

Public Library System: A Modern Outlook on its Principles and Practice

R. Raman Nair*

1 INTRODUCTION

Public library is an institution which offers to people free access to information. Unesco Manifesto for Public Libraries proclaims public library as an institution which is the principal means whereby the record of man's thoughts and ideas and the expression of his creative imagination are made freely available to all¹. The manifesto also states that it should be an institution; established under the clear mandate of law, maintained wholly from public fund, offering all its services free of cost and open for free and equal use by all members of the community irrespective of their age, sex, religion, language status or level of education.

11 Definition of PLS

Even though public library services existed from very ancient times Public Library System (PLS) is a recent concept. According to Ranganathan PLS means an integrated nation-wide network of public libraries giving free library and information service to one and all of the citizens - literate or illiterate, rich or poor, rural or urban².

12 The Need of PLS

Many global forces have made PLS and its free information service the most important requisite for life in the modern world. The development of the sociological thought has shattered all the social barriers and forced the society to move towards a socialistic pattern. It implied equal right to all for free public library and information service. It has to be free and supported by legislation. The developments in political thought progress of science, and industrialization have made it essential to keep one and all of the citizens furnished with latest ideas and knowledge through PLS which is equally accessible to everyone for their information requirements.

The two instruments which supplement the work of education to this end are on the one hand PLS with resultant dissemination of information and on the other information designed for the popularization of different fields of knowledge which is provided through books, journals and audio-visual media.

* Librarian, Government College, Kasargod, Kerala.

2 THE ROLE OF PLS

The explosive growth of knowledge and the direct relation of information to developments in all walks of human life have elevated PLS which is to give free access to information for all as the most important system in people's life and progress. Recent studies on PLS assign to it important roles in the fields of nation's political, social and economic development, education, information, culture and leisure. There is no other substitute to PLS.

21 Adjustment to Change

The speed at which the advances in science and technology is occurring at present has broadened the scope and elevated the level of PLS in modern civilization. This fast development in science and technology has caused new socio-cultural pattern to emerge with turbulent changes in goals, pursuits and priorities in all facets of life of man on earth. Change is not a new phenomenon. We have been witnessing it from time immemorial. But now we are in a phase of exploding change - with personal life being torn apart the existing social order crumbling, and fantastic new way of life emerging on the horizon - asking the very largest questions about our future; is not merely a matter of intellectual curiosity⁴.

It is a matter of survival. It gives new dimension to PLS in this new environment.

22 Maintaining Democracy

We are striving to attain a socialistic pattern of democracy. PLS is an essential requirement for achieving and maintaining democracy. In a democracy the sovereign power is distributed equally among one and all the voters. But the day to day affairs of the government which is very complex in a large country like India can not be discharged by each one of the voters. Therefore, it is impossible for each voter to take a hand directly in the administration of the affairs of the State, in virtue of his small share of the sovereign power of the country. Each voter has to exercise this residual sovereignty in a very effective way if democracy is to be safe. He should exercise this power by watching whether the policy of the government is on right lines, whether the promises of the Legislators and the Ministers made at the time of election are being faithfully carried out, and by stepping along with other voters at the right moment and by endeavoring to set right the wrong. These form the inalienable right as well as duty of each citizen.

221 *Need for unbiased information*

The exercise of these rights and the performance of these duties should be based on the knowledge of facts and ideas. Thomas Jefferson has rightly remarked that 'the people of a country would never consent the destruction of

their liberties if they were informed and nothing would do more good towards keeping them informed than the establishment and maintenance of a PLS. So in its own interest democracy is obliged to provide free and extensive information service to the people through PLS.

23 Economic Development

The economic development also requires support of PLS. Population pressure has already gone beyond powers of the natural and near natural resources to feed, clothe and house all people. So there is need for intelligent conservation of all available resources by everybody, maximising the production of natural and near natural commodities by intensive cultivation and the transformation of non-consumable raw materials into beneficial commodities through technology of ever increasing sophistication. These requires continuous dissemination of latest scientific ideas and knowledge among one and all the people. As the Sangham classic Tirukkural says; the wealth of all wealth is the wealth of human resources⁵. This makes PLS the primary responsibility of the State.

24 Social well being

Library and information service is a social necessity⁶. PLS is an essential support to the steady development of social well-being. PLS should be the nucleus from which every development in a community radiates and gets irradiated. Public libraries should be the social and intellectual centres of each locality. PLS is to be the communities cultural deposit; for all its literary remains and a medium for transmission of the distinctive culture of the community and for historical research.

PLS has a great role to play in social education to prepare people for social adjustment. It also offers materials and services to the public to understand the social phenomena and thus live a successful social life and avoid social evils. PLS provides opportunities to the people to understand social diseases and learn to control them.

25 Education of the Masses

PLS only can foster and provide means for self-development of the individual or group at whatever the stage of education; closing the gap between the individual and recorded knowledge⁷. PLS is a necessity for the preservation of universal literacy and the elimination of educational waste.

26 Use of Science and Technology

The dominating feature of the contemporary world is the intense cultivation of science on a large scale and its application at meet common man's requirements. It is only through scientific approach and method and use of scientific knowledge that reasonable material and cultural amenities and ser-

VICES can be provided for every member of the community and it is out of the recognition of this possibility, that the idea of the welfare state has grown. PLS has to offer the people materials and services that will help them to prosper in their respective fields of work. It has to help the people to get along in the present day world where inventions and discoveries are flooding everyday impelling man to have continuous education for professional maturity.

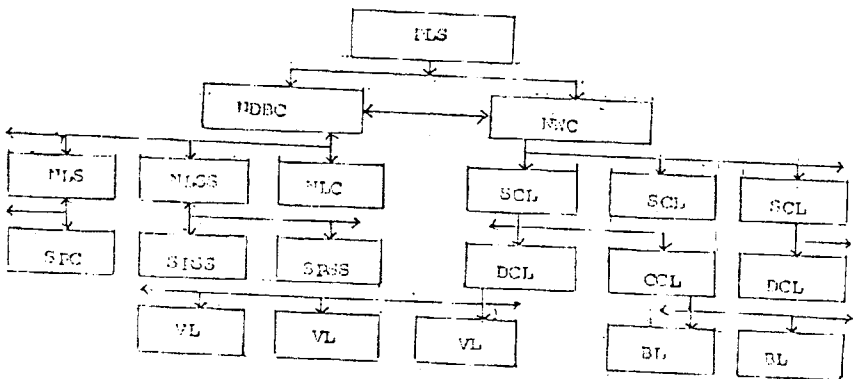
27 Culture

PLS helps the cultural development in more than one way. It can promote a keener participation, enjoyment and appreciation of all arts. It can play a vital role in collecting and preserving the cultural heritage of the locality and making it readily available to the people to enrich their cultural awareness. It attempts to reduce the cultural lag- the time taken for the innovation to become integrated into society.

3 DEVELOPMENT OF PLS CONCEPT

Earlier public libraries were considered as independent single units under the Government. The concept of PLS, as distinct from unitary libraries was presented in the Model Library Act by Ranganathan at the First All Asia Educational Conference held in Banares in 1930. This concept emphasises that PLS at different levels viz., State, City, District along with lower service units should be so interlinked as to form part of a system or network. Such a PLS can be compared with a large irrigation system. It needs a hand-work with a costly dam.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM



BL	Branch Libraries, Tier 1
CCL	City Central Library, Tier 2
DCL	District Central Library, Tier 2
NDBC	National Data Base Central
NLC	National Copyright Collection
NLS	National Science Library
NLSS	National Social Science Library
NWC	PLS network coordination
PLS	Public Library System
SCL	State Central Library, Tier 3
SPC	Special Libraries Science
SPSS	Special Libraries Social Science
VL	Village Libraries, Tier 1.

and a large number of distributaries and sub-distributaries through which water can reach every bit of land. The traditional independent libraries on the other hand, resemble more the wells and tanks which have served mankind for ages, but they have limited and dwindling use in modern times.

31 Possibilities of PLS

Thus new concept of PLS offers infinite possibilities:

1. 'PLS' is a co-operative and organic structure in which every unit however small is rich as the whole system.
2. PLS has larger funds which allow for a balanced and even development of its services over large areas irrespective of local variations or imbalances in financial support.
3. PLS is comparatively more economical, and
4. PLS can provide library services more efficiently and effectively because it can permit introduction of library services based on modern concepts of services and approved standards.

32 Support for Indian thought

The principles behind PLS enunciated by Ranganathan have been reiterated by UNESCO in its Public Library Manifesto. It declares that organized cooperation between libraries is essential so that total national resources should be fully used and should be at the service of the people. In 1950 in his report submitted to the Union Government of India, Ranganathan again stressed that public library development should be planned on the basis of

library systems rather than on unitary basis⁹.

The First International Seminar organized by Unesco on public libraries has stated that library legislation should provide for the inter-lending of books between libraries so that the book resources of the whole territory shall be available to all¹⁰.

The United States has emphasized in the standards for public libraries published in 1967 the importance of the systems concept. The standards contain the concept that every individual has a right to benefit from the record of what is known whether he lives in a big city, a suburban community, a small town, an unincorporated area or a rural district and the structure of such service should provide a flexible, operative library network effectively linking the libraries of the State and the Nation.

33 Right to all information

Ranganathan suggested in 1959 in his library development plan for Kerala, the pooling of the resources of Legislature Library, Government Secretariat Library, and some other big specialized collections to make them useful to the people through PLS. Unesco and several other international agencies such as IFLA and FID have accepted the concept of National Information Systems (NATIS) which pools the information resources of all types of libraries so that they become available to all the people in a country.

34 Recent Trends

Government of India has entrusted Raja Ram Mohan Roy Foundation the work of formulating a national policy for PLS. In 1984 the Foundation submitted a draft policy¹¹. In 1985 ILA also submitted another draft policy. So the Government set up a committee under the Chairmanship of P.P. Chattopadhyaya for considering these drafts and for the formulation of a final document on National Library and Information Policy; and it submitted its report in May 1986 which again brought to the forefront the suggestions given by Ranganathan from 1950 onwards. The committee has stressed that establishing, maintaining and strengthening free public library service in the country and enabling them to work as a system is the most important task before the Government¹².

It recommended that all libraries in the state should form part of a PLS network extending from the community library of the village through intermediary levels to the district and to the State Central Library. The State PLS network should eventually be connected with the national level network.

4 PLAN FOR PLS IN INDIA

A four tier integrated PLS was suggested by Ranganathan for India. According to it the State-wide grid of public libraries in each constituent state will together form a nation-wide grid of public libraries. In the following

pattern which is based on Ranganathan's plan the formation and maintenance of the first three tiers are to be looked after by the State. Tier four lies within the jurisdiction of the Union Government.

In the illustration given below the outer circle is the people

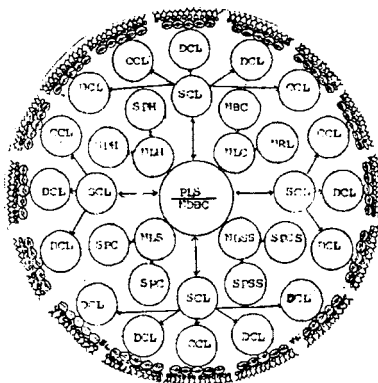
and the Central Circle is the National Focal point of PLS which controls the whole of information resources and between them comes the four circles; tiers connecting people and their information.

41 Closest service point

The village libraries and branch libraries in cities forms the first tier of the PLS which is closest to the people and which has as its only purpose the providing of book and information service to a small population cluster of not more than about 5000 people. Its permanent collection will be very small mostly made up of essential reference books. Books for satisfying users requirements that goes beyond the powers of its collection will be supplied to it from the next tier. Light reading materials also will be periodically circulated to it from the next tier. Its collection should be about 25000 books and it should have a small but purpose oriented building of its own.

104

PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM



- VL Village Libraries, Tier 1
- VCL City Central Library, Tier 2
- DCL District Central Library, Tier 2
- NBC National Bibliographical Centre
- NDC National Data Base Centre
- NLC National Copyright Collection
- NHL National Humanities Library
- NLS National Science Library
- NSS National Social Science Library
- NRL National Reference Library
- NWC PLS network coordination
- PLS Public Library System
- SCL State Central Library, Tier 3
- SPL Special Libraries Science
- SPH Special Libraries Humanities
- SSS Special Libraries Social Sciences
- V Village Libraries, Tier 1

42 District and City Centres

They form the second tier of the system. They will have the functions of purchasing, processing and circulating books to the village and branch libraries and may also serve the people of its locality directly as a service library. They should support the lower level service points in their short range and long range reference service. They should have a collection of about two lakhs books and a sufficiently large building.

It is always advisable for the District Offices of the State Public Relations Department, and District Information Centres of the NIC which provides informatics services to government departments etc. to work in the District Central Library building or in its same campus. This can avoid a lot of duplication of work and resultant waste of resources. By co-operation with these departments PLS also will become highly efficient and effective.

43 State Central Library

It will be the service library cum coordinating centre at tier three of PLS and will have jurisdiction over a constituent State. For lending to any service library in the State it should purchase and keep a stock of reference books, micro documents, equipments etc. which are either too costly for the service libraries of lower tiers or are infrequently in demand in such libraries. It may also do centralized purchasing and processing of books, prepare bibliographies and reading lists for use of the service libraries in the State either on demand or in anticipation. It will normally be the copyright collection in the State. It will be accessible to all throughout the State through any library of PLS.

44 National Library

PLS should have provision to integrate the grid of the public libraries of different constituent states in the country in to a single grid of nationwide public libraries. This requirement introduces the national libraries at tier four.

The time has already come when a single national library would become too unwieldy for efficient organization and service. Therefore national library should be a group of national libraries the organizations and services of which are to be coordinated from a central base. These institutions should be divided into two groups, one giving importance to preservation aspect and the other to service aspect. In the first group will come national copyright library, etc. which will preserve books deposited under Copyright Act, Delivery of Books and Newspapers Act, etc.

Of the second group in this tier, that is of national service libraries each will be restricted to specified subject area such as natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, etc. All research and specialized libraries on subject areas covered by these national service libraries will function under their leadership

and coordination. In this type of PLS it becomes possible that each of this special collection can be built up as the most complete and reliable collection on the subject of its specialization. By the centralized coordination at national level of all these special collections and by establishing a data base at the centre from where information regarding all the collections in the country will become available, PLS will get control over the whole information resource available in the country¹³. Extensive coverage, quality and efficiency becomes possible for PLS with minimum resources.

5 NEED FOR PLS LEGISLATION

It is an accepted fact that PLS cannot be established and maintained in any country without a properly planned and framed library legislation. With the growing emphasis on the development of national level PLS following the realization that local library services needed to be supplemented with resources from outside the local area there has been a steady interest in library legislation concerning regional, metropolitan, state and multi-states PLS.

6 UNIFORM PATTERN FOR STATES

The establishment of PLS in India requires the support of a Union Act for PLS. To enable a national system, PLS in all states which are to be its component units in a federal country like India should have a uniform pattern. Without that these components can not be organized into a coherent whole. So far being co-ordinated at the national level it is essential that the Union Government should enforce by the provisions of a Union Act for PLS uniform pattern for PLS in all states. A Model Act for state PLS also should be framed for adoption by the states. This is essential to eliminate waste of energy, money and materials.

7 CONCLUSION

Government should give high priority to PLS and for its legislation because in these days PLS is to be a highly specialised system for the people to have access to information easily and freely. PLS is potentially a means of establishing some measure of equal access to and redistribution of the wealth of information¹⁴. How freely and how equally citizens have access to knowledge determines how equally they can share in the governing of our society and in the work and rewards of our economy¹⁵.

REFERENCES

1. UNESCO and IFLA. *Unesco public library manifesto*. 1972. Unesco; Paris.
2. RANGANATHAN (S R). *Opening address at the All India Seminar on public library system*. In RANGANATHAN (S R) and NEELAMEGHAN (A). Ed. *Public library system*. 1972. SREFL; Bangalore.
3. D'OLIER (J H) and DELMAS (B). *Planning national infrastructure for documentation, libraries and archives*. 1975. Unesco; Paris.
4. TOFLER (A). *Third Wave*. 1985. NAL; New York.

5. **POPE (G U).** *The scared Kural of Thiruvalluva Nayanar.* 1886. AES; New Delhi.
6. **RANGANATHAN (S R).** *Library development plan with a draft library bill for Kerala State.* 1960. Government Press, Trivandrum.
7. **Public Library Research Group and Library Association, London.** *Purpose of public libraries.* **Library Association Record** 73(12);1971.
8. **MANGALA (P B).** *Library legislation in India.* In R.K.Rout. Ed. *Library legislation in India: problems and prospects.* 1986. Reliance; New Delhi.
9. **RANGANATHAN (S R).** *Library development plan: thirty year programme for India with draft bills for the union and constituent states.* 1950. University of Delhi; New Delhi.
10. **UNESCO.** *Report of the seminar on public libraries in Unesco manual for libraries.* 1954. Unesco; Paris.
11. **RAJARAM MOHAN ROY LIBRARY FOUNDATION.** *National policy on library and information systems.* 1984. Calcutta.
12. **INDIA. NATIONAL LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SYSTEM.** *Report.* 1986. New Delhi.
13. **RAMAN NAIR (R).** *National library: a historical perspective.* **International Library Movement.** 9 (1); 1987.
14. **USHERWOOD (Bob).** *The public library as public knowledge.* 1989. Library Association; London.
15. **AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION.** *Freedom and equality of access to information,* 1986. ALA; Chicago.