UNIT 2: LIBRARY AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Define a social institution;
- Explain the need of library in society;
- Analyse library as a social institution;
- Explain the role of library in society;
- Define and describe the information society;
- Know about the changing role of library in the society.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

The society has created various institutions. These social institutions make a person part of the society. Each institution serves one or few needs of the society. A library is a social institution and it has been created to fulfil all the needs of the society. In the library, the people are exposed to books or a variety of documents that give knowledge, bring to surface one's latent aesthetic talents, stimulate one's intellect, inculcate values and learning skills, provide one's with recreation and so on. Therefore, of all the institutions formed by society it is the library and its modern cognates that are the most potent in meeting the multifarious needs of different users of modern society. A public library provides free service irrespective of status, age, religion, colour or creed, and sex. It may extend service to the neo literates and even to the physically handicapped people.

2.3 INFORMATION SOCIETY

A society is composed of people working together to achieve common ends and to satisfy common needs. It is a body of individuals that is outlined by the bounds of functional interdependence, consisting of different characteristics or conditions such as national or cultural identity, social solidarity, etc. It is characterized by patterns of relationships between individuals that share a distinctive culture and institutions.

A society is an economic, social or industrial infrastructure, made up of a varied multitude of individuals who may or may not be from different ethnic groups. Modern society is heading towards an information society in which the central instrument of change, the force and direction of change are knowledge and information.

All information societies, ancient, medieval or modern, have functioned and prospered on the basis of proper utilization of information and knowledge in their various stages of development. The term information society is said to have been coined in Japan for the first time. The two Japanese ***cognates*** "Joho Shakai" when normally translated into English means "Information Society". The American Society for Information Science



Cognate: Having the same original form as another in a different language. E.g. English Father, German Vater.

(ASIS) in 1970 organized its annual meeting around the theme “The information conscious society”, where the concept of information society was explicitly used.

2.3.1 Definition

William J. Martin defined information society as “a society in which the quality of life as well as prospects for social change and economic development depends increasingly on information and its exploitation”. In such a society, living standards, patterns of works and leisure, the education system and the market place are all influenced markedly by advances in information and knowledge. This is evidenced by an increasing array of information intensive products and services that communicate thorough a wide range of media, many of them being electronic in nature.

According to Blaise Cronin, “an information society is one in which labour has been intellectualized, one in which the expression to earn one’s daily bread by the sweat of one’s brow sounds decidedly anachronistic”. Employment in the information sector of the economy is growing fast. Soon, terms such as information worker, knowledge engineer, ideas processor will be as common as weaver, miller, electrician, carpenter etc.

G. P. Sweeney defined information society as one “in which the creation of economic wealth is based on information and in which key economic activities are enquiring, communicating and deciding” for good or ill. Martin is of the view that “the concept of an information society has now gained a fair degree of acceptance”. As a concept it is certainly viable.

2.3.2 Criteria of an Information Society

William J. Martin has noted the following criteria for the development of information society.

a) **Technological Criteria**: Today's age is the computer age in which computers and telecommunication are behind every other change in the society. Communication technologies such as teleeducation, teleconferencing, teleshopping, telecommuting, e-government, e-commerce have converted the world into a global village and its impact can be felt at every level of our society.

b) **Economic Criteria:** This is the age of knowledge in which knowledge capital would predominate over material capital. The internet is fundamentally changing the way the companies operate. The internet is turning the business upside down and inside out. The e-commerce goes far beyond the buying and selling over the internet. The information workers are replacing productive worker as the biggest sector in the economy. Information is turning out as the key economic factor as resource, service, commodity, a source of added value and employment. In the information society most of the information will be cheaper, would occupy less space and can be communicated with greater speed.

c) **Social Criteria:** In information society, information is the enhancer of the quality of life. The information society will be conscious towards the value of information and its use and will become increasingly centred on information handling, processing, storage and dissemination using micro electronic based technologies. Globally the society has got divided into two parts, i.e information rich society and information poor society.

d) **Political Criteria:** In information society there would be more interaction between the government and the governed through citizens' participation by way of electronic polling, their access to public information under the concept of freedom and equality of access to information. There will be better interaction with fellow citizens through wired networks, telephone,

teleconferencing, etc. The information superhighway will change the whole world.

e) **Cultural Criteria:** The information society recognizes the cultural value of information through the promotion of information values in the interest of national or individual development.

In an information society, it is said, a majority of the people will spend their time doing tasks which relate to information, expressing, gathering, storing, retrieving and disseminating it. People in an information society will manipulate information for the purposes of travel, entertainment, instruction, control and so on.

2.4 SOCIAL INSTITUTION

In modern societies all activities of the people are organized through institutions. So social institution is a product of the society. It is created to work as a medium for expressing its social processes and it caries them out through its techniques developed for the purpose. It is a form of social order.

Lowell Martin states : "A social institution is an integrated pattern of human relationship established by the common will and serving some vital human need." This definition indicates that social institution deals with the integrated pattern of human being in the society. Their pattern is caused through the interaction among the people as a vital social need. For example, religious institution looks after the belief and unity, Educational institution like school, college, and universities promote knowledge, skill and socialization processes of the society. These institutions incorporate a body of formal or informal rules and regulations through which activities of a society are carried out or regulated.

2.5 NEED OF LIBRARY AS SOCIAL INSTITUTION

We are living in an information age in which information plays an important role in the complex, economic, political and social environment. Information plays a crucial role in keeping the citizens well informed so that they can exercise their right as citizens of a democracy properly. It is the information which allows us to change and improve the society. Decision makers always seek information. Modern executives, farmers in the field, workers in the factory and others need information while launching a new product, plugging the field or building a skyscraper about the state of resources and knowledge about the uncertain future events that may have to face. The researcher, the teacher, the student, the administrator, the industrial and business managers, the entrepreneur, the farmers, the workers in a factory etc all need information to equip themselves better for the fruitful pursuit of their respective vocation.

In a modern society, every human activity is organized through institution. The society also needs the institution to look after the above matters. The said institution in the broadest and most practical sense should be a force for social betterment. No one can imagine other social institutions except the library that can be entrusted with such type of responsibilities. Libraries and other similar type of institutions collect, process, organize and disseminate information and knowledge recorded in document. Since knowledge and information are vital for all round development of human beings, libraries and other institutions that handle and manage information and knowledge are indeed invaluable for the welfare of the society.

The libraries acquire, organize, offer for use, and preserve the reading material irrespective of the form in which it is packaged (print, CD-ROM/DVD, Web form) in such a way that, when it is needed, it can be retrieved and put into use. No other institution carries out such long-term, systematic work.

a) It Represents the Society: The study of libraries as an institution provides us an approach to analyze the past of a society. Its growth is not an isolated instance of society. It originated and grew out of the

necessities of life and in response to the society's needs i.e. library grows with the society. The location, the population served, the demand made upon the library, the nature of collection, financial support, status of librarian, attitude of authorities towards the library, all over a period of time reflects the growth pattern of the society. The story of the library gives indication of the educational, social, economic and technological changes. Library collections in the different countries represent their cultural identities. Language is at the heart of these institutions. They are the collectors and stewards of our heritage.

b) It Represents the History of Civilization: Library history is an essential chapter in the history of the intellectual development of civilization. It parallels the history of writing and forms a component of the history of human civilization. It is the basic metaphor with which the cycle of civilization began the step from the dark into the light of the mind.

The story of the growth and development of libraries forms an integral part of the history 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. It is an extension of the human memory. It is the repository of human culture, oral and written. The heritage of man has been preserved for posterity in different containers of information.

2.6 PRECONDITIONS FOR THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARIES

Libraries tend to prosper when a combination of certain social, political and economic conditions exist in a society. The following are the preconditions for the emergence and development of libraries in any country.

a) Recorded Literature: Existence of recorded literature and the one worthy of being preserved.

b) Need of Preserving and Transmitting the Knowledge: Political and cultural maturity in a society which recognizes the necessity of preserving, transmitting, and enlarging the body of knowledge.

c) **Literate Population:** The existence of a literate population and the willingness on the part of the community to use its resources create a proper environment for the creation and development of libraries. The cultural and intellectual interest to stimulate the use of the library also plays a great role.

d) **Leisure Time:** Nowadays the individual has both the leisure and the means to improve the common stock of knowledge.

e) **Secure Society:** Library develops during stable social climates where there are periods of relative peace and tranquility that enable the individuals to pursue leisure activities, and when the country or an institution becomes stable and the security of tenure offers permanence and continuity.

f) **Financial Support:** Economic prosperity and a surplus of wealth are needed to provide the financial support for the growth of the library. The economic prosperity provides a sizeable section of individuals and the corporate world with wealth and encourages philanthropic giving.

When society's other institutions- its school, college or universities – need to educate and inform its members, libraries also become an important to supplement to the former.

2.7 SOCIAL ORIGIN OF LIBRARY

Looking back it may be observed that at different stages of history the social forces have made their impact on the origin and development of libraries. Before the advent of printing technology the manuscripts libraries were strictly restricted both in form and content to the scholars in the community. In the 17th century the Kings, Emperors and Noble men maintained their libraries as symbol of prestige and aristocracy in the society. It was by the middle of the last century that the social forces came into play to revolutionize the character of the library movement making it more and more a public institution. Among a vast number of forces behind the library movement the following are three chief social forces at work.

a) **Religion:** It was the religious belief in own country that free gift of knowledge would bring credit for the knowledge givers in the next birth. Manu, the codifier of law in ancient India prescribed that gift of books was the highest of all gifts. So, religious forces are also instrumental in the growth and development of libraries.

b) **Industrial Revolution:** The industrial revolution made great impact on the concept of libraries transforming it from royal and personal library to democratic one for the benefit of the people. Due to industrial revolution every country faced with the emerging problems of increased leisure, high standard of living and greater accumulation of private and community wealth. These conditions supported the creation and development of public institutions like the library for the benefit of the people.

c) **Information Revolution:** Since the invention of printing, there has been a continuous revolution in the generation, transfer and communication of information. The role of information further receives new proportions with the acceleration of research, mounting social and population pressure and so on.

2.8 ORGANIZATION OF LIBRARY AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

A social organization has four parts of which each is supposed to perform a definite function. Since, library is a social institution it also has the following parts.

a) **Authority:** In case of public library -municipal committee or corporation etc., in case of university library- university authority, and for special library- Board of Directors etc serve as the authority.

b) **Material:** Library tries to procure all types of reading materials expected to be relevant to its patron. It procures books, periodicals, C.D. etc to suit the different information needs of different clienteles.

c) **Service Personnel:** The professionally qualified library staff is an integral part of the library.

d) Clientele: In case of public library - the general public, for a university library- students, teachers, research scholars, administrative staff etc. and for special library- researchers, specialists etc are the clientele of the library.

2.9 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF LIBRARIES

In the establishment of libraries the social purpose is paramount viewing it as a social obligation. Many of the basic functions such as education, research, recreation, information etc performed by libraries are also carried out by other agencies and groups. But a library 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 the society's needs any piece or items of recorded material is a potential library acquisition and no part of the social structure, regardless of the stages of its development is outside the scope of the library. The main purposes of libraries are

a) Reach All People of the Society: The public library system with its network of branches and book mobiles establishes an active reader contact and its aim is to reach the majority of the population who are not library users.

b) Free Service: It provides free service so that no user should be required to pay any subscription, fee or any other charges as far as possible.

c) Respond to Social Issues: Library anticipates and responds to social issues before these issues reach a crisis point. It provides the facilities for life long self education, proper use of leisure, advancement of culture and so on. It is the public library which can provide access to documents / information free of charge for all in the community irrespective of any restriction. In this way, it contributes to the welfare and progress of the community served by it; thereby it becomes a social force.

d) Form the Link in the Communication System: Library is created to form a link in the communication system that is essential to any society.

In fact, without communication there can be no society. It builds socially oriented information system and tries to procure information / document on all subjects including local, national and international affairs to serve economic, political and social welfare. Libraries secure the communication of culture; it secures the communication of culture between the ages.

e) **Preserve the Record of Civilization:** There can be no enduring culture without some forms of record and a means for the preservation of that record. The library preserves the records of civilization, preserves the literary heritage for posterity. The public library is a necessary unit in the social set up so organized and planned as to transmit the accumulated knowledge and experiences of mankind and provides challenging and often unorthodox material.

2.10 ROLE OF LIBRARY IN SOCIETY

A library does not exist for its own sake. It exists to serve the need of the community or the parent organization. Its objectives are the same as those of its parent body. It assists in the achievement of those objectives as detailed below.

a) **Communication of Knowledge:** The information and knowledge has become increasingly complex and at the same time the means of communication of information and knowledge are also becoming equally complex. For the growth and development of a modern society, communication of knowledge has become increasingly important. All citizens must be able to find and use information. It is the key raw material and the libraries are the access points to it. A library is concerned with the communication of information and knowledge and helps in communication through user friendly devices by providing repackaging of information. It disseminates information according to the needs of the individuals on anticipation or on demand.

b) **Information Centre:** We are living in an information age in which information plays an important role in today's complex, economic,

political and social environment. The researcher, the teacher, the student, the administrator, the industrial and business managers, the entrepreneur, the farmer, the workers in a factory, etc all need information to equip themselves better for the fruitful pursuit of their respective vocation. It can help farmers to improve production by using different agricultural information. It enables businessmen to improve their business prospects. It can help students of all ages. It provides job information for the unemployed youth, helps people looking for better prospects and so on.

c) Education: Education is considered the most important activity forming the backbone of the progress of a nation. Education strengthens the very fabric of a nation. It helps to produce men of integrity, vision, character and, above all, democratically conscious citizens.

i) Formal Education: Formal education is the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded education system, running from primary school through the university. Formal education is the one that an individual attains by enrolling himself in an educational institution like a school or a college or a university and through constant teacher student contact.

In formal education, libraries support the courses of study by providing systematic collection at all levels. They recognize the requirement of teacher and student alike. It is through the extensive reading of a variety of books bearing on a subject that a student will be able to acquire in-depth knowledge of the subject. By being able to analyze and compare different view points as expounded in different books a student will be able to develop his capacity for analytical and critical thinking. This will enable him to formulate independent view points and opinion. The basic function performed by academic libraries is to support formal education. Public libraries also collect such material to cater to the students' need in some cases.

ii) Non-formal Education: Non-formal education is an organised educational activity outside the established formal system - whether

operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity - that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles. In non-formal education one educates oneself through courses offered by the distant education mode with the help of either other methods of learning or through self study materials. The main responsibility of supporting the non-formal education rests with the public library system.

Education of Illiterates: The public libraries work for the education of the illiterate people in its community through the audio- visual media especially the video tape. It also establishes learning clubs and organizes other programmes of oral communication for educating its illiterate clients.

Education of Working Groups: Public libraries stock books relevant to the needs of the people engaged in different vocations in its area. By reading such books they will become better informed and better educated in their areas of work. They may be sufficiently interested to increase their work efficiency which will lead to greater productivity.

Education of Physically Handicapped: In recent years public libraries have provided reading materials and other documents to the handicapped readers to alleviate their miseries, have assisted the disadvantaged members of society in gaining a rightful place in society besides educating and rehabilitating them in society.

iii) Informal Education: Informal education is a lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment - from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media. Informal education can contribute to learning a new job or transferring skills which were not necessarily the principal skills for a previous job. These include communication, organizational and time management skills and the ability to set priorities. Sometimes only a few weeks or a month of “on-the-job training” can assist an

individual to be able to perform a new job. Informal education also includes learning and specialized skill development pursued in job-sponsored orientation courses (e.g. computer training courses, project management).

iv) Lifelong Learning (LLL): The whole idea of education is to stress more and more independent learning and acting. All learning activities are undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. The necessary implication is that the professional and vocational competence of the members must be maintained with the changing needs of the society.

d) Research: Research extends the frontiers of knowledge. Human beings appear to stand alone among the earth's creatures in their desire to understand their environment better and the world around them. This requirement can be partially satisfied by the knowledge gained as a result of daily occurrence. The formulation of generalization takes place on the basis of first hand experience and the use of logical reasoning. A more effective approach to expand knowledge however is the conduct of planned and structured investigation- a process known as research. Both material and cultural progress of the society depends on research. It is now recognized as the life blood of the modern society.

Access to existing knowledge and information is essential for research. Every library attached to an institution collects the knowledge that is newly created and primarily communicated through journals, research reports and other similar publications to support its own research programmes.

e) Safeguard Democracy: Libraries have been identified as one of the key elements for open access to information, which is crucial to democratic society for its growth and development. It safeguards democracy, creating political awakening, bringing social awareness, and fostering creative leisure activities.

f) **Recreation and Leisure:** The healthy use of leisure is a matter of great importance in community life so that leisure time is not devoted to negative and destructive activities. The tired and bored people like to escape from their drab little world to identify themselves with romantic excitement and creative recreation. The libraries provide for one and all harmless and elevating use of leisure. Novels and other similar forms of literature, works of arts, books of travels, popular magazines etc are primary books of recreation and they have found a place in every kind of libraries. Besides, public libraries organize programmes for healthy recreation and entertainment like the performing arts, musical concerts etc.

g) **Cultural Centre:** A society cannot function without some cohesive forces to hold it together. That force is known to the anthropologist as culture. Ancient Byzantines and the Arabiaess used libraries primarily to preserve their recorded cultural heritage for the posterity. Libraries attached to medieval monasteries also perform this function admirably. In today's context also local libraries should undertake to take care of books and other material related to local history and other subjects of local interest. A national library holds the national output. Besides, it preserves the cultural heritage of the human race as represented by the books and other documents it holds. It also plays a cultural role in two other senses. Firstly, it makes available books which would bring to expression the creative talents of individuals and develop their faculties for aesthetic appreciation. Secondly, it also organizes cultural programmes like music concerts, dances, dramas, paintings competitions for children, exhibition of painting etc and thus enriches the cultural life of the community.

h) **Religious and Moral Instruction:** The use of libraries for religious and moral instruction was practiesed by all early civilizations. Monastery libraries established during the Middle Ages and the libraries attached to ancient churches, ashramas, mutts, satras and other religious bodies have primarily existed to support religious and moral instruction. All

public libraries also possessed spiritual and religious books, books that propound ideological themes, and other books of permanent value which may be described as classics. These types of collections are for inspiration. They meet the spiritual, religious and theological needs of their followers. Every other kind of library has also a representative collection of books of this type to inspire people to high ideas in life and inculcate values in them.

i) **Inspiration Centre:** A public library can create in children a love for reading, which can lead to formation of reading habits at an early age. It prepares people for disciplined and cooperative social life.

j) **Instrument of Social Change:** Information is power and at present it is being regarded as a national resource perhaps as fundamental as energy or matter or water and air, which affects all human activities. It is indispensable and so it needs to be put in the service of the whole community.

2.11 CHANGING ROLE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE CENTRE

The information society demands to re-define and re-evaluate the position and objectives of all the institutions which work with information, knowledge, and culture. In modern society special emphasis is laid on literacy, adult education, formal education, life long education, dissemination of information etc so that every person may make the best use of their life in the society, becomes good citizen and discharge their social responsibilities besides supplementing their traditional knowledge and experience about their own vocation or calling.

Above all, modern libraries are information centres. Nowadays it does not restrict itself in procuring the books only but goes to the extent of CD ROM, DVD, network information, sharing information among the like minded institution in the form of consortia and so on. The change can be viewed from four angles.

i) *Change in demand:* A change from just in kind to just in time is a major shift.

ii) *Change in structure of libraries:* Emergence of the concept of data centre, data bank, data consolidation and evaluation centre, learning resource center, documentation centre, clearing house, information analysis centre, referral centre, etc.

iii) *Change in services:* Providing CAS, SDI, consultant, literature search, information broker, gate keeper of information, etc services.

iv) *New Information products:* Emergence of the digest, newsletter and such others.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Fill in the Blanks

i) "Joho Shakai" means .....

ii) The American Society for Information Science (ASIS) in ..... organized its annual meeting around the theme "the information conscious society".

iii) ..... history is an essential chapter in the history of the intellectual development of civilization.

iv) Libraries form a link in the information ..... system.



2.12 LET US SUM UP

In modern societies cultural values are changing. A new social awareness has emerged as we become more diverse, more independent and more highly educated. More than ever before the modern societies acknowledge the right of every individual to be free, to participate in democratic processes, and to strive for achieving his or her fullest potential. When we consider such high expectations of the society in respect of

man as individual, we realize the full potential of the library as a social institute.

The culmination of centuries of advances in the printing press, cast-iron type, paper, ink, publishing, and distribution, combined with an ever growing middle-class, increased commercial activities and consumption, new radical ideas, massive population growth and higher literacy rates forged the public library into the form that it is today.



2.13 FURTHER READING

1) Chakrabarti, Bhubaneswar (1993). *Library and information society*. Calcutta: World press.
2) Krishan Kumar (1987*). Library organization*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing house Ltd.
3) Tripathi, S.M., Lal, C and K. Kumar (2002). *Descriptive questions in Library and Information Science*, New Delhi: Ess Ess.
4) P. S. G. Kumar (2004). *Information and communication*. Delhi: B.R. publishing corporation.



2.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Fill in the Blanks

i) Information Society. ii) 1970.
iii) Library. iv) Communication.



2.15 PROBABLE QUESTIONS

A) Short Answers Type Questions

a) Define information society;

b) What are the criteria of an information society?

B) Essay Type Questions

a) Describe the role of library in society.

b) Describe the role of library in imparting different types of education.

c) What are the changing roles of libraries? Discuss.

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