

Role and Responsibilities of Public Libraries: An Overview

Devika Prabhu

Library Assistant Nehru Centre Library, India

Abstract

Public Library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. This article gives an overall role and responsibility of public libraries. It includes roles, functions, services and users of public libraries. Nehru Centre Library has been taken as a case study for this articles. Roles and responsibilities served by this library to the society has been described.

KEYWORDS: Public Library, Roles, Responsibilities, Services, Functions, Users.

Introduction

Public library is the people's university. The public library as we understand today is a multipurpose agency for information, education and culture. It exists to facilitate the full flow of information and ideas to every citizen. In this modern information age nobody will deny the importance of public libraries.

The objective of a public library is to give lifelong education /knowledge /information to everybody free of cost. In order to achieve their objective, a lot of money is required. At present the management of a public library is under the State List. Most of the poor states could not invest sufficient funds for public libraries. Therefore, it is proposed to include the public library management under the Concurrent List.

Public Library

Dr. Ranganathan defined a public library as under:

- Any library established or maintained by local library authorities, including the traveling and service libraries;
- Any library open to the public free of charge and maintained and managed by the government or by any local body; and
- Any library notified by the government as a public library.

The internationally accepted definition of a public library is that it is a library:

- Which is financed for the most part by public funds;
- Which charges no fees from readers and yet is open for full use by the public without distinction of caste, creed or sex;
- Which is intended as an auxiliary educational institution providing a means of self-education which is endless; and
- Which houses earning materials giving reliable information freely and without partiality or prejudice on as wide a variety of subjects as will satisfy the interests of readers.

The public library is established for the use of the public which includes every citizen whether he/she is rich or poor, highly educated or illiterate. It is an agency for the dissemination of knowledge and communication of ideas. It is open to the public without any consideration of caste, creed, sex, class and locality. Its services are free for every citizen and maintained from public funds.

Role of Public Library

In the modern age many people came to know the important roles played by public libraries in the overall development of knowledge-based society. The public library acts as a centre for collection, organization, maintenance and dissemination of information making free flow of information and exchange of thoughts from top to bottom and bottom to top. In other words, it is considered as an essential part of the modern society and plays an important role.

The role of the public library can be summarized as under:

- It serves as a cultural centre, bringing together people having similar interests.
- It can help in safeguarding democracy, creating political awakening, bringing social awareness and fastening creative leisure activities.
- It can play an important role in helping different sectors.
- It can help farmers to improve production, businessmen to improve business prospects.
- It can create reading habits of children from an early age.
- It can provide job information, helping people looking for better prospects or those who are unemployed.
- It is the only institution, which can help, in self-education.
- It serves elderly, poor and handicapped persons in self education, etc.
- A blind person might be provided books in Braille.
- It can provide mechanical aids to an invalid to turn pages along with books.
- It acts as an agent for transfer of new technology, which takes place periodically.
- It acts as a centre and an agent carry on the traditional art and cultural heritage for the future generation.
- It helps the young people of the society in proper utilisation of leisure hours for creation of healthy characters reducing delinquency and drug dependency.

Functions of the Public Library

The modern public library collects the printed and audio-visual materials needed to conduct the individual and group life of its constituency. It organizes and makes them convenient and easy to use. It interprets and guides the use of materials to enable as many persons as possible to apply in their daily lives the record of what is known. Lack of any one of these – collection, organization and distribution, interpretation and guidance – results in sub-standard library service....

Provision of materials means more than occasional availability. It means a supply sufficient to make the library a dependable source for more people most of the time. On addition to books, the public library selects and provides pamphlets, documents and other

non-book sources in printed form, and films, tapes, discs, and other non-print recording of knowledge and opinion.

The materials are provided:

- To facilitate informal self-education of all people in the community
- To enrich and further develop the subjects on which individuals are undertaking formal education
- To meet the informational needs of all
- To support the educational, civic, and cultural activities of groups and organizations
- To encourage wholesome recreation and constructive use of leisure time.

Services of Public Library

Services provided by the public library must be planned in relation to other facilities in the community served. Standards for service must recognise the necessary variation in library programmes required by differing communities.

The services performed by the modern library are as follows:

- Logical organization of materials for convenient use through shelf arrangement, classification and cataloguing
- Lending of materials so that they may be used in the location and at the time suited to each individual
- Provision of information service designed to locate facts as needed
- Guidance to individuals in the use of educational and recreational materials
- Assistance to civic, cultural, and educational organizations in locating and using materials for programme planning, projects, and the education of members
- Stimulation of use and interpretation of materials through publicity display, reading lists, story hours, book talks, book and film discussion, and other appropriate means either in the library or in community organizations.

One remarkable and distinguishing feature of library service is its individual service to every citizen of the community by providing a diversified and unlimited choice of reading material to exactly suit his needs. Library service does not compel reading of one and the same book by the many, although a book by virtue of its good and great influence on the human mind may capture the imagination of millions of human beings.

Users of a Public Library

The materials services, personnel and physical facilities of the public library cover the interests of all ages and groups in the population. Starting with the very youngest, the pre-school child needs special resources and help. The fast-growing group of children of school age constitutes another important part of the library responsibility. Teenagers and young adults, the challenging group approximately thirteen through nineteen years of age that is making the transition from home and school to adult life, constitute still another distinct responsibility. The various groups and interests in the adult population – the various groups and interests in the adult population – the parent, the farmer, the businessman, for example - should be reflected in materials and services. The library responsibility extends to those aspects of the well-being of older and retired people that

can be served by library facilities. It is to be expressly understood that each standard in this document applies to all ages and groups, and that a standard is not achieved if its provisions are met for one part of the population but not for another.

Case study of Nehru Centre Library

Nehru Centre, Mumbai, is a unique organization established to promote the great ideals of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Its main objectives include inculcation and promotion of science, new social values, national integration, self-reliance and rational outlook on life. Nehru Centre Library, is a reference library. The library has different forms of information on various disciplines like religion, philosophy, social science, astronomy and allied sciences, arts and architecture, literature, history, geography and biographies.

The role of Nehru Centre Library in dissemination of services to the users is described. The multiple facilities at the library are as follows:

- **Books**

The library has a collection of over 26,000 books on varied disciplines like religion, philosophy, social science, astronomy and allied sciences, arts and architecture, literature, history, geography and biographies and encyclopedias - both general and special as also a good collection of books on and by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi.

- **Journals and Newspapers**

The library subscribes to about 25 foreign and 50 Indian periodicals mostly on astronomy and allied scientific subjects as also some popular newsmagazines. The Library also subscribes to a number of newspapers in English, Marathi and Hindi.

- **Documentation**

The library has set up an expansive documentation centre by scanning and indexing articles from newspapers, journals and other sources on daily basis. With the initial focus on few subjects, today the Nehru Centre Library has emerged as a popular multi-resource centre for about 220 documentation subjects that include environment, sociology, economics, education, astronomy, sciences and technology, media, etc.

- **Cyber centre and A/V archives**

Cyber centre has six computer terminals and a network printer plus scanner. Users can browse the Internet or view multimedia CD-ROMs on the six computers installed. There are also Audio visual facilities wherein users can view video cassettes and video CDs.

- **Workshops**

Programmes like workshops, meet the author sessions, book discussions are organized by the library on a regular basis.

- **Reprographic service**

Library provides reprographic service to its users. It gives both black and white and colour copies.

Users of Nehru Centre Library

Nehru Centre Library being a public library a person from 8 years old to 80 years old visit it. And each age group have there own different needs. Since last two and half years, Nehru Centre Library is been visited by students of schools, colleges and universities, retired people, corporate employees from vicinity, visitors of Discovery of India (DOI) exposition, etc.

School students come for school assignments and projects. They prefer to take information from books and documentation section. Most frequent visitors are from Greenlawns high school, St. Mary's school and Arya Vidya Mandir.

College and university students take information for assignments, projects and competitive exams. They use books, journals, cyber centre and A/V materials for their projects. Recent visitors from colleges are Sophia college, St. Xaviers's college, H.R. college, Lala Lajpatrai college while from universities are University of Mumbai, S.N.D.T. University and Tilak University.

Retired people are usually the people living near by the library. They prefer reading books on there favourite topics. Corporate employees want to read business magazines like Business India, Entrepreneur, Frontline, India Today, etc. or newspapers. Lastly, the visitors of DOI, they come to know about the library services and to see the beautiful interiors of it.

Future of Nehru Centre Library

A public reference library has to function as an efficient resource centre for all members of the public. It has to be located in a prominently visible area of the organization, it has to be well-lit and ventilated and it has to provide ample comfort to the reader. The recently revamped library to the first floor of the DOI building greatly enhanced its profile as the physical layout of the area also suits a library's requirements. Currently, library automation is in process. With digitization of its resources also in the offing, the library aims to emerge as a 'Hybrid Library' with a collection of both print and digital information resources as also a premier library not only of the neighbourhood but of the entire city of Mumbai.

Conclusion

Members of the reading public are always in search of a place to read their favourite author, to browse through the daily newspaper, to look up articles on a subject of their interest or to surf the Internet for information. A public library acts as a 'one-stop-resource-centre' where all these will be available in the comfortable ambience.

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