

The Role of Public Libraries in Socio-Cultural Development in Rural Areas

Suresh K. Fulkar

Arts, Commerce College, Ralegaon, Dist: Yavatmal

Abstract

Public libraries are an important entity in local communities, particularly in rural and disadvantaged communities. They are more than shelves of books. Public libraries offer an ever changing range of cultural resources for the community, and they have become a type of social and cultural institution. This article discusses the broadly accepted conceptualization of information for development of social and cultural activities in people of rural areas by providing the information at all the levels necessary for that. In turn, it links between community development, empowerment and rural public library.

Keywords:

Information Society; Information Literacy; Public Libraries; Internet Access; Knowledge Society; Collection Development; Rural Library; Rural Community; Literacy; Information Seeking; Community Development and Empowerment; Socio-cultural Development.

Introduction

Information is treated as an economic resource or as a catalyst to development and for making good decision. Information society is a society in which the quality of life as well as prospects for social change and economic development depends upon access to information to meet their needs and requirements whether the resources are in print, non-print/ electronic or in any format.

Libraries are often considered an essential part of having an educated and literate population. Information is an important resource which is essential for the progress of any individual and that of a nation, so access to right or relevantly updated information to its users is required at the right time for any literate society. Any information society requires information at every step. Public libraries help to empower people in the enrichment, orientation and development of the citizens towards inculcating national pride and right sense of national culture.

The public library can act as an important force for local community development and empowerment and can play a significant role in social and cultural development of a community. In this context, the public library can be viewed as a social and cultural institution that offers an ever changing range of cultural resources for the community. This can be particularly important in rural and disadvantaged communities. This role for public libraries often remains unrecognized and the major challenge is how to capitalize on the public libraries potential contribution to development and empowerment of community.

Moreover, public libraries are facing fundamental changes internationally caused by fundamental changes of society, especially the information technology (IT) development and digitizing, the growth of multiculturalism and fragmenting of local communities and, not least, the continuous economic pressure on the public sector. Impact of public libraries on socio-cultural development particularly is discussed in this paper to aware the importance of public library services for the community. The study is based on the literature survey.

Literature Review

The research ideas are drawn and further developed into concepts from this source and finally developed into theories. The literature review provides a bird's eye view of the past researches done so far in that area to a researcher. Some of the important literatures useful in this study have been mentioned chronologically in descending order.

Adewusi in his study discussed the impact of community information centres on community development in four communities in Nigeria employing survey research method using mainly questionnaire among teachers, traders, farmers, fish sellers, civil servants, students and others as respondents. The results of

study are that the availability of community information services were rare in the communities and the communities yearn for provision of well stocked community information centres with a view to empowering, changing and transforming their life socially, economically, technologically, educationally and politically for the betterment.

The study of Sumi on community information needs and role of informational infrastructure to meet the informational needs of highly literate users of Hamirpur district, Himachal Pradesh. It reports that majority of users of community libraries are school and college students; the books and periodicals were the most accepted means of accessing the information; the maximum Community library users are not satisfied with the services and resources available and they want availability of more Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based services in community libraries with extended hours for library consultation (Sumi, 2012).

Objectives of the Public Library

The objectives of the public library is represented below:

- Creating, developing, and strengthening reading habits in early age children and newly literate people.
- Supporting formal and informal education.
- Providing opportunities for self-developments.
- Creating awareness of cultural heritage.
- Supporting oral traditions.
- Ensuring access to all sorts of community information.
- Facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills.
- Supporting and participating in literacy programs for all age groups.

Socio-Cultural Development and Public Libraries

There are different opinions about community development. Some describe it as improving a quality of life; some think it is all about building community networks while others believe it is about empowering individuals and communities. In a traditional community development model, community developer works with groups of people to help them to reach their goals, and these goals could be anything from providing more public washrooms in a community to mobilizing community members to participate in an arts project. In a public library, librarians and staff members work with community members so that they can understand what the community needs from the library in order to improve their quality of life. The librarians and staff members work with communities to understand how the public library can help them to reach their goals. In a public library context, community development also means building relationships with people. By providing access to current resources and technology, a public library successfully allows itself to go beyond a simple consultation or support process and expand into meaningful and inclusive collaborations, building stronger relationships and partnerships within its community. But the most important thing is that successful community development, especially in small rural communities, depends heavily on the success of its public library in identifying information needs and contributing to the future of the community.

The public library may contribute to community empowerment by -

- Providing free public access to computer and information technology resources;
- Helping people to locate information thus creating better informed communities;
- Running programs that promote lifelong learning and literacy in the community; and
- Building connections between individuals, groups and government (Roziya, et al, 2011).

Role of Public Libraries

Public libraries collect and preserve a wide range of materials relating to the society or all groups or individuals. It performs their roles with a view to providing and enhancing access to information in the society without discrimination. As a gateway to information, knowledge and culture, its aim is to provide timely accurate, current and reliable information to the society.

Provision of access to information using various mode and means in the public libraries is an integral part of the national socio-economic development and improvement of the general quality of life. In this case, the public library is playing the role of a cultural and communication centre.

Public libraries help in facilitating the planning and implementation of learning programmes that equip users with the skills necessary to succeed in a changing society. The public library providing information resources for learning and research, the public libraries are important in the development of information society. The economic role played by public library depends on the access to information because national development is very much influenced by the amount of available information.

Conclusion

Public libraries have moral right to provide access to information to all which can be used for self-empowerment, economic, educational and nation development. It is also supposed that the public libraries should help in accessing information regarding required materials, and information literacy programmes needed by its community users.

The rural libraries by developmental activities and programs strengthen rural public libraries in supporting rural development and empowerment. Public library acts as vital thing in the development of communities, particularly in a rural and disadvantaged community. It has been established as an essential element in the life of community members, as it provides information that is essential for the community progress.

In the age of information society of today, there is information explosion in all the disciplines. To collect, organize and disseminate the information effectively and efficiently professionally qualified and trained personnel are required. They should also have good communication skills only then the public libraries can perform their role as the institution of lifelong learning.

References

1. Iyengar, Sreenidhi (ed) Library Public Relations. Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1996.
2. Iyer, V.K. Public Library Systems in India. Rajat Publications, Delhi, 1999.
3. Kumari, J. Vijaya Public Library System. Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2010.
4. Trivedi, Priya & Singh, Uttam Kumar Public Library Systems and Services. Jnanada Prakashan, New Delhi, 2010.
5. <http://librarywaves.com> accessed on 27 Dec 2022.
6. <https://bpasjournals.com> accessed on 27 Dec 2022.