilization. Soon, libraries were considered to be the hub of intelligence or the brain of the society. It has been recorded in history that whenever rivalry broke out between different cultural groups there have been attempts to burn the libraries. This is because it was felt that by destroying a library, the future of any society could be stalled.

From feudalism to industrialism and to globalism, the human society has exhibited a tendency that is strangely intriguing. Importance was attached to land under feudalism and money gained superiority under industrialized society. In the present globalised society which carries with it the newborn child of technology — the Cyber world - knowledge, if not information,¹ is the ruling deity. So instead of paper,² now we talk about ‘Digital’- Electronic

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library, Digital library, virtual library and also Gateway and Portal. Libraries therefore may change their shape and form, but will continue to play a significant and vital role as the storehouses of knowledge and its dissemination. The significant question now is how the next generation will utilize it or in other words, what is the impact of these archives and libraries upon the intelligent elite of the contemporary world.

The library being a social institution, creates an impact on the society by providing direct or indirect benefit to the users. It provides social benefit by making available knowledge and information on matters which are useful for social welfare and for the over all upliftment of the society. The Libraries are the collectors and stewards of our heritage.\(^3\)

Libraries contribute to the financial well-being of its users by providing access to financial information, economic data, business information, market information and job and career related resources. All these help to increase business and economic activity in the society. Libraries also assist its users in saving money on the purchase of books which they need for their study or job, by making them available.

The career opportunity information provided by the library helps its members in getting jobs. Such information also helps the users to understand the job market and the qualifications required to get better jobs than the existing ones. By the use of the library resources, the users are able to acquire new skills and also improve their existing skills. This leads them to getting promotion in the existing job and also get senior positions anywhere in the world. This results in improving their economic position and also their standard of living and quality of life.

The library provides educational benefit to the students in the schools, colleges and Universities by stocking books for their regular study and also by making available other relevant information. It also helps students and others who want to continue their studies even after completing the regular studies through distance learning. Since libraries play a role in the life- long learning of its users, Public libraries are described as the *poor man's university* and the *street corner university*. And this clearly reveals its educational role in the society.

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The library helps in the overall personality development of its users. The various types of information available in the library especially about the lives of distinguished personalities around the world and their leadership activities, information on social evils, books on good manners and also books related to personality development etc plays a role in the personality development of the users.

Another important impact of the library is the creation of internationalistic perspective in the mind of the users. The books related to various countries in the world and the events therein create a remarkable impact in the perception of the individual and widen his outlook. This helps the individual to approach everything with an international outlook.

The library also provides information about the culture of the society and also about the various cultures around the world. The information regarding arts, music, literature, dance, culture and customs in the various countries influences the present thinking of the readers. This could be termed as the cultural impact.

The state of Kerala and its social, educational and cultural life are considered to be much different from those of other parts of India due to the various reforms which took place in this part of the country even much before independence. The earlier rulers of this country namely Maharajas initiated many reforms in the areas of social, educational and cultural life. The Kerala library movement, the activities of the Missionaries and their contribution to printing of books are well known. The influence of communist ideas and the formation of the first elected communist government in the world are the clear evidence for this. The people of Kerala have a passion for reading and it can be assessed from the number of publications coming out from the different towns in this state. The state also claims to have 100% literacy and the empowerment of women is considered to be much higher than in any other parts of India. Kerala have a long list of women’s organisations and their involvement in various social problems are well known. The appointment of women in many senior positions of various professions can be cited as examples for this. In this context, it is obvious that the role and impact of the British library becomes very relevant.

The British Council has established offices in 220 towns in 110 countries. India is the biggest British Council operational area in the world, having 11 libraries and having a membership
of more than one hundred thousand (100,000). These libraries are modelled on the pattern of UK public libraries and are creating an impact on the users. So far in order to assess their impact, no systematic study has been done.

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of the British Library Thiruvananthapuram in the following aspects:

1. The demographic characteristics of its users
2. Social and public impact
3. Economic impact
4. Career opportunity impact
5. Educational impact
6. Continuous learning impact
7. Personality development impact
8. International environment

Chapterization

The Thesis is organised as follows. Chapter II briefly starts with the establishment of the British Council, the India network and deals elaborately with the British Library Thiruvananthapuram and its various services and policies. Chapter III is a review of the relevant literature to establish a valid background for this study. It deals with the various ‘evaluative studies’, ‘impact studies’ and ‘social audit studies’ of public libraries. Chapter IV is research methodology, which deals with the methodology used for this study. Chapter V deals with data analysis. The collected data is analysed on the following headings - demographic characteristics of the users, social and public impact, economic impact, career opportunities, educational attainment, continuous learning, personality development, international perspective and cultural role. An additional set of qualitative data is also provided. Chapter VI presents the overall study findings, conclusions and suggestions.