Chapter X

CONCLUSION

The State of Kerala has been unique in many a field. In the field of education and social development the state has achieved the highest position among the Indian states. The torch of learning had been carried from the ancient period and libraries had a pivotal role in this unbroken evolutionary process.

The libraries of Kerala have an impressive historical antiquity. They were in existence even before the Christian era. During that time libraries were neither institutions of mass education nor of social activities. Most of them were of private nature to which entry was restricted. Besides, the habit of reading and preserving books were found only among the educated upper class in those days. During that time education was the monopoly of the ruling class. The arrival of European powers and the development of Malayalam language effected far reaching changes in the Society of Kerala. The Europeans who later on dominated Kerala had brought with them an ideology and literature embodying the aspirations of the common man. They shared these aspirations and ideals with the natives of Kerala. They introduced western educational system and
printing technology. The enlightened rulers of the state actively supported and supplemented these attempts. It was the British paramountcy in Travancore that was responsible for the setting up of the first Public Library in India. The rise of literacy rate and the availability of printed books created an atmosphere for starting new public libraries in the State. The educated people, social reformers and political leaders came out to encourage the setting up of public libraries. Thus by the beginning of the twentieth century many libraries began to spring up in almost all parts of the state. Before that, they had been basically urban institutions, set up in palaces, noblemen's homes, religious institutions. In the then socio-political atmosphere, it could not make its way into the villages.

At that time the state was politically divided into three parts, viz., Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, of which the first two were ruled by local kings who provided grant-in-aid to the public libraries, as an encouragement for their development. But the political involvement of these public libraries was disfavoured by the rulers who warned against political activities of the library workers. The library workers of Travancore and Cochin convened conferences of the library workers and formed certain organizations as a central agency of the libraries for creating public awareness about the public libraries and to attract the government towards this movement. But these organizations were short-lived. However they gave wide publicity to this movement which made easy the work of the library organizations formed later.
Malabar, the northern part of Kerala, was then under the British rule, who were not keen on giving encouragement to the public libraries formed by the local people. The political scene of Malabar was more critical than the local kingdoms of Travancore and Cochin. The people of Malabar had actively participated in the freedom struggle, and they formed a number of public libraries as part of their political activity. The library workers and politicians were the same persons in this area and were viewed with suspicion by the government. Therefore, the libraries of Malabar had not received any kind of financial assistance from the government. In short, the public libraries of Malabar were not mere centres of reading and learning but effective centres of political activity. The public library workers of that area were strong political activists - unlike their counterparts in Travancore and Cochin.

On the eve of Independence, the public library movement gathered momentum and two active library organisations were formed in the northern and southern parts of the state. The library movement of the southern part was backed and patronised by the rulers and the intelligentsia, while in the north, it was a part of freedom struggle. Though the Kerala Grandhalaya Sanghom had begun to organize different activities, after Independence it became inactive without doing anything significant for the development of the public library movement. But the formation of the Akhila Thiruvithamcore Grandhasala Sanghom was a milestone in the history of the library
movement in the state. It gave effective leadership for the movement and even now the Sanghom is the pivot around which the movement revolves.

The Akhila Thiruvithamcore Grandhasala Sanghom extended its activities from Travancore to Cochin and later to Malabar in 1956 and assumed a new name - The Kerala Grandhasala Sanghom, (K.G.S) under the initiation of the K.G.S. a large number of new public libraries sprang up throughout the state and the public libraries which remained defunct were resuscitated. The democratic governments of Kerala evinced keen interest in this movement and they rendered more financial assistance than that was given by the pre-independent government. Still, the financial assistance was inadequate to cater the various needs and developmental activities of the Sanghom and its affiliated libraries. One of the interesting features in the state is the government is spending around thirty percent of income for education, but only a fraction of one percent is spent for the development of the public libraries. The K.G.S, and the elite public have been pleading against this inadequate government allotment made for the public libraries. But the per capita expenditure of public libraries is Rs.0.44 which, is even below the national average (Rs.0.46). The Opinionnaire Survey points out that, owing to lack of funds, the libraries have failed to purchase necessary materials nor could it attend to the maintenance works properly. Moreover, inadequate furniture, dust wrapped and scattered books, point to the
sad plight of the libraries in the State. So, the libraries need more financial assistance, to overcome all this difficulties.

As a result of consistent pressure exerted by the Sanghom the Government has raised the annual grant to the public libraries every year. The libraries could also raise funds by organizing cultural performances, selling lotteries and collecting voluntary donations. In spite of all these, the amount at hand is far below the actual requirements of the libraries. It may be remembered that in the developed countries the amount utilised for education and for libraries could be found to be the same. In the modern society, the public libraries occupy an important place and for strengthening this institution more financial assistance is needed. Unless the state government comes out in a big way to finance public libraries, the latter cannot function properly, and meet the requirements of the general public.

Most of the public libraries have a very meagre budget with which they can hardly manage their day-to-day affairs. In this background, it is but natural that these libraries cannot procure new publications. If the libraries are not equipped with modern publications, they will fail to satisfy the needs of the members who fall back on them for the latest developments and progress in various disciplines or subjects all over the world.

The library movement in the state served as a microcosm for the successive-socio-cultural tutelege in the country. The K.G.S.
is the core of cultural life in Kerala. The Sanghom has got deep rooted organizational structure in each village in the State. The public libraries of the state were not mere places where the members could use the documents for reference or borrow books on payment of fee. They may be better called cultural centres of the community as has been perceived in the Opinionnaire Survey also. Cultural entertainment programmes, functional literacy programmes and sports and games are regularly organized under the auspices of these libraries. The public library workers knew, better than any one else, that these cultural programmes could appeal to the sentiments of the people and capture the attention of the public. The main item of the cultural programmes was dramas which could go deep into the mind of the people. Through cultural programmes, the public libraries actually created a silent social change in the society. At the same time, it gave popularity to those who were behind the cultural activities.

Kalasamitis and Sports Clubs were attached to all the libraries. It gave the people, especially the younger generation, an incentive to develop their taste in cultural and sports activities. The people of Kerala occupy an important position in these fields mainly because of the influence of the sports and arts centres affiliated to the libraries. In the field of drama, libraries of the state had provided enormous help and encouragement. This argument is sustained by the fact that the eminent playwrights of Kerala owe a deep debt of gratitude to this movement even now.
The Sanghom and its libraries have been discharging an excellent service in the field of adult and continuing education. The libraries are institutions for "education by self or education without a teacher". In recognition of its activities in the literary field, the UNESCO gave an Award to the Sanghom in 1975. Since the formation of public library system the adult education programme has been one of the accepted programmes of every library. The Sanghom took initiative in giving scientific guidance to the libraries in this matter. It helps very much to increase the literacy rate of the state. Moreover, it paved the way for the "Total Literacy Programme" (1990-91), through which the state received world wide reputation. The Opinionnaire Survey also shows that the public libraries of the state are functioning as non formal educational agencies and they actively involved in the literacy programmes of the state. It is the school for the deschooled. In the slums, in the tribal colonies, and in the under developed areas, the libraries have conducted literacy camps. The Sanghom brought out publications for giving continuing education to the neo-literates and the drop-outs.

The adult education and non formal education programmes were not limited to the imparting of basic library skills and eradication of illiteracy. A variety of programmes for specific target groups were being organized both in rural and urban areas. The Programmes with special emphasis on the development of skills, agriculture and related issues, health and community leadership, were highly appreciated by all sections of the people.
With the intention of promoting reading habit among the people, Mobile Library Service, Bell Cycle Programme, Family Reading Programme and library services in Jails and hospitals were conducted by the Sanghom. Special sections for women and children were also opened in almost all the libraries. Books for developing desirable feelings, good habits and humanitarian values influenced and inspired the people. The library workers of the state were convinced that though reading appears to be a personal activity it was also a part of the social process.

The availability of good literature in the libraries sharpened the taste of the people. Men of letters in the state were active public library workers too. Libraries conducted literary activities with the guidance of the K.G.S. in co-operation with the association of men of letters. The people have got enough opportunities to involve in literary activities and develop their taste in literature. The Opinionnaire Survey also indicates that libraries helped very much for the development of Malayalam literature. The Public libraries of the state may be considered as the main 'consumers' of the books published in Malayalam language, and thereby the libraries helped the growth of publishers and indirectly the literary men. This is very obvious from the relation between the K.G.S. and the S.P.C.S.

In the scientific front also the Sanghom evinced enough interest. In order to inculcate scientific awareness among the public,
science classes, seminars, and demonstrations were conducted in different libraries. An Agricultural Book Corner was organized to help the agriculturalists. By organizing medical camps and attending sanitation works the Sanghom and the libraries were really discharging great service to the society. The Kerala Sasthrasahithya Parishad and the Sanghom jointly conducted many programmes for creating scientific awareness among the public. This continues to be so even today.

The library workers also gave much importance to the environmental issues. They celebrated Forest Festivals and conducted Forest Book Corner in every library with the guidance and advice of the K.G.S. Seminars on environment and deforestation were also held. Most of the libraries have maintained good gardens and clean atmosphere which attracted the public to these institutions and their activities.

The public libraries of the state are the capillaries of social activities in each village. Mass participation in the library activities maintained social contact devoid of discrimination on any basis. The libraries have helped considerably in pampering communal harmony in the state.

The need for public libraries so conceived has been felt in Kerala after the formation of the K.G.S. The people understood that reading would widen their horizons of understanding beyond the
barrier of space and time. In democracy everyone enjoys sovereignty, and in order to exercise it wisely it is necessary that everyone should be well informed and trained to discriminate right from wrong. Reading of books opens the window of the mind and enables the readers to see problems steadily and see them whole. The public libraries of the state not only aim at creating more readers and reading materials, but also bringing the readers together. They bridged the gap between the increased number of readers and the increased number of books. Students were instructed to help themselves to acquire knowledge and they were expected to carry on this process, not till the end of their prescribed course, but to the end of their lives. The libraries of the state were par excellence the institutions for this kind of education.

The libraries are the centres for the dissemination of information and the exchange of ideas. They are undoubtedly a multipurpose agency which serve information, community recreation in the field of social, civic and utilitarian education. Reading relieved the people from parochial outlook and widened the horizon of knowledge. It reduced social tension and helped the people overlook the fictitious differences made by vested interests to make religious and communal disharmony among people. The Opinionnaire Survey also shows that the libraries played a prominent role for social change. They kept people out of the morass of ignorance and illiteracy, and redeemed people from the grip of superstitious practices.
As a democratic institution, operated by the people and for the people, access to the libraries of the state was rendered equal to all members of the community, regardless of occupation, creed, class or sex. They offered children, young person, women, labourers to educate themselves continuously, helped them keep abreast of the developments, in all fields of knowledge, and develop critical and constructive attitudes towards issues of public importance. They also helped making them socially and politically better citizens of the country and developing the creative potentialities and powers of appreciation in arts and letters.

The activities of the Sanghom were mainly centred around the rural libraries of the state. It gave an opportunity for the rural folk to involve in the various programmes of the Sanghom. It enabled them to form their opinions on the social, political and economic problems of the society. Moreover, they used these institutions as a reliable agency for promoting their self education and also as the media of mass communication. Infact, the libraries of the state played a vital role in reducing the gap between the rural and urban people in the society.

The K.G.S. and its libraries contributed much to the elegance of the social fabric of Kerala. Public libraries create social awareness against the curse of poverty, illiteracy and other social problems. All the libraries used to celebrate the important National Days and Birth Days of the National and International personalities.
It enabled the public to recall these days, and their lives. The library workers co-operated with the constructive programmes of the state and the central government as part of national building.

Even though the Sanghom was not a statutory body, the state was actually meeting its recurring expenditure. This was quite a unique thing, because in no other state in India, a library association had received such government owned libraries, support and assistance. The government owned libraries, in recognition of the merit of the Sanghom were handed over to the Sanghom for public use. This was a remarkable phenomenon peculiar to Kerala. The Sanghom had given to some extent a certain pattern to the library system in the state. It enabled to enlist the services of numerous people for the development of libraries and to create library consciousness among the public.

The libraries especially rural libraries, are the meeting places of villagers, where seminars and discussion on different issues, including political subjects were often held. The Opinionnaire Survey also shows that the libraries helped in understanding much the political situations prevalent in the state. The political parties, therefore, used these institutions as centres of their activities. No other institutions, save some public libraries in the state, have got the rare opportunity to witness the unique political events happened in this state. The workers of both the Congress and the Communist
parties used the libraries to propagate their political ideas. The communist party workers took special interest in the movement and contributed much to the spread of the library movement. Often the political parties instructed the workers to involve actively in the movement. This has led to an unhealthy trend in the field of public library movement. It was this state of affairs that finally led to the take over of the K.G.S. by the government in 1977. The Opinionnaire Survey indicates that enough books containing communist ideology are available in the libraries of the state. But the libraries were not controlled by them nor did they function according to the whims and fancies of the communist party. The democratically disciplined libraries under the Sanghom have succeeded in creating democratic awareness among the masses. The periodic elections in the Sanghom and libraries provided an opportunity to experience the democratic process. It is also a part of democratisation. When the democratic institutions have begun to grow up, the libraries, an essential ingredient of democratic set up further established its strong position in the state.

The progress of the public libraries in the state depends to a large extent on the service of politicians. They have encouraged the formation of new libraries throughout the state. The involvement of politicians in the library movement had been visible from the very outset. The Chief Ministers and political leaders have acted the President of the Sanghom on many occasions. P.N. Paniker served
the Sanghom, as the General Secretary for a long time. He was a follower of the Indian National Congress, before the formation of the Sanghom. But after the assumption of Secretaryship, he did not involve himself in the mainstream of the state politics. Most of the Presidents of the Sanghom were top leaders of the Congress Party in the state. When the President was busy with the activities in the state politics, the functions of the Sanghom were usually carried out by the Secretary. Thus P.N. Paniker the Secretary, became an unquestionable functionary of the Sanghom. At the time of the rule of Communist party (1957-59) the Government tried to take over the Sanghom through legislation. They strongly contended that P.N.Paniker was not qualified enough to lead the movement.

Compared to the K.G.S., the Government owned, L.L.A has not done anything for the bolting and blooming of the library movement and the socio-cultural upsurge in the state. The journal of the K.G.S. was widely accepted and it had a high position among the standard journals of the state. Other publications of the Sanghom also were widely acclaimed. The Book Selection Committee of the Sanghom helped the libraries to select good books. The novel programmes introduced by the Sanghom gave an impetus to the public libraries in the state.

Despite the progress made in the public library system, it must be said that some major defects are still persisting. The noticeable deficiency is that the state doesn't have a well-integrated
library system. Also, though there is quantitative expansion in terms of the number of libraries and the number of books, the corresponding improvement in the quality is lacking. Besides, even the addition of books are also steadily on the decline except in a few libraries. Books on literature, especially fictions comprise the bulk of the collection. Sub-standard books were heaped in libraries with a view to demonstrate the superiority of libraries in terms of their quantum. Little has been done for the acquisition of books on the vocational needs of the community. Now the Sanghom is engaged in curbing the influence of Painkili Sahityam (trash literature) in the libraries of the state.

The second drawback is that most of the libraries are not scientifically organized; for instance, the failure in the implementation of the classification and cataloguing systems in most of the libraries. It should be remembered that even small libraries would be able to function better, if its documents are well organised. The emphasis hitherto has been on the mere increase in the number of libraries without proper attention to infra-structural services. In the case of rural libraries, all librarians are honorary workers, while in the case of major urban libraries they are paid employees. The Sanghom is against permanent librarians and it pursued a policy of "untouchability" towards the qualified librarians. It viewed that the periodical training for library workers is necessary to conduct the daily routine of the libraries. In fact the Sanghom gave more
importance to other activities of the libraries than the traditional ones. But qualified librarians are inevitable in every library to improve the quality of the present library services.

So far, the library movement in Kerala has been a source of pride to the people of the state. To make it more attractive and purpose-oriented, a comprehensive library legislation was essential. The demand for library legislation emerged in the state even before independence. But the first step in this regard was taken by the first communist government (1957-59) that came into power in the state. After that many governments have taken steps to introduce a library legislation. Most of these acts were unacceptable to the Sanghom because they did not give proper place to the Sanghom and were against the existing democratic framework of the libraries.

At last, the long awaited library legislation in the state of Kerala became a reality in 1989, when the Left Democratic Front Government took the initiative in passing "The Kerala Public Libraries (Grandhsala Sanghom) Act 1989". It is the materialisation of a long cherished dream in the chequered history of the library movement in the state. The K.G.S., since its formation, has struggled to pass a library law based on democratic principles, keeping up the peculiar features of the library movement in the state. The present act is proposed by the government after full consultation with the K.G.S. and the library workers of the state. The Act is a unique one, in
comparison with the previous library bills of the state and the library laws existed in the country. Now the library act is at the stage of implementation, and as per the Act, the K.G.S. is expected to be converted into the Kerala State Library Council.

The libraries are actually a barometer to measure the cultural attainment of people. The libraries, in other countries, are the focus of cultural activities. Free library service is a well recognised principle all over the world. The responsibility for providing funds for library development falls upon the government. The neglect of libraries really means the stunting of the social and cultural development. Hence it is the duty of the government to take more pragmatic steps for the efficient functioning of the public library system. Though a fabulous amount (31.5%) is provided in the budget for education, a very small amount (below 1%) is being spent for the promotion of public libraries. The government has to come forward in a big way in financing the public libraries, so that the latter would be in a position to cater the needs of the society and the state.

The information collected through the Opinionnaire Survey shows that the readers do not like the politicalization of library activities. A separate fund for library purpose in every library is very necessary (The Kerala Public Libraries Act on 1989 has a separate section in this regard). Likewise, it is desirable to have audio-video facilities in all the libraries, especially in the rural
libraries. The services of the library workers may be availed by the government in the constructive programmes and the K.G.S. may conduct cultural and sports festivals every year with the active participation of all the libraries of the state.

However the public library system and the libraries can serve the people better, if only the necessary warming up is attempted on many a direction.

1. Library service should be free to each and every citizen of the State.

2. It is desirable to have an independent Directorate of Libraries. It can look after the entire field of the libraries in the state. It may conduct constant evaluation of library services in the state, and be in charge of the administration of the libraries.

3. There should be an All Kerala Library Advisory Committee consisting of officials, library experts, library workers and the representatives of people. They should periodically meet and review the works of the libraries of the state and recommend necessary changes in the policy matters of the library.

4. The state government should encourage the setting up of a Book Bureau in the state capital and from there libraries shall select and buy their books avoiding mediators.
An informal organization consisting of library users may be formed in every library and they form reading circles and study groups in the library and among libraries. They will also help to carry out the message of the library consciousness among the public. They can also communicate the essentials of library morality among their friends and the users of library.

The public libraries of the State may co-operate with one another. And the libraries in schools and colleges, Departmental libraries, Research libraries and libraries in the University also should follow suit.

Each library may have a trained librarian who will be the Executive Officer of the library.

The elected members of the library may be the policy makers of the library. The librarian may be a permanent staff in the library.

The libraries of the state may act as effective and efficient information centres in each village.

Classification and cataloguing of the available resources in the libraries and a union catalogue may be prepared.

A Director of Libraries may be appointed as the Chief Technical Officer of the libraries. He shall be provided with all kinds of technical advice about the libraries in the state.
12. More facilities and encouragements may be given to libraries as centres of adult and continuing education.

13. A meeting of the library workers and the social workers would be summoned occasionally, which will be helpful to one another to understand the fields of activity.

14. To understand the taste and trend of the reading habit of the people of the state a detailed survey research is needed.

15. The infrastructural facilities of the libraries may be modernised.

16. Library Associations are essential for the development of library movement, and the state government should encourage development of strong library associations.

There were instances when the state government tried to suspend the powers given to the Sanghom. It was strongly criticised by all because they know that the functions of the government departments are not smooth and uninterrupted. And so it would not be healthy to hand over the activities of the K.G.S. to a department of the government. The Sanghom efficiently discharges the duties entrusted with it. At the same time the activities of the L.L.A. proved that the government owned libraries could not function effectively.

At present, the involvement of the youth in the library field is on the decline when compared with the experience of the past. Once they were the pillars of this movement. It shows that the
present activities of the libraries are not suited, to attract the young
generation. Likewise, the introduction of electronic media
particularly the audio-visual things reduce the reading habit of the
people. People spend more time watching the television instead of
reading books. The perverted influence of these media has been
appalling. The reading habit and the thinking capacity of the people
also have been adversely affected by this trend.

Though the Sanghom started a crusade against the trash
literature 'produced' by money minded publishers it hasn't so far
succeeded in warding off the menace from the libraries. The
newspapers of the state exercise a strong influence on the thinking
capacity of the people. Every average Keralite wakes up with a
newspaper in hand or he may go to the nearest public library for it.
The newspapers open-up a day's topic of discussion and thought for
him. He is sometimes provided with false versions of facts. This
is alarming, and it also reduces his natural capacity for thinking.
The Sanghom and the library workers may organise a strong public
opinion against such psychological exploitations.

The literacy programmes of the Sanghom have received world
wide acclamation. The libraries are, undoubtedly, the schools of the
neo-literate and they function as the centres of adult education. Now
the government has started certain new centres in the name of "Jana
Shikshan Nilayam" for adult and continuing education. However, it
would be better if the libraries are made the centres for the
implementation of the programme. If other organisations are set up to discharge the present functions of the libraries, it would be a great loss of wealth and energy. Actually the libraries of the state are capable of carrying out such programmes.

Many things that give strength and sustenance to our culture have withered in recent years and the library movement also followed suit. Places that used to be vibrant with activity have become mere shadows of what they used to be. The libraries of the State are facing acute shortage of funds. There is no increase worthy of mention in the stock of books. The employees are disgruntled and the number of library users are on the decline. Once the cultural activities of the libraries were the nerve centres of the society but today they seem to have relapsed into inaction. The Kerala Public Libraries Bill, it is hoped, will be a panacea for relieving the libraries of their present position.

The progress made by the Sanghom during the last forty five years has not helped it to keep away from the clutches of the Government and the bureaucracy. Despite this fact, the Sanghom has been given legal recognition and support by the Government. At present the libraries under the Sanghom are not in any way inferior to the libraries of the Local Library Authorities.

With the adoption of the new Act, the Kerala Grandhasala Sanghom would vanish, for it will be eliminated from the scene of
activities by resorting to alternate arrangements. But the pioneer work of the K.G.S., with a galaxy of selfless and dedicated activists at the helm of affairs, has certainly left an indelible imprint on the field of social, cultural and educational achievements of the state. Receiving nothing but pittance by way of remuneration, the early workers put their heart and soul for the success of the movement. Their insight and social commitment unbridled by petty political motives, is actually a very important phase in the sphere of socio-cultural and educational evolution of the state.