

# THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN THE MODERN SOCIETY

A. S. Chandel

States that the objectives and purposes of the library are still not recognised. Its role to reform the Society is latent. Emphasises that new services are to be introduced to utilise the power of the library. Shows how libraries can be responsible for the over all development of each and every individual, mentally and physically, through its educational, recreational and informational activities, in the interest of the nation. Concludes that socialism and democracy can not be successful unless due priority is given to these services.

The province and purpose of library is still partially known to the users of the library as well as to the profession. It may be due to the changing demands of the society and the new dimensions in the field of librarianship. But the connotation of library is still archieval; a storage place for preservation of culture, thought, experiences etc. of mankind.

Library is undoubtedly, a power house, which is yet to be estimated and recognised. The goals which can be achieved through library service are not fully visualised. Planning, organisation and administration are not possible unless we are clear and definite about the objectives. Extension activities require to be changed into core activities. There is hardly anything which libraries cannot do. To seek truth, share other opinions and experiences, libraries can play a great role. Late Dr S.R. Ranganathan's philosophy of librarianship is happiness, joy and delight which is an ultimate goal of one's life. On the importance of reading Aldous Huxley says "Every man who knows how to read had it in his power to magnify himself, to multiply the way in which he exists, to make his life full, significant and interesting." But the question is how many of us can read? How many of us are able to have access to the World's best thought? Library service is involved with every individual all the times. Professionals can get more efficiency; farmers can yield more crop, business community can make more profits; politicians can be assisted in policy making; researcher can accomplish his work at ease without wasting much of his time simply in locating his desired information; student community can perform well in the examinations; and administrator can take right decisions. Are we really aware of so much involvement of libraries. with everybody's life? Late Dr. Robert Linder compared the individual life to a triangle shut in by three walls which is shown in the form of diagram for better understanding :

mortality



ignorance and ineptitude

mental and physical  
capacity

Mortality can not be checked. We have limitations in our physical and mental capacities. But wall of ignorance and ineptitude can be unlocked to accommodate the accumulated knowledge.

Today every individual needs happy contented life, utilising all possible knowledge required for his field of specialisation. What Science and Technology is doing for mankind should not only be known to all, but everybody should be benefited by its discoveries and inventions.

### Educational Role

*Formal education* is the most fundamental role of library. Academic libraries can activate and enlarge the intelligence of the students. Students are to read beyond their curriculum. Class room teaching is to be supplemented by extensive study of important books on the subject. In some of the Western Universities teaching is library oriented (book centred). It is based on seminars, more assignments are given to the students which naturally involve more and effective use of library resources. Jesse H. Shera has also stressed that there should be close affiliation between library and formal education system. Arthur Maltby also admits that libraries and education should work in close harmony and says that 'Libraries in public as well as in educational institution need to be as vigorous younger sisters which should not shoulder on excessive share of any financial restraint.'

The library authorities in our country are yet to think on these lines. Our libraries suffer mostly due to financial stringencies and inadequate staff. The regular use of library's resources by the student community is very very less.

Formal education is upto a definite period and age, Frank M. Gardner says that the individual must not only have access to the printed word during his period of formal education, he must have the means of enlarging his experience after school and university, this necessarily implies organised collections of printed materials. If a library is an essential adjunct to the school or college, it is an essential adjunct in the world outside also. Libraries can play an important role in eradication of illiteracy and the promotion of literacy. In developing countries libraries are being made the main agencies for adult education. But in our country it is yet to be realised that libraries can play a significant role in the process of spreading literacy. There is a proposal for mass literacy in our country, but unfortunately no one has realised the fact that the campaign can be launched through public libraries which will be effective and economical. Without good library service even educated community

may relapse. It is now left to the profession of librarianship to bring revolution in the library services in spite of all adversities. It is this profession alone which can fulfil the message given by Manu 'to carry knowledge to the doors of those that lack it and to educate all to perceive the right even to give away the whole earth cannot equal that form of service.'

### Recreational Activities

Leisure time is as important as that of working time. But how to make best creative and meaningful use of leisure time? Recreational activity, a social necessity and a part of our community life, is necessary for the development of mind and body. Life should be pleasant, lively and interesting. Now the question comes to what extent library can perform this function? Recreational activities used to be peripheral in the public libraries, which should now be one of the integral or core activities. Admittedly, books often are amusing, and entertaining, therapeutic. What doctors may not be able to do, librarians may successfully cure the mental ailment by providing right literature. The modern disease of boredom is spreading in every mind. Its apparent cause is nothing but misuse of leisure time.

To fulfil this requirement libraries should have sufficient provisions for recreation, which can be had by conducting musical recital, plays, film shows, lectures, art exhibition, etc. These activities can have dual effect. Such programmes initially may be recreational, may later become casual to regular to the clientele of the library. Therefore a public library is expected to issue music records, tape cassette to its members. In the western countries the library services are fully recognised like health and sanitary services. The provision for outdoor games within the premises of a public library is being seriously thought upon.

Public libraries have the function to provide information for the community they serve. Man cannot live in uncertainty. He always needs proper guidance and advice to reach his destination or objective. He has to keep abreast with the current information of his interest. The acquired knowledge of the library is to be transferred to the individual who needs it. According to Pierce Butler 'Mass communication make it possible for every citizen to be continuously exposed to torrent of information concerning current happening and events.' They may often try to take over the function of professional in recommending solution to the problem or in attempting to modify individual behaviours. Information is so important that none can afford any item of it to be missed. A medical practitioner would be unable to cure a patient with a new disease if he is not upto-date with the latest information in the field of medicine. A Minister may fail to answer the query in the parliament if he is not fully equipped with the latest development and information about his field. Similarly, a business man may undergo heavy loss if he does not keep himself informed with the current market position. Alex Wilson in his paper presented in the Annual Conference of the Scottish Library Association in 1975 says that 'in

Information World you could almost say that society exists for transfer of information between individuals and groups and that deprivation has symptoms of disease beginning with apathy and ending with rage, as witness the disturbance at some planning inquiries of late.

K. J. McGarry says that 'library is an information store which has to mediate between clients and library'. So our libraries need special information cell designed for dissemination of information according to local need which may be all information about tourism.

### **Library and the Society**

Society is made of individuals. If society is to be reformed, we have to reform every individual forming society. If we look at the structure of our society it is heterogeneous where there is big gap between rich and poor, literate and illiterate, oppressed and the oppressor. For welfare state we need homogeneous society. Library is an agency where people and books are brought together. Jesse H. Shera says that 'the objective of communication is like-mindedness which means achievement of understanding or getting some one to understand what it is you mean'.

He further emphasises that 'dissemination of information is one of the most basic activities, and one of the most essential. Instead of like mindedness (understanding) we have mis-understanding among us due to ignorance, illiterary, doubts, superstitions etc., which are to be dispelled from each individual in his own interest and of the nation.' Is it justified to talk of socialism, cherishing democracy, knowing human rights etc.? For ideal society we need good citizens and library is the corollary to the good citizen. But it is very unfortunate that its social force is still latent, neglected and unappreciative. Even to-day it will not be too late for our Government and profession to recognise its services and given due priority. In conclusion, along with Shera's statement who says 'this strange failure of the early professional librarians to recognise a library function that was indigenous to its social role may be attributed to a variety of causes; an excessive preoccupation with custodianship and preservation; the struggle to gain public recognition and more nearly adequate public support; early concern with the development of management and house keeping methods to the exclusion of more professional responsibilities; sackling of college library by academic regulations which were directed more towards book preservation than toward book use, and hence hampered the librarian in performing any important service, function to the academic community; and relative poverty of most libraries, both book stack and in staff.'

In a democratic country Government guarantees to safeguard the human rights, gives every opportunity to right to liberty, pursuit of knowledge and information, meaningful life without and discrimination and exploitation, equal social and economic benefits to all. But majority are unaware of these rights.

In a democratic country having mass illiteracy it is compared as giving torch to a blind man to show the right way. This is the province of the Government to think over and throw challenge to the library profession and get the desired results. The library profession also need to rethink on its objectives. We have to work in consonance with the national requirement which is continuum. If every professional is sincere, paying full attention to his reader, utilising all resources to serve, getting pleasure by giving information and knowledge to those who need it, it is certain that this profession will get its due place.

### Cited References and Bibliography

*American Library Association.* Public Libraries Division. Coordination Committee. Public Library Service, a guide to evaluation, with minimum standards. Chicago, American Library Association, 1959.

Ronald C. *Benge.* Libraries and cultural change. London : Archon Books and Clive Bingley, 1970.

Frank M. *Gardner.* Library Legislation, a comparative study. Paris, Unesco, 1971.

M. A. *Gelfand.* University libraries for developing Countries. Paris, Unesco, 1968.

Helen E. *Haines.* Living with books. Chicago, American Library Association, 1950.

K. J. *Mcgarry.* Communication, Knowledge and librarian. London, Clive Bingley, 1975.

Harry *Passow.* Trends in learning and education effecting community library services. Chicago, American Library Association, 1973.

S. R. *Ranganathan.* Five laws of library science. Bombay, Asia, 1931.

*Scottish Library Association.* Peebles '76, proceedings of 62nd annual conference of the Scottish Library Association, 24-27th May, 1976. Glasgow, Scottish Library Association, 1976.

Jesse H. *Shera.* Sociological foundations of librarianship. Bombay, Asia, 1970.

C G. *Viswanathan.* Public Library Organisation. New Delhi, Today and Tomorrow, 1977.