

INTRODUCTION TO LIBRARIES

Definition

The word 'Library' is derived from the Latin word "libraria," meaning 'a book place'. It originates from the term 'liber,' which means 'a book.' According to the Oxford Companion to the English Language – "Library is a collection of books, periodicals, and other materials, primarily written and printed." The library is a social organization and a necessary unit of society. It is organized for transmitting the knowledge and experience of society to individuals. This is done through books and other materials like maps, charts, digital materials, microfilms, etc.

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, the father of library science in India, describes the library as a public institution or establishment charged with the care of the collection of books and the duty of making them accessible to those who require using them.

Purpose and functions of a library

The purpose of establishing a library is to serve society through the records of human thoughts, ideas, and expressions by making them available to all. The functions of a library are given below :

- Collect and provide books and other non-book materials to help people become aware of other's thinking and act independently.
- Foster and promote the spread of knowledge, education, and culture;
- Provide facility for formal and informal life-long self-education in the community;
- Preserve the literary and cultural heritage of humanity for posterity as vehicles of culture and material for research;
- Provide reliable information for all kinds of users irrespective of age, caste, creed, color, religion, etc.;
- Collect resources to promote enlightened citizenship and to enrich personal life; and
- Facilitate the advancement of culture in the community.

Library as an Information Centre

The progress of civilization and advancement in science and technology resulted in the tremendous growth of literature. The explosion of knowledge in multi-disciplinary subjects was recorded not only in books but also in latest research periodicals, research and technical reports, patents, standards and specifications, trade transactions, circulars, reprints, off-prints, etc. The specialists not only needed books but also information contained in periodical articles and other material. Information centres were set up to cater to their specialized information needs.

An Information centre is defined as an organization that (1) selects, acquires stores, and retrieves information in response to requests, (2) prepares abstracts, extracts, indexes of information, and (3) disseminates information in anticipation and in response to requests.

Information centres are attached to highly specialized Research and Development organisations. An Information Centre provides various services such as referral service, literature search, translations, bibliographies, abstracting, etc. to its users.

Information Analysis Centres: They collect literature produced in a particular field, evaluate its utility and communicate to the specialists conducting research in directly usable form on request. The centre verifies the collected information for its validity, reliability and accuracy before dissemination. The reports of these analysis centres play an important role in strengthening research, pinpointing gaps in knowledge or shortcomings.

Clearing Houses: They are set up either on a cooperative basis or by a national or international agency. They provide a single point of access to information originating from different sources, countries and languages. They compile bibliographies of particular disciplines and circulate them to the organisations interested in them. A copy of the available document, if requested, is also provided.

Data Centres and Data Banks: Data centres collect, organise and store numerical data pertaining to specific subject field to answer specific queries. They collect information in anticipation of future requirements of its users. Data Banks are usually concerned with a broader subject field. They extract and process raw data from the collected data sources and

relevant literature. They keep these structured files ready to provide right answers to user's queries.

These centres are managed by subject experts as well as library and information professionals who organize information to retrieve and disseminate for conducting research. Staff of these centers may include Research officers, librarians, bibliographers or trained information officers. It may include the functions of a special library and extend its activities to include collateral functions such as technical writing, abstracting, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and library research for clients.

Modern Concept of Libraries

A society does not remain static but goes on changing. As a social institution, social changes also affects the role of libraries. The present day society has undergone transformation in almost all sectors. Several factors are responsible for this transformation. The main factors affecting the transformation of the society as well as the libraries are as follows.

- Political and social stability of the society
- Expansion of educational facilities and high rate of literacy
- National, regional and local socio-cultural traditions
- Urbanisation and globalisation of population
- Growth in trade and commerce, industry and business
- Encouragement from national, local and state governments
- High standard of living
- Influence of leaders and individuals in different fields
- Well established book trade
- Mass communication
- Computer and communication technology

These social, political and economic conditions have left a great impact on all aspects of the growth of libraries, by radically changing their conventional functions. It not only deals with books but collects information in multiple media for its clients. The modern library has undergone changes in handling the basic functions of a

library such as collection, processing, storage, retrieval, dissemination and utility of information. New information, communication and networking technologies have completely changed the functioning of the libraries. Information is collected, processed, stored and disseminated using sophisticated technologies. Users are provided information at their own desks or even in their homes through Local Area Networks (LAN) and Wide Area Networks (WAN). There is no need to visit a library to access information and thus save time.

A library is regarded as a service institution. The advent of computer, communication, information and networking technologies have posed a great challenge to the librarians. In order to render efficient services and assist the users to make effective use of the available resources, a librarian has to understand, appreciate and accept these changes. They must be willing to deal with with the changes and adopt them for taking advantage of the same.

Modern libraries broaden their services beyond the physical walls of a building by providing material accessible by electronic means to all those who required them through internet. Now the services offered by the libraries are variously described as library services, information services, or the combination "library and information services". Modern libraries are usually staffed by a combination of professionally-trained librarians, paraprofessional staff sometimes called library technicians or information scientists.

