

## From Libraries To Knowledge Centers To Knowledge Gateways

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### Intorduction

The UNESCO Manifesto on Public Libraries (1994) says, “The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.”

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC), constituted on 13th June 2005 by the then Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh as the high-level advisory body to the Prime Minister of India and with the objective of transforming India into a vibrant knowledge-based community focuses on the following five key areas of the knowledge: (1) knowledge concepts, (2) access to knowledge, (3) knowledge-creation, (4) knowledge application and (5) development of better knowledge services. For this goal, the commission recognized the libraries of India as rich repositories and resources of knowledge. Naturally, one of the central objectives of the commission was to analyse the constitution and services of the various types of libraries, with a goal to “transform libraries from guarded storehouses of publications into open stockpiles of knowledge.” (National Knowledge Commission, 2007) The title of the NKC report on libraries, “Libraries: Gateways to Knowledge” is itself a statement on the importance of libraries. The Foreword to the NKC report states, “Libraries have a recognized social function in making knowledge publicly available to all. They serve as local centres of information and learning and are local gateways to national and global knowledge.” (National Knowledge Commission, 2007)

Beyond the borders of India and across the seas, a specially-designed 18-wheeler truck which brought treasures of information from the Library of Congress to the cities and towns of America is another great message writ large for all to read on the international stage. The truck was named "Library of Congress – Gateway to Knowledge." This exhibition on wheels, started in September 2010, carried its truckload of information moving across the Midwest, South, and Northeast of USA., and completed its round-trip in September 2011 at the Library of Congress. (Library of Congress, Gateway to Knowledge: The Library's rolling exhibition, 20110)

### **Evolution of Libraries**

Libraries collect the history of the human activity on our planet earth. The invention of the writing system, approximately 5300 years ago, may be considered beginning of that history. Prior to this period and back to 3.3 million before our times, when hominines began to use the first stone tools we have the pre-historic period. (Renfrew, 2007)

The history of libraries cannot be but recent across the vast expanse of human presence in the pre-historic age. The ancient libraries take us back to 2600 BC and to Sumer, in Mesopotamia (in the present-day Sothern Iraq). There we see first libraries with clay tablets in various places of (Casson, 2002) There are evidences of such libraries in Northern Syria, Nippur (ancient civilization, like Ugarit (ancient port city in Northern Assyria, one of the most ancient Sumerian cities), Nineveh (one of ancient Assyrian cities). The Nineveh library shows the existence of a classification system. (Encyclopedia, 1954)

The library of Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria (c. 668-630 BC) is the oldest Royal library that was survived to our times. There are more than 30,000 cuneiform tablets and fragments at his capital, Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik). Besides historical inscriptions, there are administrative and legal texts, and letters as well as thousands of divinatory, magical, medical, literary and lexical texts. This is treasure-house of learning and it holds unprecedented importance to the modern growth and development is possible (The British Museum, 2018) No human growth and development is possible without linking and bridging the past with the present. With such a view and with the hope to be able open Ashurbanipal Library Project's readers, the British Museum undertook 'the Ashurbanipal Library' Project with a goal to bring Ashurbanipal's astonishing library back to life with the help of modern technologies.

Among the great libraries of the ancient world, the library of Alexandria in Egypt stands renowned and occupies prime position with its size and significance. The Alexandrian Library was conceived and made open to the scholarly people during the period 323-246 BC, during the reign of either of Ptolemy I or Ptolemy II.

History shows that it was a matter of prestige for emperors to build, maintain and develop libraries. Gaius Julius Aquila built Library of Celsus in Ephesus, Roman Emperor Asinius Pollio built Rom's first public library, Emperor Augustus, and Emperor Tiberius of Han Dynasty of China built libraries. (Casson, 2002) (Houston, 2008). Demetrius, a Greek King, built a universal library to hold copies of all the books in the world. "Ptolemy and his successors wanted to understand the people under their rule and they housed Latin, Buddhist, Persian, Hebrew and Egyptian works – translated into Greek." (Krasner-Khait, 2001).

As we come to more recent times, we find that more and more libraries were founded and nurtured by various rulers and kingdoms in various countries. The European Middle Ages was a time when different types of libraries appeared on the scene. We can speak of four types of libraries of this period: (1) imperial, (2) patriarchal, (3) monastic and (4) private libraries. Each had a specific purpose and, as a result, their survival varied. We can see a direct relationship between the growth of Christianity and the growth of libraries in the West. "After the Roman Empire disintegrated and the contents of its grand libraries were destroyed or dispersed, monasteries emerged throughout Europe and gathered remnants of these ancient libraries. One key activity of many of these monasteries was the copying of Bible manuscripts, as well as others, by hand. The Benedictine monasteries, for example, which lived by the "Rule of St. Benedict," commanded the reading and copying of books." (Awake, 2005) Historian Elmer D. Johnson says: "The role of the monastery library in the preservation of Western culture cannot be denied. For more or less a thousand years, it was the intellectual heart of Europe, and without it western civilization would have been a far different world." (Johnson, 1966) One of the most important monastery libraries was the library at the abbey of Montecassino founded by St. Benedict around 529 AD in Italy.

### **Libraries of the 21st century**

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rendered to the users, libraries may be categorized into Academic, Special, Public and National Libraries. Academic Libraries, in their turn, may be school, college and university libraries.

A look at the biggest libraries of the present century can be quite revealing:

### **The Library of Congress**

The Library of Congress, established in 1800, is the largest library in the world, with more than 167 million items on approximately 838 (1349 km) miles of bookshelves. The collection includes more than 39 million books and other printed materials, 3.6 million recordings, 14.8 million photographs, 5.5 million maps, 8.1 million pieces of sheet music and 72 million manuscripts. This library receives 15,000 items each working day.





The collection contains materials in about 470 languages. It holds the largest rare-book collection in North America (more than 700,000 volumes), including the largest collection of 15th-century books in the Western Hemisphere. The collection also includes the first known book printed in North America, "The Bay Psalm Book" (1640). The oldest written material in the Library is a cuneiform tablet dating from 2040 B.C. The Library's Prints and Photographs Division contains more than 15 million visual images, including the most comprehensive international collection of posters in the world, the most comprehensive visual record of the Civil War, and pioneering documentation of America's historic architecture. More than 1.2 million images of Prints and Photographs are accessible online. (Library of Congress, Fascinating facts, 2018) The annual budget of the library is \$ 684,040,000.

The Library of Congress is a gateway to knowledge, providing information on matters that are very ancient and most recent. Information on culture, art, science, technology, medicine, engineering, cinema, literature, folklore, music, comedy and newspapers are all preserved here systematically and with easy access.

### **The British Library**





Established in the year 1973 (1753), the British Library holds the second position in the world for its size. On its 625 km of shelves, which grows by 12 km every year, are more than 150 million items, in most known languages. Each year 3 million new items reach this library. Over 16,000 people use the collections each day (onsite and online). It has 1200 onsite seating arrangement for the readers. The library operates the world's largest document delivery service providing millions of items a year to the users all over the world. The treasures of the library include Magna Carta, Lindisfarne Gospels, Leonardo da Vinci's Notebook, the first edition of The Times from 18 March 1788, Beatles manuscripts and the recording of Nelson Mandela's Rivonia trial speech. (British Library, 2018)

Besides the Library of Congress and the British Library, there are a number of libraries which can claim similar honor and importance in sharing knowledge and turning societies into knowledge societies. They are given below in the descending order of their size.


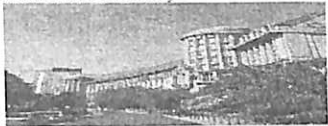


SL NO	Name of the library (with image)	Important facts and figures
1	<p>New York Public Library</p>  <p>Image, courtesy: <a href="#">General Knowledge February 7, 2018</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established 1895</li> <li>The stacks contain 125 miles of shelves</li> <li>The number of Library visitors on opening day in 1911</li> <li>Most visited library in the world with annual visit of 37 million people</li> <li>Hold a 1493 unique copy of Columbus's letter announcing his discovery of the New World</li> <li>Annual Budget : US \$ 302,208,000 (2017)</li> </ul>
2	<p>Library and Archives Canada (Wikipedia, 2018)</p>  <p>Image, courtesy: <a href="#">Padraic Ryan</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established in the 2004</li> <li>20 million books, periodicals, newspapers, microfilms, literary texts and government publications</li> <li>167,000 linear metres of government and private textual records</li> <li>3 million architectural drawings, maps and plans</li> <li>24 million photographs</li> <li>350,000 hours of film</li> <li>425,000 pieces of art, including paintings, drawings, watercolours, posters, prints, medals and caricatures</li> <li>547,000 musical items;</li> <li>More than a billion megabytes of digital content</li> <li>Annual budget : C\$98,346,695 (2013-14)</li> </ul>
3	<p>Russian State Library (RussianStateLibrary, 2018)</p>  <p>Image, courtesy: <a href="#">Vladimir Tokarev</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established in the year 1862</li> <li>The Russian State Library comprises the unique domestic and foreign collections in 367 languages of the world. The size of all holdings exceeds 46 million items</li> <li>More than 800 thousand people visit the library annually and about 100 thousand new library tickets are issued</li> <li>Budget 1,740,000,000 (2012)</li> </ul>
4	<p>National Diet Library (NationalDietLibraryJapan, 2018)</p>  <p>Image, curtsey <a href="#">General Knowledge February 7, 2018</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established in the year 1948 (1872 &amp; 1890)</li> <li>41,881,649 items</li> <li>Annual acquisition 831184</li> <li>On site users - 722,062 (2015)</li> <li>Number access to the website 21,346,142</li> <li>Budget 18190 million yen for the year 2018</li> </ul>



18)

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5	<p>Bibliothèque nationale de France (wikipedia, 2018) (BnF, 2018)</p>	 <p>Image Courtesy Vincent Desjardins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1461</li> <li>• Rare Books Reserve holds approximately 200,000 volumes selected for being rare editions or unique copies, from the Gutenberg Bible (around 1455) to the most contemporary books. <a href="http://reliure.bnf.fr">reliure.bnf.fr</a> database provides access to a selection of digitized bookbindings from collections of the Rare Books Reserve</li> </ul>	<p>Gallica, the digital library for online users, was established in October 1997. As of October 2017, Gallica had made about 4,286,000 documents, 533,000 books, 131,000 maps, 96,000 manuscripts, 1,208,000 images, 1,907,000 newspapers and magazines, 47,800 sheets of music, 50,000 audio recordings, 358,000 objects available on the Web.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 40 million catalogue entries</li> <li>• Budget € 254 million</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gallica, the digital library for online users, was established in October 1997. As of October 2017, Gallica had made about 4,286,000 documents, 533,000 books, 131,000 maps, 96,000 manuscripts, 1,208,000 images, 1,907,000 newspapers and magazines, 47,800 sheets of music, 50,000 audio recordings, 358,000 objects available on the Web.</li> <li>• 40 million catalogue entries</li> <li>• Budget € 254 million</li> </ul>
6	<p>National Library of Russia (TheNationalLibraryofRussia, 2018)</p>	 <p>Image, Curtsey General Knowledge February 7, 2018</p>	<p>Russia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1795</li> <li>• Total number of items (2016): 37,890,000</li> <li>• Total visit (2016): 820,000</li> <li>• Individual users who visited the web site (2016): 9,993,100</li> <li>• Budget: 569,200,000 RUB (\$ 23,400,000)</li> </ul>	<p>Russia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1795</li> <li>• Total number of items (2016): 37,890,000</li> <li>• Total visit (2016): 820,000</li> <li>• Individual users who visited the web site (2016): 9,993,100</li> <li>• Budget: 569,200,000 RUB (\$ 23,400,000)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1795</li> <li>• Total number of items (2016): 37,890,000</li> <li>• Total visit (2016): 820,000</li> <li>• Individual users who visited the web site (2016): 9,993,100</li> <li>• Budget: 569,200,000 RUB (\$ 23,400,000)</li> </ul>
7	<p>National Library of China</p>	 <p>Image, Curtsey General Knowledge February 7, 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1909</li> <li>• Total collection : 37,686,187 items</li> <li>• With a collection of over 37 million items, it is the largest library in Asia</li> </ul>	<p>China</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1909</li> <li>• Total collection : 37,686,187 items</li> <li>• With a collection of over 37 million items, it is the largest library in Asia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1909</li> <li>• Total collection : 37,686,187 items</li> <li>• With a collection of over 37 million items, it is the largest library in Asia</li> </ul>
8	<p>The Royal Library of Denmark (Wikipedia, Royal Library, Denmark, 2018)</p>	 <p>Image, Courtesy Arne List</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1648. In 1989, it was merged with the prestigious Copenhagen University Library (founded in 1482)</li> <li>• With a collection of 35 million items, it is the largest library among Nordic countries (Northern Europe and the North Atlantic)</li> <li>• As of 2015 the collection exceeds 35 million items</li> </ul>	<p>Denmark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1648. In 1989, it was merged with the prestigious Copenhagen University Library (founded in 1482)</li> <li>• With a collection of 35 million items, it is the largest library among Nordic countries (Northern Europe and the North Atlantic)</li> <li>• As of 2015 the collection exceeds 35 million items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1648. In 1989, it was merged with the prestigious Copenhagen University Library (founded in 1482)</li> <li>• With a collection of 35 million items, it is the largest library among Nordic countries (Northern Europe and the North Atlantic)</li> <li>• As of 2015 the collection exceeds 35 million items</li> </ul>



9	<p>National Library of Spain (Wikipedia, Biblioteca Nacional de España, 2018)</p>  <p>Image, Courtesy <a href="#">Jean-Pierre Dalbéra</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1712</li> <li>• Collection 26,000,000 items, including 15,000,000 books and other printed materials, 30,000 manuscripts, 143,000 newspapers and serials, 4,500,000 graphic materials, 510,000 music scores, etc</li> <li>• Budget € 47,380,860</li> <li>• Users: 115,707 readers in 2007. The number of web users in the same year was 1,800,935</li> </ul>
10	<p>German National Library</p>  <p>Image, Courtesy -General Knowledge February 7, 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1912</li> <li>• Collection as on 2016 32.7 million items</li> <li>• Budget 52.3 million € (2016)</li> </ul>
11	<p>Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Wikipedia, Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2018)</p>  <p>Image, Courtesy: Alex 'Florstein' Fedorov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1714</li> <li>• Collection 20.5 million items</li> </ul>
12	<p>Berlin State Library</p>  <p>Image, Courtesy <a href="#">General Knowledge February 7, 2018</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established in the year 1661</li> <li>• Size of the Library 23,110,423 items, consists of 12.3 million books, 206,700 rare books, 60,100 manuscripts, music autographs, 1,600 estate archives, 25,000 periodicals, 180,000 newspaper volumes, 4,300 databases, 2.7 million microfilms, 13.5 million images at the bpk (The Prussian Heritage Image Archive)</li> <li>• Budget € 16,000,000</li> </ul>

<p>13</p>	<p>Boston Public Library (BostonPublicLibrary, 2018)</p>  <p>Image Curtsey -General Knowledge February 7, 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Established in the year 1848</li><li>• Boston Public Library is a pioneer of public library service in America</li><li>• All firsts in It was the first large free municipal library in the United States, the first public library to lend books, the first to have a branch library, and the first to have a children's room</li><li>• In the year 2017 38,18,883 Visitors, 23 million items in the collection, 49,33,786 items borrowed, 32900 items digitized,16,28,324 downloads, 82911 new card holders, 12665 new programmes and 98,39,461 visit to bpl org</li></ul>
<p>14</p>	<p>Culcutta Public Library</p>  <p>Image, Curtsey Wikipedia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Established in the year 1903</li><li>• Over 2,270,000 books</li><li>• Over 86,000 maps</li><li>• Over 3,200 manuscripts</li><li>• Over 45 kilometers of shelf space</li><li>• Reading rooms can accommodate over 550 people</li></ul>

As the present-day libraries are not merely collection of books and reading materials, but also provide access to all these collections to the public, they rightly be considered gateways to knowledge. They provide a wealth of fascinating information about persons, events, developments, literature and a host of other areas of knowledge. The modern world churns out information at a mind-boggling rate, and it is not easy for individuals to have access to all the information unless it is available to him at some centre. Libraries are such collection centers of all such information that is being generated in the world, and which in turn makes it available to the public according to their need and time.

### **Libraries as knowledge centres:**

“A library is not a building stacked with books; it is a repository and source of information and ideas, a place for learning and enquiry, and for the generation of thought and the creation of new knowledge. Public libraries in particular have the potential to bridge the gap between the ‘information poor’ and the ‘information rich’ by ensuring that people from all sectors and settings of society and the economy across have easy access to knowledge they seek.” (National Knowledge Commission, 2007) Libraries have come a long way since Alexandria. If they disappear at one point of time, we would miss cultural and knowledge traditions dating back to hundreds of years.

We have modern libraries with a history of more than six hundred years. Majority of the national libraries have a history of one or two centuries. They will have rare documents, information on literature, culture, development, health, economics, education, science, technology, folklore and a host other fields of knowledge, some of which may be available nowhere else in this world. These libraries are knowledge centers, where the knowledge created in the world is collected and arranged orderly with the sole purpose of retrieving it as and when it is needed. The British writer Caitlin Moran, narrates the importance of library in a poetic way:

A library in the middle of a community is a cross between an emergency exit, a life raft and a festival. They are cathedrals of the mind; hospitals of the soul; theme parks of the imagination. On a cold, rainy island, they are the only sheltered public spaces where you are not a consumer, but a citizen, instead. ... (Norfolk & Stenson, 2017)

### **Libraries as knowledge gateways**

Libraries survive not only because of the rare collections in them, but also because they imbibe the changes which are required of them from time to time. In this age of information society which is greatly influenced by the developments in the Information communication Technology, libraries and librarians strive to cope with these changing demands. As Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, the Father of Library Science of India, has rightly said in his famous five laws of library science, Libraries are growing organism. We can see libraries that grow gigantically in physical size. At the same time no library can survive without appropriate growth in other dimensions proper to the times.

Libraries gives us best hope for the controlled release of information, and librarians are the trusted gatekeepers with professional training to cluster, classify, index and preserve the universe of knowledge. They provide orderly and easy access to information resources. A tech-savvy librarian with additional capability and competency to handle the Information and Communication Technology is in a position to repackage the whole universe of knowledge produced, into small reusable valid information units which will help someone who needs it to access that knowledge pin-pointedly within a short amount of time. Classification, cataloguing, indexing, abstracting services, bibliographic services, reference services, inter-library loan services, digital preservations of the documents and information add importance to the libraries.

As the generation of knowledge is very large and the task of search it difficult, it becomes the duty of the librarian to make the process simple through specialized library services. According to Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, "Reference service is the process of establishing contact between a reader and his documents in a personal way." It is providing right information to the right reader at the right time in a right personal way. So the librarian acts as a gatekeeper who has the responsibility to let readers get into the world of information that is accessed, arranged, preserved and stored systematically in the library, whether in physical format or in digital format, and help them to come in contact with the relevant piece of information which is required for the person at the moment. Time and timeliness are essential! The right piece of information at the right time is priceless.

The National Knowledge Commission of India observes rightly that, "The ability of a nation to use and create knowledge as capital determines

its capacity to empower and enable its citizens by increasing human capabilities.” To respond to global challenges of 21st century, the country needs a knowledge-oriented paradigm of development to give its people and institutions a competitive advantage in all fields of knowledge. In this drive for knowledge based development, libraries can act as ‘pillars of civilization’ (Mauk & Oakland, 2017) and ‘memory of mankind.’ (Hessel, 2001). Indeed. Libraries are the treasure houses and historical memories of civilization as well as the gateways to the organized knowledge treasures.

### **Conclusion**

Adetoun A Oyelude (Adetoun 2012) made a survey to examine libraries are gateways to knowledge or gatekeepers in the digital knowledge environment. The study reports the social implications of libraries as gateways or gatekeepers in the following words:

“With libraries as gateways and gatekeepers, society will be able to have improved library services and assured of access with the new digital publishing dynamics in a balanced environment.” (Adetoun A. Oyelude, 2012)

The 21st century is set to witness a paradigm shift in the role of libraries because of the emergence of information communication technology. Libraries are now pathways to high quality information in a variety of electronic media and information services. The universe of knowledge is gathered in the library in different formats, modes and media. Nations and organizations invest huge sums in the libraries to organize the collection. The policy framework of libraries enable the easy, legal and rich collection development in libraries, as well as sharing the organized treasure with the public. The gates are open! Let libraries march ahead of the fast-progressing world, gathering the wealth of knowledge that is being generated at a mind-spinning speed and make it available to any hungry mind, thus showing and leading humanity’s path ahead and into the future.

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