Chapter 12
Public Libraries in the Modern World

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ABSTRACT

Modern society has various needs such as education, research, cultural advancement, information, spiritual and ideological pursuits, pastime and recreation. Society has founded various institutions to serve these needs, among them the library occupies a prominent place; the library is able to meet all of them in equal measure. The public library is the local centre of information making all kinds of knowledge and information made available to its users. The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social group. A public library as enunciated in the UNESCO Manifesto (1994) is expected to play the libraries role in three main areas like information, education and culture. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of how the public libraries support and guides the digital and modern world.

1. INTRODUCTION

The library service became a movement of the people, by the people and for the people. UNESCO gave the concept of under the International Book Year (1972) the public Library is a living force of education, culture and information, as an essential agent for fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women (UNESCO, 1972). The ancient libraries consisted of the clay tablets as a form in cuneiform script, now the world's first bookless public library opened from September 2013 in the USA, the state of Texas, all-digital public library named '*BiblioTech library*', this offers about 10,000 free e-books for the 1.7 million residents of the count, users check out e-readers rather than physical texts. From the clay tablets to the paperless library revealed that our visionary Dr. S. R. Ranganathan's fifth law, the library is the growing organism. This chapter will going to explore the growth and developments of the Indian Public Libraries in the modern world.

2. LIBRARIES AS GATEWAYS TO KNOWLEDGE

In sandy soil, when deep you delve, you reach the springs below; The more you learn the freer streams of wisdom flow. (Thirukkural-396)

This Thirukkural wants to educate us by saying that water will spring from the sandy well depending upon the depth of digging; similarly the knowledge will flow from a man in proportion to his learning. In the similar way libraries acts as the Centre of Learning in all human activities have relied heavily on knowledge and information. Modern society needs in supporting the educational and research activities of society, promoting culture, disseminating information and providing recreation and making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users (Pope, 2004).

A library is not a building stacked with books, it is a repository and source of information and ideas, a place for learning and enquiry, and for the generation of thought and the creation of new knowledge. Public libraries in particular have the potential to bridge the gap between the *'information poor'* and the *'information rich'* by ensuring that people from all sectors and settings of society and the economy across India have easy access to knowledge they seek (National Knowledge Commission, 2007). The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of how the public libraries support and guides the digital and modern world.

3. THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Public Library is a social institution, created and maintained by the society for its benefit and progress and plays a vital role in the life of an individual and in enrichment of community life. The library service became a movement of the people, by the people and for the people; this modern concept gradually spread over India from 1800 onwards (Ranganathan, 1957). Alwin Johnson called a "Public library is largely regarded as the People's University". Dr. S.R. Ranganathan defined Public library as:

- Any Library established and / or maintained by local library authority, including travelling libraries and services.
- Any libraries open to the public free of charge and maintained ad managed by the government of by any local body
- Any government notified by the government as a public library

UNESCO public library manifesto said that, The public library is the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups, is an organization established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization (UNESCO, 1994).

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