

## Chapter 2

# LIBRARY AND SOCIETY

### 0 INTRODUCTION

Library forms a component of the history of human civilization. Libraries are closely related to intellectual history and as well as to organizational structure of society. The story of the growth and development of libraries forms an integral part of the story of the peoples being served by it. A library does not exist for its own sake. Its objectives, role, functions, services and kinds depend upon the needs of the people served by it. The libraries have responded to these needs. The needs are diverse in nature, which have grown out of varied conditions existing in a society from period to period. However, there are certain needs that can be identified as basic needs which occur frequently in the story of libraries.

### 1 RELIGIOUS AND MORAL INSTRUCTION

The use of libraries for religious and moral instruction was practised by all early civilizations. Monastery libraries established during middle ages and libraries attached to modern church have primarily existed to support religious and moral instruction. The same is true about libraries attached to ashramas, mutts and other religious bodies in India.

### 2 PRESERVATION OF DOCUMENTS

National, state central and university libraries have been undertaking the task of preservation of books and manuscripts. As regards preservation of government documents, state agencies at different levels (national and state archives) have been doing it. Preservation of documents is considered an important function of libraries and archival organizations.

Western man has always been historically minded and this tract has increased during the past two centuries or so. This is apparent from

the great care bestowed by great business organizations, governments and other organizations who are making an attempt to preserve their archives. The same kind of care has been bestowed on preservation of books, manuscripts and such other records forming part of cultural heritage.

The individuals and organizations including libraries in India have greatly neglected archival materials, which form the basis of histories of various kinds. However, in recent years, preservation of archival materials has been getting greater attention. Indian libraries at national and state levels did not systematically collect and preserve books and manuscripts of Indian origin. Early Indian material is lying scattered and is in danger of being lost to posterity due to lack of proper preservation. There is also lack of bibliographical control of documents of Indian origin even for recent material. Libraries at national and state levels are making an attempt to improve the situation but they will not succeed unless we have a complete national bibliography for current and retrospective materials. The will to formulate and implement a national policy on collection and preservation of Indian materials is extremely important. We have yet a long way to go before this can be achieved.

### 3 PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Ancient Byzantines and the Arabs used libraries primarily to preserve recorded cultural heritage of the past for posterity. Libraries attached to medieval monasteries also performed this function admirably. During modern time, national libraries, state central libraries and large university libraries are expected to perform this function. Local public libraries have undertaken to take care of books and other materials related to local history and other subjects of local interest. The society must recognize the role of libraries in this regard so that the libraries get enough support to carry on this important function.

### 4 RECREATIONAL READING

One of the function of a public library is to provide for recreational reading. The lending libraries or rental libraries came into being during late 18th century in the West, specifically to serve the needs of the clientele for light reading. In small and large towns in India, such libraries exist in large number and provide light reading material at a small cost. These have continued to exist along with public libraries.

### 5 COLLECTING FOR PERSONAL SATISFACTION

From early times people have been collecting books, manuscripts etc. for personal pride and satisfaction. A bibliophile gets a special pleasure out of book collecting. Quite often he collects books from the point of view of peculiarities in the physique of books. Thus a bibliophile may be interested in artistically distinguished binding, kinds of typefaces, illustrations, first editions etc. Many rare-book collections collected by book lovers have been gifted to libraries or purchased by libraries. These have enabled many libraries to build splendid collections.

### 6 WELL INFORMED CITIZENS

Success of democratic society to a large extent depends upon an informed citizenry. It is the crucial role of public libraries to keep their public well informed so that they can exercise their rights as citizens of a democracy properly. Public libraries in the West have served this role extremely well.

### 7 INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Indian constitution aims at fulfilling the aspirations of the people and securing for all the citizens of India, justice, liberty and equality. Thus its objective is to establish a new social order, where all citizens can hope to obtain justice, liberty and equality. Libraries can help in the process of social change to fulfil the aspirations of the people.

A public library can provide access to documents/information free of charge for all the community irrespective of any restriction. By providing relevant documents and information, a public library can influence the attitudes of the people in combating prejudicial treatment of certain groups, thus removing barriers between groups of people.

A public library, can help in solving social problems of a society in bringing equality of education, in achieving political and social awareness, etc. This is how, it can serve as an agent in the process of social change.

### 8 SELF IMPROVEMENT AND SELF EDUCATION

Social libraries especially mechanics' libraries, apprentices' libraries and mercantile libraries were founded specifically to serve these

purposes. The movement towards the social library was started in USA by Benjamin Franklin. He in late 1720s organized a group interested in "socializing and debating" the Junto. Social libraries were forerunners of the tax-supported library, which provided free access to the public.

In case, a member of the society intends to pursue self improvement and self education, then public library might be the only institution accessible to him.

## 91 FORMAL EDUCATION

36111

The basic function performed by academic libraries including school libraries is to support formal education. College and university libraries have build up large collections of text and recommended books to serve the needs of students. Public libraries have also collected such materials to cater to the students.

### 911 *New Education Policy*

Education should be considered as the most important activity forming back bone of a nation's progress. Education strengthens the very fabric of a nation. It helps to produce men of integrity, vision, character and above all thinking citizens. New Education Policy was announced by Government of India in 1986.

The objectives of new education policy are:

To put the less privileged on the same footing as that of more fortunate.

To give more autonomy to institutions so as to offer less scope for bureaucratisation but intends to strengthen traditional Indian values.

To bring about a quantum change in the quality of education to make each pupil a "thinking citizen."

To bring universalization of primary education.

*Comments:* In order to achieve the first objective, one model school of navodaya vidyalaya will be set up in each district within the seventh plan. Such schools constitute a major step in breaking social and economic barriers and it will hopefully lead to sound education to talented children from poorer homes of country side in particular. Its objective is to build up a national reservoir of talent from different strata of society especially from rural areas and weaker sectors of society like scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, tribals and people living in hilly areas. Another objective is to achieve national integration through coeducation and enrolment of 20 per cent from outside the linguistic region. According to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime

## 14 Library Organization

Minister of India, major thrust would be to put children from different parts of the country together, "to grow up together, breaking the traditional social, regional and financial barriers." The aim being to break present elitist structure of education and bring good education within reach of everyone. Hopefully, these will become pace setting institutions. However, many educationists have criticized this approach on the grounds of giving false priorities and breeding elitism. Critics argue that limited funds would be siphoned away from the primary goal. In order to achieve the first objective, it will require massive inputs. There has to be political will on the part of the Central and State governments to achieve this.

In order to achieve the second objective, national core curriculum is being developed having social and cultural inputs representing rich diversity of India. It would include lessons on political, social and economic conditions of contemporary India, environment studies and also freedom struggle. The core curriculum would be supplemented by individual inputs of the various states. Thus emphasis is on national integration, moral values and environment studies.

For achieving the third objectives, teaching is proposed to be child centred, whereby he would get motivated to learn. Examination reform is being planned through grading system of assessment.

Top priority is being given to universalisation of primary education, with emphasis on education of girls, working children and the problem of drop outs. The target is to achieve 100 per cent literacy in the 15-35 age group by the turn of the century. There is a national consensus on this objective. Hopefully, this will lead towards equalisation of opportunities for children from different strata of society. This will also take us near our goal of achieving a learning society.

Implementation of the new education policy is planned to be done on a time-bound schedule. The Government of India seems to be serious about the new education policy. The policy before being finalized has been discussed at different levels. In fact there has been a national debate on it.

Experience of different countries shows that no such policy can succeed fully unless library component of an educational system is strengthened to play its role in the scheme of things. There is some indication of the same from the fact that National Policy on Library and Information System finds a mention within the framework of New Education Policy. The major thrust of the new policy is taking education to the disadvantaged sections of the society in the backward, hilly and tribal areas. From this it follows that the major thrust of Indian libraries should be to give special attention to the needs

of disadvantaged sections of the society. In the policy statement, there is emphasis on non-formal system of education. As such role of libraries becomes highly significant. Emphasis has also been laid on vocational education. Keeping in view, the thrust of the policy, the libraries in India would have to lay down their goals accordingly.

A great responsibility rests on the profession. The profession must rise to the occasion and respond to the needs of the society.

## 92 SUPPORT TO SCHOLARSHIP

All along libraries have provided materials and facilities for serious scholarship. This practice has accelerated during modern times. National libraries, great university libraries, large public library systems and special libraries, regard support to serious scholarship as a major function. Great libraries all the world have become great centres of such activities.

## 93 PRECONDITIONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF LIBRARIES

The following are the preconditions for the emergence of libraries in any country.

1. Existence of recorded literature and the one worthy of being preserved.
2. Existence of a literate population; and
3. Willingness on the part of community to use its resources for the creation and development of libraries beyond the idea of private ownership.

Due to lack of willingness on the part of Indian society to use its resources for the establishment and development of libraries, the libraries in India have been slow to emerge. The change in attitude seems to be taking place.

## 94 CONDITIONS FAVOURABLE TO LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT

The story of the growth and development of libraries reflects the social, cultural, economic and educational needs of the society. Libraries have responded to the needs of the society. Experience shows that many conditions which affect the development of our societies also affect the development of libraries.

There are certain conditions which are favourable to the development of libraries. Under these conditions libraries have tended to prosper. The conditions are listed below:

## 16 *Library Organization*

1. In societies of political and cultural maturity which recognize the necessity of preserving, transmitting, and enlarging the body of knowledge.
2. During the periods of relative peace and tranquility which afford time to plan and pursue cultural and intellectual activities.
3. When individuals have both the leisure and the means to "Cultivate the finer arts and improve the common stock of knowledge."
4. In periods of intellectual creativity and scholarly activity, when large and varied collections of materials are required for study and research.
5. When there is large societal emphasis on self improvement and a well-informed citizenry.
6. During revival of learning which center around and depend upon accumulations of graphic materials and access to them.
7. When institutional stability and security of tenure offer permanence and continuity.
8. In areas with concentrated population and especially in an urban environment which can provide the leadership, the financial means to support libraries, and cultural and intellectual interest to stimulate their use.
9. When economic prosperity provides sizeable individual and corporate wealth and encourages philanthropic giving.
10. In times when, as in recent decades, economic growth and national power and status are considered to be dependent upon the wide dissemination and use of information and knowledge which have utilitarian value."<sup>1</sup>

The above list indicates that existing conditions in India are not favourable to the development of libraries. But the situation is changing. The development of libraries in India has been rather slow. In the present stage of development, the masses always look towards the state for establishment and maintenance of libraries. However, there has been lack of political will towards library cause, because libraries form a low priority in their scheme of things. A country like India is faced with unemployment, inflation and serious threat of energy crises. Any government would give top priority to these problems over library development. Under these circumstances, government will be unwilling to increase financial support to library development substantially. In spite of this, there are five states, that have enacted library legislation. In these five states library, development has been

<sup>1</sup>Jean Key Gates, *Introduction to librarianship*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1968, pp. 92-93.

of a higher order. Thus experience shows that a library legislation is essential for proper growth and development of libraries in a particular state. It is to be noted that education is a state subject. Similarly, libraries also come under the purview of state. Surprisingly, not many philanthropists have come forward to provide financial support for libraries. Possibly Indian libraries have not made enough efforts to seek the support of leaders of the society, industrialists, philanthropists etc for the cause of libraries. Librarians should aim at creating strong 'Friends of the library' groups who would take up their cause and create favourable public opinion. Library profession has failed in this respect. For this purpose, library associations at state and national levels should be strengthened. They need to work in coordination to achieve their objectives.

#### 95 REFLECTION OF SOCIETY

Study of library as an institution, provides us one approach to analyse the past of a society. Such a study reflects the story of a society served by it. The location, the population served, the demands made upon the library, the nature of collections, financial support, status of librarian, attitude of authorities towards the library, all over a period of time reflect the growth patterns of the society. The story of the library gives indicators of attitude towards education, and social, economic and technological change.

#### 96 CONCLUSION

Many of the basic functions (such as education, research, information, recreation, etc) performed by libraries are also carried out by the other agencies and groups. But "the library, in a collective sense, is the only agency devoted solely to the purpose of collecting, making available, and securing the widest and most effective use of the record of civilization by the society of which it is a part. Since the library is intertwined in purpose and function with society's needs, any piece or item of recorded material is a potential library acquisition and no part of the social structure, regardless of the stage of its development, is outside the scope of the library's generic concern."<sup>2</sup> Indian society is developing towards becoming an industrial society. We are in greater need of knowledge and timely information. Under this environment the need for libraries becomes immense. Libraries

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.* p. 93.



## 18 Library Organization

must play their role for the good of the society

### FURTHER READING

LEON CARNOVSKY AND LOWELL MARTIN, *ed*, *The library in the community*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1944.

JEAN KEY GATES, *Introduction to librarianship*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1968, chap. 8.

DAVID GERARD, *ed*, *Libraries in society*, London, Clive Bingley, 1978.

CARL WHITE, *ed*, *Base of modern librarianship*, New York, Macmillan, 1964,