

Chapter 2

User Information Needs in the Public Libraries in India

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ABSTRACT

The researcher has chosen the topic for the purpose of the study in consultation with research supervisor. The public library is the local center of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access to all, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, language, or social status. Public library is a non-profit organization maintained for public use. The thesis comprises of information needs and information seeking behavior of the user of south Tamilnadu, from various angles, the information dissemination services existing in south Tamilnadu and the role played by the district central library in this regard. In public libraries we have the users with different age groups of people right from children to old persons.

INTRODUCTION

Public libraries play a vital role in the overall development of the society. Gerald Johnson, in his book entitled, Public Library Service, writes, “The quickest and easiest access to the world’s best thought is through public libraries”. Public library and society are inter-linked and interdependent. Society without libraries has no

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significance, and libraries without society have no origin. Early libraries were essentially archives / storage places for the preservation of records that were necessary for the transaction of business or commerce. As of now, the modern society expects man to be self-governing, truth loving and non-violent. This can be achieved through the public library, a social agency, moulding the life of the community by its resources in the form of books and periodicals and other non-book materials. Library is actually the “mind of the society”, it reflects its social aspirations. If the society has an obligation to feed, clothe and house the people comfortably, it has a similar moral obligation to educate them and to feed them with mental food through educational institutions and libraries’ respectively.

Public Library and Culture

Culture is closely related to social life. Public library is a product of society for its cultural advancement. Libraries can be called centres of cultural excellence. This is because libraries maintain records of the past. It is in the libraries that the cultural heritage of human beings is presented and passed on to posterity. The public library has to contribute to the cultural enrichment of the society by organizing extension activities like lectures, seminars, symposia, book exhibitions and cultural gatherings. Culture is passed from generation to generation either through personal contacts or through recorded knowledge.

The society as a whole, or a region of it, or an era, all are found embodied in the pages of documents. The success of libraries as cultural agencies depends upon the degree of enlightenment of the community and quality of the resources and services offered. A network of quality libraries is essential to make a nation aware of its cultural heritage. Sayaojirao Gaekwad, The Pioneer of Public library movement of India, made this statement: A library is instituted to preserve the records of the deeds and thoughts of men, for the instruction and enlightenment of future generation.

Public Libraries and Communication

Libraries not only conserve our culture, but also act as agencies of communication. The power of communication of ideas is the most significant achievement in human life. Books and libraries are the most powerful means of communication. In books, achievements of life, experiences of the departed and the thoughts of saints and scholars, scientists, educationists, artists, poets and philosophers are recorded. Acquisition, accumulation and sharing of ideas through experience and passing them to fellow beings distinguish man from animals.

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