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# UNIT 1 ROLE OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES IN MODERN SOCIETY

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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This Unit gives an overview of the role of the library in education, research and development, cultural activities and such others fields.

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain the need for and role of libraries to meet the different requirements of persons in society;
- become aware of the expanding dimensions of libraries and emerging new information institutions in a changing society; and
- get acquainted with the services of the library to a variety of information needs of users in different contexts in an information society.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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In modern societies, every human activity is organised through institutions. Every major social task, whether economic performance or health care, education or research, business or industry is institutionalised. The protection of the



environment or defence is today invariably entrusted to institutions and organisations. Libraries and other similar types of institutions are those that collect, stock, process, organise, disseminate and distribute information/knowledge recorded in documents. Since knowledge and information are so vital for all round human development, libraries and other institutions that handle and manage knowledge and information are indeed invaluable. In this Unit, you are introduced to the important role that libraries play in the educational process of formal and non-formal learning, in research and development, in cultural activities, in spiritual and ideological realms, in recreation and entertainment, etc. With spectacular advances in information technologies and increasing categories of users and their information needs in different situations, modern society is heading towards an information society in which the central instrument of change, force and direction of change are knowledge and information. All these ideas are discussed at some length in this Unit. Assimilation of these ideas is essential for you to get a full appreciation of the role of libraries. This will enable you to develop a proper insight into professional practice and performance. In the succeeding sections of this Unit, we shall discuss how the library plays its role.

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## **1.2 NEEDS OF MODERN SOCIETY**

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As members of the modern society, we are all aware of its varied needs. Education is perhaps the most important among them, for it helps to mould a well informed, knowledgeable and responsible citizen who alone will be able to contribute to progress and advancement. Then there is the goal of the economic well being of society. Activities towards this end have to be sustained by technological developments brought about by research and the enormous amount of information it makes available to us. But 'man does not live "by bread alone". There are deeper and finer instincts in the human being such as the spiritual and ideological instincts, cultural and aesthetic instincts and others which refine life and elevate it to a higher plane. A person also needs recreation during his/her leisure time, and unless there are facilities for constructive and competitive activities, his/her attention is likely to be diverted to negative and destructive avenues. The aim should be the development of a society that is able to lead a cultured, prosperous and fulfilled life, laying emphasis on certain basic values in life and adhering to them. It is the collective responsibility of members of society to make suitable arrangements for this purpose.

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## **1.3 INSTITUTIONS FOUNDED BY SOCIETY**

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It is for the purpose of discharging this important responsibility that society has, over a long period of its existence, founded various institutions. Educational institutions like schools, colleges and universities, research institutions, cultural institutions, institutions of fine arts and recreation, business and industrial establishments and a host of others are some examples of such social institutions. The library is also one such institution. But, unlike the other institutions each of which concentrates on one or a few of the needs of society, the library is able to serve almost all its needs. If you are a student of a school, your primary task is the acquisition of knowledge prescribed for that level. And this will be mainly through oral communication from the teacher supplemented by the reading of a few prescribed text books. But in the library you are exposed to books on a variety of themes - books that will give you knowledge, bring to surface your



latent aesthetic talents, stimulate your intellect, inculcate values and learning skills in you, provide you with recreation and so on. Therefore, of all the institutions founded 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.

### Self Check Exercise

1) List the types of institutions founded by society to meet many of its activities.

Note: i) Write your answer in the given space below

ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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## 1.4 LIBRARY AND EDUCATION

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Briefly speaking education aims at (i) the imparting of knowledge and skills; (ii) the inculcation of values; and (iii) the imparting of vocational skills.

There is both formal and non-formal education. 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 contacts. In non-formal education there is no such institutional base for education; you educate yourself through courses offered by distance education mode, with the help of either other methods of learning or through self study.

### 1.4.1 Formal Education

Every institution of formal education, be it a school, a college or a university, should have a library attached to it. It should have a collection of books relevant to its courses of study. Students should be encouraged to read books and imbibe the knowledge contained in them. At the earlier stages of education like the school this should be done to supplement classroom teaching. At later stages, particularly in colleges and universities, the focal point of learning should gradually shift from the classroom to the library. 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 analyse and compare different viewpoints 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 viewpoints and opinions. The role of the library in fostering the intellectual development of students cannot be over-emphasised.

Apart from school, college and university libraries, the public libraries too have a responsibility to support formal education. For this purpose, the public library must stock books and other material of an academic nature suitable for students and teachers of educational institutions in its area and make the books, etc., available to them. It must be remembered in this context that a public library



should serve everyone in its community and it should not ignore the requirements of teachers and students who form part of the community.

### 1.4.2 Non-Formal Education

In non-formal education where the help of the teacher is minimal, it is the library that is the main resource. Students here have, by and large, to acquire knowledge through self-study. Libraries of formal educational institutions as well as public libraries have a significant role to play in this respect: The former should throw open their facilities to students of non-formal education in such a manner that the interests of their primary clientele are not adversely affected. Universities, as the bodies that lay down academic standards and conduct examinations in the field of higher education; have a special responsibility in this regard. They should try to make their library services reach as wide a clientele as possible including students of non-formal education. One way to make this possible is to establish branch libraries of the main university library at different places within its jurisdiction and making them accessible to the entire academic community in the area including students of non-formal education.

But the main responsibility of supporting non-formal education rests with the public library system. Everyone should have access as a matter of right to the public library. A public library should try to discharge this responsibility by acquiring books and journals suited to the needs of the students of non-formal education in its area. The development of a sound public library system is an essential pre-requisite for the successful implementation of all non-formal educational programmes.

If the library needs of the students of non-formal education are not met by academic and public libraries, the result would be that the students would take to cheap guide books. The inevitable consequence of this substitute will be a steep fall in the standards of education.

#### Self Check Exercise

2) Describe in five lines the role of the library in non-formal education.

Note: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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### 1.4.3 Education of Illiterates

If one is an illiterate person, do you think that he/she is unable to get the benefits of education? Not at all. Literacy is only a means of education, not education itself. It is, no doubt, the most important means, and not having it is a serious handicap. But we have today many other effective means that modern technology has brought into existence. The audio-visual media, especially the video tape, have made it possible for education to be brought to your doorstep. It is a special responsibility of the public library to work for the education of the illiterate



people in its community through such media: It should also organise learning clubs and other programmes of oral communication for educating its illiterate clientele.

In India where illiteracy is as high as 47.79 % (according to the 1991 census), this responsibility assumes great importance and vast dimensions. The public library's important role in this regard and the need to prepare it adequately to discharge its role should never be lost sight of.

#### **1.4.4 Education of Working Groups**

The library has an educational role in another sense also. It should stock books relevant to the needs of people engaged in different vocations in its area. By reading such books they will become better informed and educated in their areas of work and will be able to increase their work efficiency. This will lead to greater productivity. The public library has to play a contributory role here also.

#### **1.4.5 Education of Physically Handicapped**

The establishment of educational institutions for physically handicapped persons is a special and mandatory responsibility of society and the government. Appropriate learning and teaching materials are acquired by these types of institutions, such as books and other types of learning kits for the blind, in addition to other physical facilities. Libraries attached to these institutions have the responsibility of stocking these types of library material and help these unfortunate persons use them and thus get them educated and rehabilitated in society.

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### **1.5 LIBRARY IN RESEARCH**

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Supporting research is yet another important role of the library. Access to existing knowledge and information is essential for research. The knowledge that is newly created is primarily communicated through journals, research reports and other similar publications: Every library attached to an institution engaged in research should have a strong collection of such publications to support research programmes. The libraries attached to universities, research organisations and research and development wings of industrial establishments play the key role in this respect. However, no library is without a research function in some form. Even public libraries have a research role especially in the social sciences and humanities.

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### **1.6 LIBRARY IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**

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The first cultural role of the library is that it preserves the cultural heritage of the human race as represented by the books and other documents it holds. It has also a cultural role in two other senses. It should make available books which would bring to expression the creative talent- of individuals and develop their faculties for aesthetic appreciation. It should also organise cultural programmes like music concerts, dances, dramas, painting competitions for children, exhibition of paintings, etc. and thus enrich the cultural life of the community. These programmes primarily fall in the domain of public libraries.



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## 1.7 LIBRARY IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION

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Libraries, through their books, are actually repositories of information and knowledge. Information is indispensable for any human activity aiming at social progress. The researcher, the teacher, the student, the administrator, the industrial and business manager, the artisan, the entrepreneur, the farmer, the worker in the factory and the field, all need information to equip, themselves better for the fruitful pursuit of their respective vocations. The basic information role of the library is to collect material containing information through appropriate methods. It is primarily in this sense that a library is described as an information centre. But a library also has an information role in the sense of providing information relating to the socio-economic needs of the people. A library can stock career information books and help those who are on - the look out for a career in a particular field. Similarly, well-produced "how-to-do-it" type of books would be helpful in providing guidance to youngsters wanting to start some enterprise. In short, a library should be so equipped and organised that it will be able to serve its community with all types of information that may be in actual or potential demand.

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## 1.8 LIBRARY IN RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL INSTITUTIONS

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Books can be broadly divided into three categories - books of information, books of recreation and books of inspiration. Spiritual and religious books, books that propound ideological themes and other books of permanent value which may be described as classics are books of inspiration. They meet the spiritual, religious and ideological needs of their readers. Every library should have a representative collection of books of this type to inspire people to high ideals in life and inculcate values in them.

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## 1.9 LIBRARY IN RECREATION AND LEISURE

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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 library should cater to the recreational needs of its users by stocking books suited for the purpose. Novels and other forms of literature, works of art, books of travels, biographies, popular magazines, etc., are primarily books of recreation and they should have a place in every library. Besides, libraries, especially public libraries, should organise programmes of healthy recreation and entertainment like the performing arts, musical concerts, etc.,

### Self Check Exercises

- 3) Explain briefly the responsibilities of different types of libraries to cater to the research needs of the community.
- 4) Describe briefly how public libraries organise dissemination services on current affairs.

Note : i) Write your answers in the space given below.

ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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## 1.10 LIBRARY AND THE CHANGING SOCIETY

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In the preceding sections, we have studied the conventional role of the library in education, research, culture, religion, spiritual pursuits, etc. In this section, we shall study the expanding dimensions of libraries due to unprecedented transformation of the society. Several factors are responsible for these changes. Consequently libraries also are undergoing a very drastic transformation in all aspects of their growth.

### 1.10.1 Dimensions of Change

The changes that are occurring in different facets of human life in modern society can be seen in the following aspects:

- Pressures exerted by the population explosion, particularly in India, produce societal pressures through increasing urbanization, mobility of population, group dynamics, etc.
- Socio-economic changes affect occupational patterns, incomes, prices, value, inflation, growth dynamics, and economic developments at the macro and micro levels.
- Political changes affect political structures and systems, political parties, their growths, the activities of members of parliament and state assemblies, power structures, etc.
- Educational changes affect learning and teaching processes at all levels of education, learning and teaching materials, educational technologies, etc.
- Research and development in the scientific and technological fields, the social sciences, and the humanities, lead to the creation of new knowledge, innovation, diffusion, dissemination, distribution and use, etc.
- Industry and business are affected by changes in production and distribution, technology transfer, assessment and application, marketing and sales, etc.
- In trade and commerce, import and export, international trade and commerce, multinational trade impact, etc., are affected.
- Government and administration are affected through changes in planning, policy-making, governance, execution and management, etc.
- Cultural changes take place in the fine arts and music, in the show business, in films, satellite TV, etc.

The above facets of contemporary human life are merely to illustrate some of the more conspicuous factors that have brought about rapid changes in society.

The information and knowledge aspects that permeate the entire fabric of contemporary life can be broadly grouped under three categories as given below:



<b>Literature-oriented</b>	<b>Management</b>	<b>Current affairs</b>
Learning and teaching	High productivity	News analysis, comments on current events, activities and personalities relating to everyone of the facets mentioned above.
Research and development	Strategic planning	
Publications-research	Operation and control	
Monograph	Decision-making	
Periodicals		
Technical reports	Feedback and evaluation	TV, broadcasting, video, etc
	Performance rating	
Theses and dissertations		
Scholarship	Others	
Innovation and invention		

Inputs to everyone of the activities, programmes, projects, etc., have to be made from all the above three broad categories, and have to be properly blended, amalgamated and integrated to meet specific requirements of use. Information technology indeed is applied to all processes, individually and collectively, to the three groups, to create a specific information database for storage and retrieval.

It is in this perspective that the entire field of information has to be viewed and understood. In each of the above categories of information, we are able to discern an information flow pattern, commencing from generation of information to processing, dissemination, storage, retrieval and utility of information. New institutional mechanisms are being set up with the introduction of structural innovation, application of information technologies, development of new methodologies and techniques for creating model innovative systems and services. All these aspects of the design and development of information systems and programmes are based on demand, need, use and utility. In fact, users' demand for information forms the fulcrum of the present day information system.

### **1.10.2 Expanding Role of the Library**

All these factors have radically changed the conventional functions of the library. The new demands of users have to be met by several activities based upon documentation, information analysis, consolidation and repackaging, computer based information systems, etc. that have sprung up in the last 30 years. Many of these developments have also provided new opportunities for commercialisation of information products and services, thus paving the way for an information industry which is growing and flourishing steadily. These rapidly changing roles of the library have made an eminent information scientist to remark that "in a metaphorical sense, we are moving from a Ptolemaic world with the library at the centre to a Copernican one with information at the centre and the library as one of its planets" (Robert S. Taylor). (Ptolemy, the Greek mathematician, propound the theory that the earth was the fixed centre of the universe with the heavenly bodies moving around it. Copernicus, the Polish astronomer, changed this concept

saying that the earth is only one of the planets that circles the sun in the solar system).



The above statement vividly brings out the changing dimensions of knowledge and information and the institutional mechanism to handle them. Now, information is at the centre, while earlier the library was at the centre.

Although the library essentially handles information and knowledge, the institutional mechanism to meet the demands of users in an information society has expanded by properly organising and operating many of the modern information systems and services.

### Self Check Exercise

5) Discuss the name of information in the changing context.

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## 1.11 SUMMARY

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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: While other institutions are designed to meet one or a few of the needs, the library is able to meet all of them in equal measure. It plays an important role in supporting the educational and research activities of society, promoting culture, disseminating information, catering to the spiritual and ideological instincts in man and building up a value system for him and providing recreation.

All human activities at all times have relied heavily on knowledge and information. But it is only in the last half of this century that information and knowledge have taken, the centre of the stage, making them the most important resources for development. It is lanelv information technology which has made information storage and processing, access and liability possible irrespective of distances and location by moving them with speed and accuracy. Information and knowledge have occupied the status of basic resources, and modern society, therefore, is termed as an information society.

The institutional mechanism to meet a variety of knowledge and information needs has drastically changed. The library has become one of several institutions that serve knowledge and information.



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## 1.12 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

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- 1) The institutions founded by society for different activities are given in the following table:

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Institutions</b>
1) Education	Schools, colleges, university professional organisations
2) Economic well-being	Financial institutions, industrial undertakings of different kinds, goods distributing agencies, etc.
3) Technological development	Research establishments, industrial establishments, etc
4) Spiritual pursuits	Philosophical and religious institutions
5) Cultural activities	Arts and crafts centres, theatre, music academies, etc.
6) Leisure activities	Libraries, entertainment centres
7) Recreational activities	Cinema halls, television centres, sports and games associations etc.

- 2) Non-formal education is a process of self-learning. Self-instructional materials, both paper-print and audio-visual learning kits, are necessary for this process of learning. These materials are collected in libraries, providing facilities for study in the premises of the library or making them available for home study on loan. Libraries of distance education centres have, therefore, to organise these, services, particularly in smaller towns and in rural areas. This responsibility of libraries is crucial to non-formal learning.

- 3) Research is conducted in universities, research institutions and in industrial establishments:

The function of libraries attached to these institutions is to build the necessary document collections, provide facilities for accessing this collection in addition to obtaining information on research materials on the subject of research and obtaining hard copies of required documents and such others.

Therefore libraries are indispensable supporting institutions for research and development.

Public libraries also stock appropriate research material and service them for supporting research.

- 4) Public libraries collect newspapers and general/popular periodicals for the use of the public to keep themselves aware of current affairs. Debates and meetings on current issues of public concern are organised by public libraries in which the public participate. Book clubs, exhibitions and special fairs are organised periodically to highlight reading materials on



public affairs. Thus, public libraries disseminate information on current affairs.

- 5) The changing contexts of information are caused by:
- i) Demand for information by different groups involved in education and learning, research and development, industrial and economic development, social welfare programmes and many others.
  - ii) Advances in computer and communication techniques have made information/knowledge accessible and available, enhancing the use of them for all developmental purpose.
  - iii) Increasing attention is given to creation of new knowledge and information, which form the central force for development and hence call for proper care, harnessing and management.

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### 1.13 KEY WORDS

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<b>Disseminating</b>	:	Collecting, organising and packaging information : making them available to people.
<b>Information Society</b>	:	A society in which the central instruments of and direction are information and knowledge.
<b>Non-formal Education</b>	:	A system of education wherein; the students have acquire knowledge through self-study and
<b>Repositories</b>	:	Places where things are stored.
<b>Vocational Skills</b>	:	Skills pertaining to an occupation.
<b>Working Groups</b>	:	Persons engaged in different vocations, professions occupations.

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### 1.14 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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