

IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN OUR SOCIETY

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Abstract:

Library is a learning institution that exists in our society from ancient times. It is a place where interaction between human and information takes place and intends to satisfy the information and social needs. Libraries play a vital role for a nation by preserving its cultural heritage. In the modern age with the abundance of information, libraries assist the society by maintaining and disseminating the relevant information as and when required.

Keywords: Library, Society.

Introduction:

Library from time immemorial has been considered as a 'social institution'. It has an immense role in the modern society and regarded as the 'gateway of knowledge' for the community. With the generation of new information sources including web-based resources there is a huge change in the role and form of the libraries. Today people in every sphere of the society irrespective of their age, profession, etc. from child to adult, from teacher to politician, businessmen to housewives use the libraries. Everybody use and need the services of a library. In today's age of information both print and non-print materials are kept in a library. Conventional documents like books, journals, newspapers as well as non-conventional documents such as maps, charts, etc. are maintained together in a library.

Library and Society:

Library and society are both interlinked and interdependent. Library exists for the need of the society. A library can be referred to as a well acknowledged 'social agency'. It plays a vital role in shaping our society. It transmits and disseminates the accumulated knowledge through books and other materials.

In ancient times, libraries acted only as the custodian of books and other written documents. Writings on clay tablets, papyrus, parchment, velum, paper, etc were preserved in those libraries. Libraries existed as accumulation of personal collection of kings, in temples, religious centres. There was limited accessibility to these collections. Only the elite who were involved in acquiring knowledge had access to it.

Gradually, with the increasing democratization of education, libraries became accessible to the general public and there was awareness about libraries.

What is a library?

The word library is derived from the Latin word '**libraria**' meaning '**a book place**'. It originated from the word '**liber**' which means '**book**'. A library can be described as:

- A room where books are kept.
- Collection of literary documents or records kept for reference or borrowing
- A depository built to contain book and other material
- A building that houses a collection

Definition:

- Library is Collection of information resources in print or in other forms that is organized and made accessible for reading or study. (**Encyclopedia Britannica**)
- A library is a collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. It provides physical or digital access to material, and may be a physical building or room, or a virtual space, or both. A library's collection can include books, periodicals, newspapers, manuscripts, films, maps, prints, documents, microform, CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, Blue-ray Discs, e-books, audio-books, databases, and other formats. (**Wikipedia**)
- Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, father of Library Science, describes the library as the public institution or establishment charged with the care with the collection of books and the duty of making them accessible to those who require to use them.

Thus, libraries can be referred to as places to get access to information in a number of formats from various sources.

Types of libraries:

Libraries can be broadly divided into three categories:

- 1) **Public library:** Public Libraries are those which are developed for the use of general public and funded by public sources. It provides services to the people of a particular region irrespective of their age, religion, sex, profession, etc. Example: The National Library of India, Delhi Public Library, etc.

- 2) **Academic Library:** Academic Libraries are those which are available in a particular institution and provide the reading material and other services to the members of that institution. Generally these libraries are attached to education institutions and support the curriculum and research activity of the students. Example: School library, College library, University library.

- 3) **Special Library:** Special Libraries are those which provide specialized information services to particular category of users. Here documents of a specific subject are available. Example: Agricultural Research Library, Libraries for Disabled, etc.

Purpose and Objectives of a library:

The main purpose of a library is to serve the society through the record of human thoughts, ideas and expressions by making them available to all. They vary according to the type of libraries.

1. To provide access to a large collection of different kind of books and other reading materials at one place.
2. To preserve literature for posterity.
3. To provide a place or an environment for study and research.

Services Provided:

The basic service is to provide access to the collection of the library.

1. Reference
2. Circulation
3. Inter-library loan

Functions of a library:

The functions of library are as follows:

- Build up a collection and provide books and other non-book materials to the people who need them.
- Helps to develop and promote the spread of knowledge, education and culture.
- Provide facility for both formal and informal life-long self education in the community.
- Furnish up-to-date facts and information on all subjects to all.
- Support for adult literacy initiatives.

- Provide reliable information to a variety of users irrespective of their age, caste, creed, religion, sex, profession, etc.
- Provide students with books and other reading materials that are relevant to the course curriculum in the academic institution.
- Help faculty members in preparation of their instructional courses.
- Support for job seekers via free access to the internet to search for and respond to job applications.
- Support to the disadvantaged.
- Preserve the literary works and the cultural heritage for posterity.
- Support for community involvement through the provision of information about the local area
- Provide Information Services – business, economic, social and other information to the needy.
- Supports research and development.
- Facilitate advancement of culture in the community.
- Fulfilling recreational needs and utilization of leisure time.

These functions may broadly be categorized into the following areas:

- a) **Education:** Library supports both formal and informal education and provides facilities for life-long education. It helps in the self-development in various stages of education.
- b) **Dissemination of Information:** Libraries provide current and accurate information to the intended users according to their subject of interest. They act as an information centres or referral centres for specific source of information like Information regarding employment, social programmes, public utility services, etc.
- c) **Promotion of Culture:** Libraries act as cultural centres and promote participation and appreciation of various arts. It helps to broaden our views and develop creative abilities by reading and thinking. It also help in cultural upliftment by organizing extension services like lectures, seminars, book exhibition.
- d) **Recreation:** Libraries help in utilizing the leisure time properly by providing books on fiction, magazine, newspapers, etc. Audio-visual materials are also kept in the library for use.
- e) **Preservation of Knowledge:** Libraries maintains archives of old and rare documents thereby preserving the literary heritage for posterity. It stores the literary works in various formats which helps the researchers to do their work.

f) **Aids to Research Work:** Libraries assists research scholars in their work in the following way:

- Libraries procure research materials such as books, journals, etc. and facilitate easy access and discovery of research materials.
- Provides physical space to work.
- Assists in gathering of vital information.
- Provides information and advice regarding publishing, copyright, open access, citation.
- Provides access to high quality content vital for research.

Recent Trends:

The recent trends that are observed in the library are:

- i. **Library Professionals to Information Professionals:** The work of the librarians is now not limited to just mere circulation of books but providing the accurate information to the right user. In the age of digitization, documents are now available in e-formats and the library automation is must for every library.
- ii. **Traditional Libraries to Digital Libraries:** In the age of information technology, digital documents co-exist with printed books rather than only printed documents that were available in the traditional libraries. Initiatives are taken to develop digital libraries in India. Modern libraries subscribe a number of e-journals and e-books to facilitate the users through internet. Example: N-LIST of INFLIBNET.
- iii. **Library Co-operation to Resource Sharing Networks/Consortium:** No library is self-sufficient enough to accommodate each and every document. Certain issues like space, limited fund, increased price of documents, etc. restricts a library to acquire all the documents. In such case, a consortium or network is developed among libraries to share their resources. Example: INFLIBNET, UGC-INFONET E-Journal Consortium.
- iv. **Collection Development to Content Development:** A proper collection of documents have to be developed to satisfy user needs. Libraries have to assess and recognize the user's need and built up the collection accordingly so that the content satisfies the users.
- v. **Conventional Education to Web-Based Education:** It provides access to e-resources and there is increasing access to learning resources. It reduces the educational delivery cost and provides a new learning environment.

Future of Libraries:

As long as books are there, libraries will exist in our society. But some eminent personalities have opined that in the near future libraries may not exist at all. Google and other resources may weaken the relevance of the libraries. According to them, documents will be available in electronic formats only. Others think that libraries will exist but have to face a number of challenges.

The job of the **librarians** is very important. Even a small library must have a librarian whose task is to arrange the documents and make them available for the users.

The focus will be on the following areas:

- 1) Organising the universe of knowledge:** The librarian should explore the knowledge needs of the people. They should capture and manage the new emerging knowledge.
- 2) Managing online content:** Librarians should learn the skills for using online resources and Use of search engine in selecting the best online content. They should possess basic knowledge of web resources.
- 3) Understanding the needs of library users:** Librarians help users to satisfy their requirements and in this process may use information technology. They should also encourage the use of reliable information sources.
- 4) Developing Technical skills:** Librarian should be technology friendly, support digital database development and take initiative in digital archiving and preservation.
- 5) Evaluating users' need:** For this, the librarian should first prepare a complete list of users needs of both present and future and information may be collected through questionnaires, interviews and observations. The data which is collected should be classified and after analyzing the data, suggestions to be recommended.

Conclusion:

Education is the backbone for the progress of any society. Libraries provide the crucial role in promoting education, research, personality development, ethics and other important values. A society cannot flourish without proper education and the primary requirement of the education system is the knowledge available in the books. Libraries acquire books along with other reading materials, organize them, preserve them and disseminate the information to the users. In this way libraries play an important role in development of the society.

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