

National Libraries: An Overview

DR.HD GOPAL
LIBRARIAN

GOVERNMENT FIRST GRADE COLLEGE
HAROHALLI-562112. RAMANAGARA (DIST)

E-mail: dhdgopal@gmail.com

Abstract:

A national library is a library established by a government as a country's preeminent repository of information. Unlike public libraries, these rarely allow citizens to borrow books. National libraries are usually notable for their size, compared to that of other libraries in the same country. here are wider definitions of a national library, putting less emphasis to the repository character. National libraries are usually notable for their size, compared to that of other libraries in the same country. Some states which are not independent, but who wish to preserve their particular culture, have established a national library with all the attributes of such institutions, such as deposit. Many national libraries cooperate within the National Libraries Section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to discuss their common tasks, define and promote common standards and carry out projects helping them to fulfill their duties. The first national library to establish in the Americas became the National Library of Colombia having been founded on January 9, 1777, as the Real Biblioteca by Manuel Antonio Flórez, the Viceroy of New Granada.

Keywords: Bibliography: Current bibliographies: Journals: Manuscripts: Microforms: National Library: Publications: Reader: Retrospective bibliographies.

Introduction:

The first national libraries had their origins in the royal collections of the sovereign or some other supreme body of the state. One of the first plans for a national library was devised by the English mathematician John Dee, who in 1556 presented Mary I of England with a visionary plan for the preservation of old books, manuscripts and records and the founding of a national library, but his proposal was not taken up. In England, Sir Richard Bentley's Proposal for Building a Royal Library published in 1694 stimulated renewed interest in the subject. Sir Robert Cotton, 1st Baronet, of Conning ton, a wealthy antiquarian, amassed the richest private collection of manuscripts in the world at the time and founded the Cotton Library. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries, many priceless and ancient manuscripts that had belonged to the monastic libraries began to be disseminated among various owners, many of whom were unaware of the cultural value of the manuscripts. Sir Robert's genius was in finding, purchasing and preserving these ancient documents. After his death his grandson donated the

library to the nation as its first national library. This transfer established the formation of the British Library.



The first true national library was founded in 1753 as part of the [British Museum](#). This new institution was the first of a new kind of museum – national, belonging to neither church nor king, freely open to the public and aiming to collect everything. The museum's foundations lay in the will of the physician and naturalist [Sir Hans Sloane](#), who gathered an enviable [collection of curiosities](#) over his lifetime which he bequeathed to the nation for £20,000.

Concept of a National Library

The concept of national libraries, as we know them today, has developed in about three centuries back, mostly in industrially advanced countries of the West. The growth and advancement of such libraries has been a conspicuous feature of the intellectual and cultural development of a country. Not only have they grown in size, particularly in the last half a century, they have also expanded in multi-fold dimensions, tending to develop into a network of national libraries. There are, in some countries today, national subject libraries for medicine, agriculture, science and technology, and for a few professional services like document supply, compilation and production of national bibliographies. These trends are also witnessed on the Indian scene in some measure.

Definition of National Library

A National Library keeps all documents of and about a nation under some legal provision and thus represents publications of and about the whole nation.

1. **Edition 6 of Harrods's Librarians' Glossary and Reference Book (1987)** defines a National Library as: a library maintained out of government funds serving the nation as a whole; books in such libraries being for reference only; libraries are usually copyright libraries.
2. **The ALA Glossary of Library Terms**, simply defines, the National Library As “a library maintained by a Nation”. One of the unique privileges of a National Library of a country is to receive by law all print and non-print materials produced by the country. This provision is usually incorporated in the Copyright Laws of the country, by which an author, an artist or a musician, has the exclusive right, granted by law, for a certain number of years, to make and

dispose copies of a literary, musical or artistic work.

3. **The UNESCO** defines Libraries which, irrespective of their title, are responsible for:
Acquiring and conserving copies of all significant publications published in the country;
Functioning as a 'depository' library, whether by law or under other arrangements.

Concept of a National Library

The concept of national libraries, as we know them today, has developed in about three centuries back, mostly in industrially advanced countries of the West. The growth and advancement of such libraries has been a conspicuous feature of the intellectual and cultural development of a country. Not only have they grown in size, particularly in the last half a century, they have also expanded in multi-fold dimensions, tending to develop into a network of national libraries. There are, in some countries today, national subject libraries for medicine, agriculture, science and technology, and for a few professional services like document supply, compilation and production of national bibliographies. These trends are also witnessed on the Indian scene in some measure.

Purpose of National Library

While discussing the overall objectives of National Central Library, Ranganathan emphasised that: "The National Central Library should be national in every sense of the word and not merely the symbolic representation of the library personality of the nation. It must be the channel through which all the library obligations of the nation to the international world are discharged. It should be national in the sense of learning the ultimate book bank of the nation capable of supplementing the library resources, of every locality, by being open for use by any citizen wherever he might live and whether in the present or in the future. It should also be national in the sense of having representative copies, of every reading and kindred material published within or on our country and by or on all the nationals of our country. It should also

Emergence of the National Library

The early characteristics of these National Libraries were that they were the focal points of the nation in each country. They enjoyed the privilege of receiving a copy of every book published in the country. They had funds for buying foreign publications, space to house them and a staff to process them. They were located in the capital of the country. These libraries were built up to preserve, protect, conserve and perpetuate the nation's intellectual and cultural heritage. They were not particularly oriented towards providing public library service. The collection of these libraries was largely in arts, literature, philosophy, religion and one or two social sciences. Books on science and technology were still to come. These libraries were used by scholars in humanities and social sciences, who could spend a great amount of time in these libraries. With the advent of the 20th century, science and technology gained ascendancy. The researches of scientists like Newton, Roentgen, Pierre, Marie

Curie and many others, opened flood gates of scientific research.

Types of National Libraries

We have mentioned earlier that the activities of National Libraries have expanded considerably in recent decades. Consequently, several of these activities and functions are being shared, by a few National Libraries that have sprung up. However, these trends have not been identical in all countries. Historical traditions, socio-economic, scientific and technological developments have determined the nature of emerging National Libraries. National Libraries that have been operating in different countries may be grouped by:

- Functions
- Subjects
- special groups served
- type of material collected
- sub-national serving a geographical area or a cultural group
- Functional sharing.
- subjects
- Special groups served
- type of material collected
- Sub-national serving a geographical area or a cultural group
- Functional sharing.

Types of National libraries

Types	Functions	Examples
Comprehensive	All Functions	National Library of Canada
By Functions	Lending	British Library Lending Division (Formerly National Lending Library for science and Technology)
By subject	Agriculture Medicine Science Scientific & Technical	National Agriculture Library USA National Medical Library, India National Science Library, India Technical Library USSR
By Special groups	Blind Legislators	National Library for the Blind, UK National Diet Library, Japan
Sub National serving a geographical area or culture group	Area/State/cultural group	National Library of Wales National Libraries of Serbia USSR National Library of Scotland
Sharing	Sharing functions	State and University of Aarhus, Denmark
Comprehensive	All Functions	National Library of Canada
By Functions	Lending	British Library Lending Division (Formerly National Lending Library for science and Technology)

Functions of National Library

It works as a national depository library for all literary work published in the country;

It freely collects copies of all published material in the country under legal provision or by law;

It also procures foreign publications about the country; and by the authors of Indian origin living abroad;

It compiles national bibliographies to disseminate information about literary output of the country;

It works as an apex body of the national library system and coordinates with other libraries in the country;

It develops and maintains different bibliographic data bases and works as a national bibliographic centre;

It also exchanges data and documents at national and international level;

It produces national union catalogues, current, retrospective and subject bibliographies;

It makes provision for practical training of library professionals;

It procures and preserves manuscripts;

It also keeps photocopy collection of available documents for national and international library lending;

It provides reading, lending, consulting facilities to researchers, writers and other users;

It works as a national referral centre of authentic information for all literary work of the country and responds to all national and international queries from individuals as well as from private and government organizations

Descriptive Account of a Few National Libraries

A library which performs the functions and activities mentioned in the earlier section of this unit will necessarily have to be at the centre of the nation's bibliographical activities. Against this background, profiles of the national libraries of India, the United States of America and United Kingdom are given below:

National Library of India

The Constitution of India provides for the establishment of a National Library under article 62 of the VII Schedule of the Union List, and declared it as an institution of National importance.

Historical Background

Libraries existed ever since mankind started keeping records of events, activities and achievements, although they were not necessarily the same as we conceive them today.

First Phase (1835-1903): Calcutta Public Library

Calcutta Public Library was established in 1836. It was not a Government institution. It ran on a proprietary basis. Any subscriber paying ` 300 at one time or in three installments was considered a proprietor. Poor students and others were allowed to use the library free of charge for a specified period of time. The then Governor General, Lord Metcalf transferred 4,675 volumes from the library

of the College of Fort William to the Calcutta Public Library. These volumes and donations of books from individuals formed the nucleus of the library. Dwarkanath Tagore was the first proprietor of Calcutta Public Library. Calcutta Public Library had a unique position as the first public library in this part of the country. Such a tidy and efficiently run library was rare even in Europe during the first half of the 19th century. Thanks to the efforts of the proprietors of Calcutta Public Library, the National Library has many rare books and journals in its collection.

Second Phase (1903-1947): The Imperial Library

In 1899, when Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy and Governor General of India; visited the Library, he found it in a miserable condition. Lord Curzon, who was interested in art and learning, immediately swung into action. He bought the rights of the Library from the proprietors. He later merged this Library with the Official Imperial Library consisting of government departmental libraries and the eminent of the East India Company Library. With this nucleus, Lord Curzon declared open the new Imperial Library of India on 30th January 1903 in the Metcalf Hall. John Macfarlane of the British Museum was invited to look after the new Imperial Library, as its first librarian.

In 1928, the Government of India appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. J. A. Richey, to suggest measures for reorganising the administration of the Library. This Committee recommended among other things, that the Imperial Library should be declared as a copyright depository Library. This recommendation was followed up by the successive librarians, Mr. Chapman and Khan Bahadur K. M. Asadullah; to secure for the Imperial Library, the privilege of copyright deposit. But their efforts were not realised until the enactment of the Delivery of Books (Public Libraries) Act, 1954.

Third Phase (1948-1947): The National Library of India

With the dawn of freedom, the founding fathers of the new nation transformed the former Imperial Library into the new National Library of India in 1948. One of the most pressing needs of the Library was additional space. This problem was solved by a magnanimous gesture which the then Governor-General of India, Shri C. Rajagopalachari, made by offering the Viceroy's Palace in Calcutta, namely, the Belvedere Palace, with its sprawling, lush green lawns, for housing the new National Library. Shri S. Kesavan, a man of vision, enthusiasm and administrative skill, was appointed the first Librarian of the new National Library. The imperial institution was transformed into a temple of knowledge of free India. The new National Library was declared open to the nation by the then Union Minister for Education, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad on 1st February 1953, in connection with the golden Jubilee celebrations of the library.

Organisation and Management

The National Library became a department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The Director is the head of the Institution, assisted by two professional librarians. There are deputy and assistant librarians to look after the technical and professional work of the library. Two administrative officers assist the director in administrative matters.

The Library is organised on a functional basis. The technical and professional functions operate under two main divisions viz., Professional and Conservation. The professional divisions now 42 in number look after acquisition, processing, maintenance of reading materials and readers services. Divisions of reprography; preservation and laboratory functions come under the conservation division. The administrative division is concerned with personnel, maintenance of building and garden, security, etc. Except for the Laboratory division which is headed by a chemist and the Reprography division under the joint supervision of an assistant librarian and a micro photographer, all the other technical divisions are headed by assistant librarians

The Collection

The National Library has a collection of nearly 22 lakhs of books and other materials (1996). The collection is built up through:

Books received through the Delivery of Books and Newspapers Act

Purchase: Gifts: Exchange: Depository privileges

- The majority of books are in English and in the Indian languages and the rest in a few foreign languages.
- The broad categories of publications acquired through purchase are as following: Books and journals on India, in any language, published anywhere in the world.
- Indian publications, published before 1954, and not available in the library.
- Books by Indian authors, published abroad.
- Standard reference works.

Books on library, documentation and information sciences; science and technology (general histories, reference works); education, agriculture, planning and development; standard works on history, geography, sociology, etc.; Biographies of eminent personalities of the world; rare and out-of-print books in microforms; foreign language books as far as the budget permits. The National Library has some notable gift collections which have enriched its holdings considerably. Some of the outstanding gifts have been the collections of Sir Asutosh Mukherji (76,000 books), Ramdas Sen, Barid Baran, Jadunath Sarkar, Dr. S. N. Sen, Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai and the archival papers of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. The pride of place in these gifts goes to Sir Asutosh collection which covers the whole gamut of subjects in the humanities and in the sciences as far as knowledge extended up to the early decades of the 20th century

Processing

The library's cataloguing system follows the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR-2), the Rules for Descriptive Cataloguing of the Library of Congress, for uniformity and consistency in subject headings; the Subject Headings used in the Dictionary Catalogue of the Library of Congress, 8th edition is followed. The books are classified according to the Dewey Decimal Classification (DTC). The four editions of DDC i.e. 16th to 19th have been used for this purpose. The library catalogue is both in the card and printed forms. The card catalogue is in the dictionary form for English language publications,

arranged in two sequences, author and subject

Reader's Services

The National Library extends its services through its various reading rooms, lending section, bibliography and reference divisions. Presently, the following services are offered:

Lending Services: A peculiar feature of the National Library of India is that, except for rare books, gift collections, generally out-of-print publications, government and UN documents and serials, all other books are lent out for home reading. This function is rather peculiar to a National Library, as most National Libraries are for reference only and seldom offer lending services to individual users. However, for historical reasons, the National Library, of India, has continued its lending facilities to the members of the library in and out of Calcutta. On an average 250 books are issued every day.

Inter library loan service is offered to members and institutions with the cooperation of other libraries, both at the national and international levels. This service obtains loan of books from Russian State Library, Moscow, the British Library, U.K., and libraries in Australia, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden and a few other countries.

Reading Rooms: Apart from its main reading room which accommodates 320 readers at a time, the National Library maintains ten reading rooms for using different specialised materials. The main reading room stocks a very selective and open shelf collection of about 10,000 volumes of general reference books and books for basic study and reference on specific fields of knowledge.

Bibliography and Reference Service: The Bibliography Division of the National Library was established in 1951 with an aim to function as an active agent to disseminate knowledge and information in an organised and effective manner. This service is offered in response to requests from scholars, researchers and writers for a bibliography on a specific topic,

Reprography Service: With the installation of Plain Paper Copiers at the main and other reading rooms, facilities are provided for obtaining copies of journal articles, small technical reports, etc., at nominal rates to scholars and research workers. An in-house printing unit is operating for printing small documents for limited circulation.

Library of Congress (LC)

The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. which is at present considered as the national library of the United States of America, was originally created to serve the U.S. Congress. It was established in 1800 with a small collection, but grew steadily. By the Copyright Law of 1870; the Library acquired the status of a depository library, getting the privilege of free delivery of two copies of printed books, charts; dramatic or musical compositions, engravings, prints or photographs, etc. Today the Library ranks as one of the largest national libraries of its kind and occupies an eminent place in the world of scholarship and learning. We give below a few glimpses of this great Library. An idea of the size, magnitude and range of LC's collection and services can be had from the following facts:

LC is the largest centre for information storage in the world, having 20 million volumes, books representing only one-fourth of its collection; the other 59 millions of stored data are on sound records, motion picture reels, and computer tapes or in the form of manuscripts, maps, prints and photographs. Less than one-fourth of its collection is in English;

It operates with a staff of about 4800, comprising professional librarians, highly trained personnel such as musicians, lawyers, chemists, computer specialists, scientists and technologists, braille specialists, etc.

It is housed in three enormous buildings with three different architectural styles; covers a total area of over 71 acres; 3,000 readers can sit at a time in its several reading rooms; and It offers services to a variety of specialist groups such as Congressmen, legal community, scholars and academicians, performing artists, blind and handicapped, library and information community. Ten million pieces of material are handled every year, twenty seven thousand every day.

British Library

The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom. It is more than just a library. It has the world's leading resources for scholarship, research and innovation, with incomparable collection, and expertise of staff. It occupies a central position in the library and information network of UK. It reflects the intellectual, cultural and socio-economic life of the country. The library aims to serve scholarship, research and development, industry, commerce and all other major users of information. Its services are based on the wealth of materials collected by the British Library System.

Objectives

The British Library was created with an aim to provide the best possible central library services for the country. The objectives of the British Library:

- Preserving and making available for reference at least one copy of every, book and periodical of domestic origin and of as many overseas publications as possible. The aim will be to provide as comprehensive a reference service as possible. If a reader cannot get what he wants near at hand, he will know he can find it in the British Library.
- Providing an efficient central lending and photocopying service in support of other libraries and information systems of the country; and
- Providing central cataloguing and other bibliographic services related not only to the needs of the central libraries but to those of libraries and information centres throughout the country, in close cooperation with central libraries overseas.

Functions

To achieve these objectives, the British Library Act specifies the functions of the British Library. In short, the functions are as follows:

- The British Library shall constitute a comprehensive collection of books, manuscripts, periodicals; films and the recorded matter, whether printed or otherwise;
- The library shall act as a National Centre for reference, study and bibliographical and other information services in relation to scientific and technological matters and to the humanities; and

- The services of the Library shall be available in particular to institution of education and learning, other libraries and industry.

The National Library of India must Act Fast

the National Library (NL) in Kolkata is now in a state of flux and rudderless. It is true the Library is visited daily by a large number of local readers and academics together with a handful of outstation research scholars. Many of the local young readers are using this as a library of first call. The rich and varied collection of the Library is the mainstay of most academic pursuits in Kolkata. In the interest of social inclusion, the Library follows a simple admission procedure. The continuous down-hill slide over the last sixty years cannot be stopped as no one is there to hold the rein and infuse required impetus and directions so as to put it on the galloping mode with strong determination of making it to act as the hub of the nation's library and information services and systems.

To set the recovery process on, one has to go into the roots to identify the causes of this poor state of the Library. It would be unfair to point a finger only towards the Department of Culture for their inconsistent policy guidelines and slow implementation machinery, nor the staff associations of the National Library for their involvement by overstepping in management issues with socio-political twist. The other party directly associated with the Library is the senior management who also must share the responsibilities for bring the NL to its present state. At the same time, one must not ignore the mute role of the library professional organisations and users groups of the library, who by acting as lobbyists with some support from the media, could have kept a watchful eye and bring moral pressure on all the stakeholders. If we look at the management structure of any developed country, having an effective national library system, one cannot miss the point of noticing their national library has acquired the recognition of being the apex body for national knowledge storage and handling systems and a guiding factor for all research and developmental activities related to library and information services.

National print and electronic media, have little time and space to cover the activities of this cultural centre of both historical and national importance. Indian cinema and television, both documentary and entertainment channels have totally neglected the world of books and libraries. It is also perhaps right to point a finger at the library and information professional organizations whose primarole is to act as a watch dog but consistently failed to take up these national issues seriously with the bureaucratic and political decision making process at the national level. One must also bring out the present crisis faced by another library – the Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi (CSL), the second largest library under the direct control of the same Ministry. CSL is also over 100 years old that holds another valuable collection of research materials. This library has lost nearly half of its sanctioned professional staff over the last ten years. No attempt has been made so far to fill up these vacancies and the library is being asked to 'carry on' by hiring a few short-term trainees with fresh LIS background, at regular interval. Now with the recently introduced strict security regulations, CSL has lost most of the regular readers and

research scholars who are ‘not central government employees’

It is perhaps because of this uncertainty the National Knowledge Commission, Working Group for Libraries avoided to identify the distinctive role of national library of India within Indian library and information systems and services. Question may also be raised by a few, why go for another report on the National Library? This is to be based on real life users’ survey undertaken and conducted under direct supervision of the National Library; not imposed upon it by some ‘eminent scholar/bureaucrat’. The most recent report on the National Library is of a high-powered committee headed by Prof. Satish Chandra (1994- 95). The revised National Library Act of 19765 (not implemented) also included many significant modifications to improve its management. The most significant reason is that with the passage of time and pace at which information and communication technologies are influencing information storage, access and retrieval, The National Library must make the right moves after clearly defining its role and identifying the means to reach its goal. Rapid and significant developments are taking place in all three segments of librarianship over the last four decades – (i) Collection development of information resources, (ii) Customers services (including cataloguing, education, reference services and inter-library loans) and (iii) Management and marketing. The Library has to be active on all the fronts and needs a little push and encouragement from all of us.

Summary

National libraries have originated, grown and developed in the last two or three centuries. Almost all countries of the world today, have a national library, representing or reflecting their cultural, literary, socio-economic, scientific and technological advancements. A National Library keeps all documents of and about a nation under some legal provision and thus represents publications of and about the whole nation. The early characteristics of these National Libraries were that they were the focal points of the nation in each country. Historical traditions, socio-economic, scientific and technological developments have determined the nature of emerging National Libraries. Both Indian and foreign books, especially from Britain, were purchased for the library. The National Library became a department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The National Library has some notable gift collections which have enriched its holdings considerably. The National Library has exchange relations with 170 institutions in 56 countries all over the world, and with a number of institutions within the country. The National Library extends its services through its various reading rooms, lending section, bibliography and reference divisions.

References

1. Budd, John (2001), *Knowledge and Knowing in Library and Information Science: A Philosophical Framework*, Scarecrow Press.
2. Faruqi, Khalid Kamal & Alam, Mehtab (2005), *Net-Studies in Library and Information Science*, Aakar Books.

3. Henderson, Kathrine A. (2009), *Case Studies in Library and Information Science Ethics*, McFarland.
4. Prasher, Ram Gopal (1997), *Library and Information Science: Information science, information technology and its application*, Concept Publishing Company.
5. <http://f3.hs-hannover.de/fileadmin/media/doc/f3/Aktivitaeten/> international
6. <http://inbonline.nic.in/>
7. http://www.kuk.ac.in/userfiles/file/distance_education/Year-2011-2012/B_Lib%20lecture%201.pdf
8. <http://www.nationallibrary.gov.in/>
9. http://www.nationallibrary.gov.in/nat_lib_stat/history.html

