CHAPTER 4
CHAPTER -4

Role of Library in society

4.1 Introduction:

Institutionalization of human activities in every sphere of life is the most common trend in modern societies. Human activities like economic performance, business, industries, defence, health care, education, transmission of information, environmental studies etc. are organized and developed through institutions.

Man is a social being and cannot live 'by bread alone'. There are deeper and finer qualities in a human being such as the spiritual, ideological, cultural, aesthetic and some others, which elevate life to a higher pedestal, which in turn contribute to the progress and advancement of society. There must be ample opportunities for people for being well informed, knowledgeable and responsible for the cause
of society. The very lack of recreational facilities and constructive, competitive activities results in subversive tendencies and anti-social activities amongst people. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the society for its well-being and prosperity to establish different institutions. Modern society has established a variety of institutions /organizations to meet the various needs of its members. Educational institutions like schools, colleges, universities, research and technical institutions, other institutions such as industrial complexes, business houses, institutions of fine arts, recreation, etc. are few of the social institutions in society.

The library is also one of such social institutions, which are entrusted with the task of collecting, preserving, storing processing, organizing, retrieving, information and knowledge as recorded and documented through different media. Most of the social institutions other than the library concentrate on one or few of the needs of the society. However, the library is unique in that, it can serve almost its needs.
4.2 Library in Society:

Man is Homo sapiens. He dives into past, swims on the Present and advances to the Future. Inquisitiveness and desireness to communicate the ideas are very common to him. Man being a thinking animal wants his thoughts / ideas and experience to be recorded and communicated to the future generations since these are indispensable for the development of society, civilization, and humanity at large. Out of these basic instincts, the idea of library originates in the society and serves as a repository of recorded human thoughts for the perpetual use by the present generation as well as the posterity. Thereby its holdings varies from clay tablets, parchment, velum, papyrus, palm leaves, manuscripts to books, periodicals, maps, magnetic tapes, CDs etc. The process of communication evolves from oral communication, mechanical communication to electronic communication.
Since information and knowledge are so vital for all-round human development, the library exposes all its documents (irrespective of its form) containing a wide variety of knowledge, thought and information to its users. This act generates new knowledge, brings to the surface the dormant aesthetic talents, stimulates intellect, inculcates values, develops learning skills, and provides recreations and better understanding amongst its users and by extensions, in society. It is depicted in the following figure -1.

**Fig.-4.1**

*Library Service-Knowledge Generation Cycle*
It shows that the library as a service provider provides service say $S^1$ to the society and the society after getting enlightened from the library service a new knowledge say $K^1$ is generated and the same is accumulated in the library. The library again with its enriched collection provides better library service with more information say $S^2$ to the society. The society again generates some more new knowledge say $K^2$ and the same is also accumulated in the library. This cyclical process will continue till the society exists and the library is regarded as 'the chief instrument for accumulating and disseminating man's intellectual heritage' and it places the society on a higher pedestal.

One more thing to be kept in mind is that people come to libraries not only to 'find information they need or want', or for recreational reading but also to reduce ambiguity, make decisions, uplift their abilities to cope with a situation, or to search for something that will minimize their anxiety as far as possible. Therefore, gathering information is not an end in itself but the means to solve problems.
And this can also be said that in the midst of these various functions, the basic role played by a library remains the same to maintain a link in the communication chain between recorded knowledge and its users from one generation to another, and from one age to the coming ages passing through geographical barriers.

There are no exact records of when or how the first library originated but it is worth saying that 'Library is a social institution. It is born in civilized literate society, grows and develops in response to social conditions and needs for equipping the people with necessary proposition of accumulated knowledge and preparing them for cooperative social life.' As Pierce Butler rightly observed, "The library has been created by actual necessities in modern civilization. It is now a necessary unit in the social fabric."

So it can be seen that library and society are inter-linked and inter-dependent. 'Society without libraries has no significance and libraries without society have no origin'. Regarding the role of libraries in
society, J.H. Shera has quite appropriately observed that, "The library is a product of our cultural maturation".  

4.3 Role of Librarian:

The role of the librarian in this process is a 'Mediator' who makes a match between the recorded knowledge and the man, and establishes a relation between the two. J.H. Shera depicts this relation in an 'Analogy of Triangle'.

![Analogy of Triangle](image.png)

**Books & People**

**Fig.-4.2**

**Analogy of Triangle**
In this triangle 'Books' are shown on the one side and 'People' is on the other side and the base line is 'Books and People' that directly focuses the objective of the library: 'to bring human beings and recorded knowledge, in as fruitful a relationship as it is humanly possible to be'.

Here side AC indicates 'Books': All sorts of recorded knowledge both conventional and non-conventional, side BC indicates 'People includes library users and people in general, base AB indicates 'Library': A common place where library materials and its users come together.

The librarian belongs all the sides of the triangle. He takes initiative in the collection of library documents, and processes and arranges for the same in a systematic way in the library. He also assesses the information needs of its users and retrieves or helps to retrieve the documents/information to meet their needs.
4.4 Evolution of the concept of Library:

The concept of library has been revolutionized from early past to present day. This is shown in the following chart.

Library is a Repository of Reading Materials

(Books are accumulated like other forms of wealth or property. It is a museum of books. The possession of a private library becomes a symbol of social prestige. Sometimes old manuscripts are treated as holy/religious things; not to be touched)
Library is a Storehouse of Books for use

(Library provides books to its users. Here book represents all sorts of reading materials: conventional and non-conventional. Book contains thoughts, ideas, and information. Book is a container of thought contents of a person on a particular subject.)

Library is an Information Centre

(Library provides information to its users. 'The dissemination of information is,...,one of the most basic of social activities, and one of the most essential'.)

Library is a Knowledge Centre
(Library provides widespread and inclusive access to knowledge)

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**Library is a Window of the World of Knowledge**

(Library unfolds its collection to its users as well as a gate way to national and global knowledge)

With the passage of time and development of information technology, the modern society is under going a rapid change. The early concept of library as a repository of reading materials has been changed and now it becomes a window of the world of knowledge. Therefore, library is not only a gateway of its own resources but also a server of information of rest of the world. To-day 'Libraries have a recognized social function in making knowledge publicly available to all'.

The National Knowledge Commission (2006) clearly defines the role of libraries, "Libraries have to play two distinct roles - to serve as a local centre of information and knowledge and to be a local gateway to
national and global knowledge." That is, the society is moving forward the information society, knowledge society, the network society.

4.5 Role of Library:

The library as a social institution plays a vital role in different fields in the progress of society. The fields can be identified as follows:

4.5.1 Drive illiteracy:

Illiteracy is a curse and a national shame to us. It is the library, which can steadily eradicate illiteracy. The illiterate people can’t enter into the world of books and therefore fail to know whatever lies in their pages. In India, illiteracy is an alarming 34.62% (as per the Census Report of 2001). This inescapably stands in the way of social progress. It is our responsibility to fight against illiteracy. The Literacy Mission, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India has taken steps to
eradicate illiteracy. But whatever be the steps taken by the Mission, they should be centered around the library at the grass root level because a local library is the social nerve centre of locality.

This apart, the library takes active steps to protect the neo-literate against the curse of illiteracy. The library collects books and other materials for neo-literate and invites them to its premises. Due care should be taken to sustain their reading habits so that they are not be drowned in the darkness of illiteracy again. The importance of a library in this regard, to prepare itself adequately to discharge its function, should not be lost sight of. Driving illiteracy and educating them should go side by side.

Apart from taking necessary steps to eradicate illiteracy the library also educates them by using modern technology. The audio-visual media, especially the video tapes, CD's, audio tapes, etc. are effectives tools to educate the illiterates. It is the social responsibility of the library to work in this field in its communities through such media. If
the illiterate clientele does not feel eager to come to the library, the library may go to their doorstep to educate them and make them aware of what is going on in their surroundings.

In the context of present changing scenario, the library should take up also the 'Computer Literacy Programme' for its clientele as far as practicable.

4.5.2 Educate the working force:

The library plays an important role in educating the people engaged in different vocations in its area. It should collect books and other relevant materials for the people engaged in different professions. Having access to such documents, they will become better informed and educated in their own fields of work and will be able to improve their overall efficiency thereby. This will lead to enhanced
productivity, which in turn will improve the economic condition of the country.

4.5.3 Self-education:

Libraries in general and public library in particular have a very important role to play in the development of social economical cultural and educational life of a country. Library services to all classes of people irrespective of caste, creed, sex, religion etc. – to children, adolescents and young adults, the aged and the handicapped- is a social necessity for a harmonious and cultured life and for the steady development of the social being.

Great libraries have been called the fruits and roots of great civilization. The public library “is an indispensable basis for a community intelligence service”\textsuperscript{9}. From the early notion of ‘museum of books’ public libraries today are essentially ‘universities of the people’ as Alvin Johnson very thoughtfully called, ‘The Public Library- A
People's University'10 That is, the public library as a people's university accommodates the people in general and unfolds the treasure of knowledge to them. Education is a life long process; library and education are twin sisters. The modern trend in education is to develop a thinking individual who should strive to be a self-reliant person in all walks of life. Education implies discipline and cultivation of the intellect – 'an intellect able to operate well in all fields'. It enables the individuals to know himself and to be self-reliant, cultivate the virtue of self-help, self-confidence, to judge the situations to take decisions as fit for a given situation and develops the power of adjustment and understanding. The importance of formal education imparted through a school, a college, or a university can hardly be over estimated, yet education does not end with the formal education. It is also true that through it education is imparted only to a fraction of the total population. Moreover, only a small fraction of the accumulated knowledge of humankind is covered in the curriculum. Therefore, a considerable portion of the population remains outside the fold of such education and a vast portion of knowledge remains untouched. So the
education of an individual starts, in real sense, after the formal education is over and it is the library which unfolds the universe of knowledge to the people on the one hand and accommodates all sections of people to share that knowledge on the other. As Carroll V. Newsom correctly remarked, "All education is really self-education. Learning cannot be passive; one who would develop the powers of his mind must seek deliberately 'to match his wits' with problems provided by his natural and man-made environment."^{11}

To be fully beneficial to the cause of society, the function of the library must not be confined merely to make book available when needed by a potential reader but actively to stimulate the use of books. Thus, the library can perform the task of converting every person in its neighborhood into a habitual library-goer and reader of books and thus the potential readers are also converted into actual readers.
4.5.4 Encouragement of reading:

The most significant role played by a library is to draw people into its fold, stimulate their reading habits, and offer guidance in choosing books and other materials as required for their particular purpose. That is, the main job of the library staff in general and the librarian in particular is to guide the readers as to how and where to find out the materials and to acquaint them with the 'hide and seek' character of most of the books which baffle even the most advanced of the lot. Readers—sometimes very serious readers—come to the library with an unsatiable thirst to know. A particular document searched for may not be available at that time. That situation should be tackled sympathetically so that the reader may wait for that or may have an alternative document or other possible means without which a library will not be able to attract readers.

So concerted effort put in by the library is directed towards selling itself, going out and promoting its services. The library with its network
must encourage reading habits among readers; children, adults, aged people, workers, handicapped, neo-literates, under privileged even in the remotest corners of the country for their different purposes. The library must insist on that reading is instrumental in the creation of intellectual, aesthetic, moral, social, and political values. The slogan should be, "Books are for use," and 'Reading is for education, for information, for seeking social recognition, for emotional release, for self-realization and for attaining Moksha'.

4.5.5 Augmentation of research work:

One of the most important roles of a library is to support research work by virtue of which society is enlightened considerably. 'Research is the life-blood of the modern society'. Quality research work enhance social dynamism and the more dynamic a society, greater the rate of development conducive to the uplift of the economic standards, level of education, knowledge and cultural life all over. No research work
cannot go on without the support of library as Oliver Wendell Holmes said that a library is ‘a nest in which to hatch scholars’12.

Research is a kind of intellectual activity that starts with a problem and progresses through critical examination of documentary evidences and circumstances that are reliable and relevant to the problem and comes to a conclusion to reveal previously unexplored dimensions from available knowledge. That is to say, research is an attempt to discover, develop, and verify knowledge, which in turn widens the horizon of learning.

The body of knowledge that is added or newly created through research is published in journals, research reports, abstracts etc. The libraries that are linked with different institutions engaged in research like universities, research institutions / centres, research and development wings of industrial houses etc. must have a rich and varied collection of such publication and other materials to supports farther research activities. Since the ingredients of research work happen to be information, which is to be disseminated with
pinpointed, accurate, fullness and rigor, the library has to maintain some essentials gadgets and preserve them with utmost care. Though research work is facilitated by some special libraries, yet no library is entirely without a research function in some form. The public library serves the cause of research, especially in the social sciences and humanities. Even a local library by opening a 'Local History Collection' may be a golden treasure for research scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

4.5.6 Preservation of culture:

The library is the nerve-centre for preserving the cultural heritage of the human race for raising cultural standards and thereby effecting the all-round progress of society. The library generates reading habits, which in turn influences the intellectual tastes of the people, and helps develop a healthy cultural atmosphere. Culture as defined by Arnold is, "The complete and harmonious development of all the faculties that make for the beauty and strength of human life". Sir Edward Taylor
defined culture as, "That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society." Kluckholn has briefly summarized it, "Culture consists of all transmitted social learning." 

The UNESCO Manifesto for public library clearly mentions that the public library is entrusted with the job of promoting awareness regarding cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations, fostering inter-cultural dialogue and facilitating cultural diversity by providing access to all books and other materials that the library maintains. Thus, the library performs its cultural function by acquiring and providing books and other materials to its clientele that preserve and uphold the cultural heritage of man. It is the duty of the library to further transmit the social learning to posterity. The collection of recorded materials of humankind bringing out his excellence in poetry, drama, prose, music, dance, sculpture, painting etc. provide a soothing effect to the working mind and develop their qualities of aesthetic appreciation.
The library should organize cultural programs such as drama, dance, music concerts, observation of national and international important days, recitation competition for children, exhibition of paintings etc. in an attractive manner and invite the people of the locality to participate and enrich the cultural life of the community.

Moreover the opening of a separate section in the library named as the ‘Local History Collection’ accommodating cultural materials like the works of art or sculpture, painting literary documents, manuscripts, musical instruments, weapons of the past etc. as available in that particular cultural community will enkindle a sense of pride and achievement in the minds of the people and enlighten them about their cultural heritage.

4.5.7 Disseminating of Information:

Information is a piece of knowledge centering some particular fact or event in any communicable form. C.G. Viswanathan defines, “Information is the product of the human brain in action and may be
abstract or concrete". Present age is called the 'Information age' and the fourth information revolution is upon us. Information is one of the basic resources of a country being no less important than the natural resources. J. McCarthy opines that "Information is a commodity no less tangible than energy; if anything, it is more pervasive in human affairs". Realizing the importance of information, it is said that a country is rich because it is rich in information. Information helps man to change his surroundings and raise it the higher pedestal. That is, information propels all forms of progress in society as it compels man to work. P.F. Drucker compares information with that of electricity and says, "Information like electricity, is a form of energy...information is energy for mind work". With the progress of society, generation and publication of information are increasing very rapidly. The rate of generation of information is so high that 'Information explosion' has taken place today.

The basic information role of the library is to collect the books, periodicals, popular magazines, employment news, newspaper etc.,
and other materials containing information through appropriate methods. Therefore the libraries are actually repositories of information and knowledge through books, periodicals etc. that they collect. Thus, the books, periodicals and other materials are nothing but 'container of contents' and here 'contents' means information.

Another information role of the library is to disseminate relevant information relating to the socio-economic needs of the people. The information is needed by the teachers, students, research scholars, scientists, administrators, farmers, artisans, and others to equip themselves to perform better in their respective vocations. 'Career Guidance Cell' would be helpful to the youngsters. The unemployed youths may seek information to start some enterprise. Even the laborers and poverty-stricken people may look for information for being engaged (on daily payment basis) in rural development activities. Therefore, the library should contain unbiased information not only relating to the academic and professional, but also in relating to popular science and technology to be applied in day to day life,
unhealthy and unsocial practices to be avoided in social life, legal information relating to family laws, crime etc. and of other areas also. So information is necessitated almost by all in almost all the fields of our life and its importance is ever increasing. Realizing it, Richard R. Rowe rightly says, "Information has always been valued by mankind. As the velocity of change increases, information will be much more important. Its perceived value is bound to increase substantially. Access to knowledge-quick, accurate, comprehensive information will become the capital of the future, making difference between success and failure". Here the library plays a crucial role in disseminating information and should act on the principle of "Right information to the Right man (person), in the Right amount at the Right time and in the Right form".

With the contemporary transformation of ours into an ‘information society’, the need for information is multidimensional. The information explosion resulting in its rapid continuous flow poses serious problems for the library professionals. Modern technology in general and
information technology in particular provide some respite here. It is information technology, which has largely made possible the storage of vast quantities of information and their processing, access and availability irrespective of distance and location with great speed and accuracy. Many commercial organizations have appeared in this field, taken the information as commodity, and started 'information business'. That is, commercialization of information services has taken place. Therefore, the library for its existence should possess computer, T.V. C.Ds, Video tapes, floppies, films, tapes, projector etc. and above all should provide Internet facilities to cater to the information needs of its clientele. In the context of this changing situation and rapid globalization, the traditional concept of library as a 'store house of knowledge' and 'gate way to its own collection' has been changed. In addition, the library becomes a 'window' to watch the 'world of knowledge'. 
4.5.8 Success of democracy:

The library as an impartial service provider welcomes every person irrespective of caste, creed, sex, age, income, level of intelligence etc. to its doorstep to unfold all shades of opinion on a particular topic or issues to them so that they could have the opportunity to think over it independently and develop an idea unbiasedly and objectively. Thus, the library stimulates thinking and thinking drives ignorance and replaces it by understanding, love, and knowledge. Since people from different segments of society come to a common platform- the library - a mutual understanding among them develops and enhances a democratic spirit. The library paves way for the success of democracy by mass education. The people become well-informed citizens capable of exercising their democratic rights. Modern democracy that is based on adult franchise depends for its success on universal education. Adam’s report to the Carnegie U.K.Trustees in 1915 states that ‘thinking’ ultimately is that which moves and develops society and no real democracy can be established until there are well-educated people.
As the nation progresses, the socio-economic condition of the people improves and the leisure hours of the people increase providing thereby a greater opportunity for pursuing studies. The library will provide the best material to those who shall lead the developmental activities of his country as well as to the general people as a whole who play a very important role for the development of society and the successful working of democracy.

4.5.9 Fostering religious understanding:

Traditionally India is a land of different religions and a religious harmony should consistently be maintained so that the people of different religions co-habit peacefully in the country. The library has a unique role to play in this regard. As the people belong to different religious communities each of which has its own religious faith and belief, the library should impartially collect books on religious philosophy and spirituality covering all religions. The stress should be given particularly on the religions embraced by the local people. This
enables people to meet their spiritual, religious, and ideological needs and inspires them to follow higher ideals in life by inculcating values in them.

Since the library is a citadel of individualism, there is every scope of studying inter-religious books that will foster understanding and tolerance of other religions (a crying need of the present day) dispel ignorance and hatred, and replace it by love of the Almighty and of man.

4.5.10 Healthy practices in the use of leisure:

Leisure means, 'Free time, time at one's disposal'. The modern world has made life on earth almost a continuous struggle. But all work and no leisure makes a person monotonous. So every one should find out some leisure and should use the leisure in such manner that it refreshes his mind. With the betterment of socio-economic condition of the people the leisure time available to an average person increases and his leisure should be spent in some healthy practices. It should not be
wasted through negative and destructive activities. The library should cater to the recreational needs of its users by collecting books and other materials suitable for this purpose. Novels, short stories, dramas, biographies etc. are to be collected for this purpose. Moreover, library should organize cultural programmes like theatre, dance, recitation, and other performing arts, discussions on some pressing social issues etc. in a colourful manner that these attract people of the locality other than just its members to come to the library and pass their time in a positive way. The library should have an ample space; say community hall etc. for this purpose and have a T.V. so that the people may watch the news, national programmes and decent entertainment programmes freely.

4.5.11 Aiding social integration:

Though India is a land of people belonging to different languages, religions, races etc. who have their different customs, beliefs, rituals, etc. and the country, within itself, has some different contradictory
geographical features, still there is unity in diversity, which is our long cherished cultural heritage. However, at present maintaining its unity has become very difficult. Various disruptive forces, separatist tendencies, and terrorist activities are trying to destroy our national unity. It is in jeopardy at present. It can be restored through one of the instruments-library which, as a social institution for democratic living welcomes the use of its meeting rooms for socially useful and cultural activities and discussions on current public issues. Such accommodations should be equally available to all groups in the community regardless of the creed and affiliation of their members and their political and religious beliefs. In this way, the pavement for social integration is made possible within the library premises itself. Every library is a centre for international peace and understanding. By its very existence, free from all bias and prejudice, the library in general and public library in particular helps maintain peace, uphold democracy, and sustain national integrity.
4.6 Sum up:

Viewing the importance of library in the society it can be said that that the library is the heart and developmental activities in the community are its pulse beats. A local library is the nerve centre of the locality. The increased rate of literacy, the spread of education, knowledge, information from centre to circumference, i.e. from head quarter to grass-root level in the country is the prime need for development. This work could best be performed by the library. "Development of libraries is imperative for an overall healthy development of its members. Since libraries are the centers of information, education and knowledge, it is for the society to have libraries which provide food for thought, food for inspiration and food for survival of human race"[21]. So the development of library; the spread of library in every root and corner of the country and their networking is one of the basic infra-structural components for national development and likewise the proverb should be 'a nation is known by the library it possesses'.
In present scenario of population explosion; socio-economic, political, educational changes, the advent of new knowledge in science, technology, and the social sciences, changes in trade and commerce and cultural changes that affect tastes have transformed society enormously. Society has metamorphosed itself into an ‘information society’. Consequently, libraries are also undergoing unprecedented changes in all its spheres; they are shaped and reshaped by the changing needs of the society. Observing this, Robert S. Taylor, an eminent information scientist, has rightly remarked that, “In a metaphorical sense, we are moving from a Ptolemaic world with the library at the centre to a Copernican one with information at the centre and the library as one of its planets”\(^\text{22}\). That is, our society is ‘Moving toward what is called the information society, the knowledge society, the network society’\(^\text{23}\). In this information age information and knowledge are the two remarkable features of this modern society. The increasing use of information and communication technologies are the prime mover of this change and the librarian becomes the ‘General Manager of Information’ in the ‘Information Enterprise’.
Reference:


5. Ibid. p 31.


