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ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN BETTER FUNCTIONING OF PRI INSTITUTIONS



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ABSTRACT:

Public libraries are primarily institutions of basic learning having a mission which involves in providing collection and services to meet information needs of local community. These serve as local gateway to knowledge and information and provide conditions for lifelong learning, community development and independent decision making by an individual. Majority of population in India lives in rural areas where new technologies are not within the reach of people, that is why a gap has widened between information rich and information deprived community. The paper also discuss how internet and web technologies have paved the way of interactive communication between libraries and its clients whereby a remote user can be connected by several technical options in a more affordable manner. An attempt has also been made here to provide a futuristic vision of ICT enabled public library services in India to help the entire rural as well as urban community especially unprivileged masses

KEY WORDS: public libraries, PRI institutions, local community, knowledge and information .

INTRODUCTION:

Over the years, many libraries have supported education efforts by providing teaching resources, information and referral services. Many libraries have outreach programs designed to meet the needs of specific groups of people with limited educational skills. Library resource materials are distributed to the institutionalized, including those in prisons, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and group homes for the elderly and disabled. In addition, some libraries offer programs for groups at risk for education-related problems. The development of Science and Technology (S&T) in the last two centuries has led to an information explosion. Rapid changes have taken place at a great pace. In order to meet the growing needs of users the library system has been greatly improved and upgraded to meet the new challenges. The services offered by libraries have also undergone a great change. With the advent of new technologies in the field of computers and telecommunications, revolutionary changes have taken place in the field of Library and Information Science.

The potential impact of the internet on the public demand for the services and resources of public libraries is an issue of critical importance. Public libraries are social institutions offering services based upon books and information for various public groups on social, political, economic, cultural and other matters. Among the different types of libraries evolved by the society in modern times, public libraries are the most popular because of the functions they perform. They play a significant role in the welfare of the society. Public Libraries have a social mission and are devoted to the development of the community. It has been providing information for education, leisure and entertainment for decades and will continue this function for many more years. Users are able to read and borrow anything available in the system

PUBLIC LIBRARY- DEFINITION

Public Library has been explained differently by different experts depending upon the importance they give to its objectives. However, the most widely accepted definition of a public library was formulated by UNESCO in 1949 which was later revised in 1972 (UNESCO 2004). According to UNESCO manifesto, the definition of a public library is as follows:

- a. Public Library is financed for the most part out of public funds.
- b. It charges no fees from users and yet is open for full use by the public.
- c. It is intended as an auxiliary educational institution providing a means of self education which is endless.
- d. It houses educative and informative materials giving reliable information freely and without

LIBRARIES INSPIRE EDUCATION

- When individuals of all ages have the opportunity to explore information that matters to them, various forms of education can emerge. Libraries have tools to inspire education of all ages.
- They teach skills and strategies individuals need to learn and achieve
- They are partners in education, developing curricula, and integrating resources into teaching and learning They teach the skills individuals need to become effective users of ideas and information
- They seek, select, evaluate, and utilize electronic resources and tools and instruct individuals and educators in how to use them Library is the ideal neutral and non threatening environment for learning, formal and informal, to occur
- Libraries have a record of personal service and impartiality

- They readily partner with other learning providers and with other libraries
- They provide public ICT facilities and support.

ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY IN THE SOCIETY

The society is of multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature. In such type of society a sense of respect and regard for other linguistic and cultural groups is essential to strengthen the cultural unity in diversity. Hence, a public library needs to address itself in organizing functions and get-together meetings of different cultural groups to give vent to the aspirations and contributions of different cultures. Occasions like national festivals, religious festivals, and birthdays of national or religious leaders could be utilized to serve such an objective. Another notable role a public library plays in this sphere is the work relating to the preservation of local cultural materials. In order to identify and procure such materials, a public library solicits the assistance of historians, archaeologists, literary persons and leaders of the area.

Thus the library serves as a link between the past and future. The UNESCO Manifesto declares that the public library is concerned with the refreshment of man's spirit by the provision of books for relaxation and pleasure (UNESCO 2004). The term book is interpreted here in the widest sense to include all recorded materials of mankind depicting his excellence in prose, poetry, drama, music, painting, dance and sculpture and collected together to provide a soothing effect to the working mind. As a public library is required to meet the individual needs of the local public, local or regional cultural materials are given a place of utmost prominence. Thus, a Public library is essentially a free library financed by public funds providing impartial service to all the members of a local community despite its cast and creed and a democratic institution providing information, education and culture to each user according to needs.

FUNCTIONS OF A PUBLIC LIBRARY

A public Library generally performs the following functions:

Access to Tools of information and Education- It is the primary function of a public library to select and to organise need-based literature and other means of information and education suitable to the requirements of the local community in which the library is located.

Instrumental in Informal Self-Education-Public library is one of the agencies on which an adult heavily relies. It provides him/her suitable learning material to develop his/her skill and competence in areas of interests. Self education may be obtained through a public library such as methods of agricultural operations, scientific methods of poultry, bee keeping etc.

To Promote Cultural and Social Activities-A public library lends active support to many socio-cultural groups, such as children's club, youth forum, dramatic club, teachers association, lawyers or doctors associations, film society etc. to conduct their activities through its premises or through its rich informative, educative and cultural materials.

Preservation of Local Material- Another important function fulfilled by a modern public library is to identify and collect cultural material of importance available in its jurisdiction. These may be works of art or sculpture, paintings, documents, musical instruments etc. In a nutshell, a public library goes in search of all such materials which link the people of the locality with its cultural past.

Strengthening of Democratic Spirit- By bringing together in its socio-cultural activities seemingly different segments of the society on a single platform, the library slowly develops a sense of amity, a sense of respect for other groups, an appreciation of the differences in languages, religion customs and manners. Thus sectarian life styles are substituted by democratic life patterns. In this

sense, a public library justifies its existence as a democratic institution.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN INDIA- CURRENT STATUS

India can now claim to be the world's largest democracy: its population growth has made it the second country in the world after China to cross the one billion mark (Arora, 2001). As its population grows, it is faced by enormous challenges in areas such as literacy and education, areas in which it has long been acknowledged that the public library has an indispensable role to play. This role accords with the definition in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (UNESCO, 2004), which declares that the public library is —the local gateway to knowledge, [and] provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups || . In this vision of public libraries, they are seen as people-oriented institutions which should service the widest population possible. However, public libraries in India are in a state of abject. Possessing neither regularly renewed print collections nor vibrant non-print multimedia resources that could lure in illiterate or semi-literate folk; they suffer from a variety of infrastructure, manpower and monetary constraints, as well as being low in the priorities of policy makers and implementing bodies. At the same time as India's expanding population looks for innovative support and services from its libraries, the country has emerged as one of the global leaders in information technology and one of the largest exporters of knowledge workers. In this digital era, the people of India should thus come to think of the public library not only as a champion of books and knowledge but as a major access point to the benefits of the digital age. But again, as a developing country, the economic conditions for libraries and information centres are poor in this regard, especially by comparison with the developed world. On the one hand, there has been a significant degree of implementation of automation and networking in special and academic libraries. But in rural areas, where a majority of population lives, public libraries are almost wholly dependent on Financial support from central or state government for their collection development, infrastructure and human resources, and as a result planning for modern tools and IT facilities in public libraries has not taken place. Though there are a number of constraints faced by Public Library system in India for effective dissemination of information, they are providing traditional library services with utmost care and trying to serve the community in the changing atmosphere also. A number of public libraries especially in the urban sector have adopted Information Communication Technology (ICT), thanks for the help received from RRRLF. But despite these advances, majority of the population are still denied the benefits of these services (Parameswaram & Vimal, 2008).

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN LIBRARIES

ICT has been one of the major factors causing changes in the way people communicate, locate, retrieve, and use information. Libraries and information centres have embraced the ICT more profoundly than many other fields, and most of them are currently using electronic products and services. It is evident that ICT has created a division in the modern society: information poor and information rich. The countries that had the ability to utilize ICT for information resource development have generated information-rich societies while those countries which were weak in utilization of ICT have created information-poor societies. As information is directly related to knowledge and skills which influence socio-economic development, one could hypothesize the relationship between information and development. This has speculated the assumption that information-rich countries have developed economies and information while poor countries have less developed economies (Yapa, 2003). Because economy and information are closely related and information resource development leads to economic development, policy makers pay special attention to the development

of information resources. It is recognized that ICT is a tool which could be manipulated effectively for information resource development.

ICT ENABLED PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES IN INDIA- A FUTURE VISION

The new technology which today is available is just a new tool to produce, store and distribute information. It also makes the communication more effective and rapid. That is why we call it nowadays ICT, Information and Communication Technology and not only IT, Information Technology. As means of communication this new technology is comparable with the book. We all know that ICT has already changed the way libraries function. As information and knowledge institutions, public libraries in developed countries are probably among the institutions within the public sector that have been most actively involved in the digital revolution. The Indian scenario in this regard still depicts the gloomy picture as only libraries of national repute have started using ICT in providing services and state public libraries and district libraries are still deprived of this vital service. However the Indian government has started taking stock of the situation and states are enacting Public Library Acts. Punjab government's recent announcement to pass this Act is a step in this regard. Therefore, in near future it is expected that all public libraries would get equipped with ICT and following services would be provided by them:

NETWORKED LIBRARY SERVICES-

Communication services on Internet are now more accessible for public use. Blogs, Wikis, Pod Casting, RSS feeds, email, instant messaging and SMS are powerful communication tools available through Internet. These services have the capability of changing the nature and delivery of library services. SMS, E-mail and chat services are already popular among public libraries to deliver reminder, notification and reference service. Sending SMS via on-line is comparatively cheap or free. As ICT is implemented in public Libraries in India, these would be aware of how to make use the advantage of these new age communication services to keep connected to the community.

MULTIMEDIA COLLECTION-

ICT has changed library and information services globally. Digital media has revolutionised the information source and advances in ICTs have dramatically changed the information provisions. The Internet has provided universal access to information. Technological innovation has changed the rate of conversion of knowledge, information and data into electronic format.

ONLINE CATALOGUE AND RELATED SERVICES-

This would facilitate remote access to the full range of library services, including the ability to renew or reserve books and other stock, and to check the user's own borrower record. Accessing an electronic database of community information, tailored to the library would be feasible. Posting an inquiry to the 'Ask a Librarian' service, using the electronic portal to access the digital resources of the library and partner organisations and Finding information helpful to selecting reading material e.g. 'top ten reads' of the month would be possible. The library's catalogue being online, would allow users to perform basic search/browse functions from any networked PC.

IMPORTANCE OF LIBRARY IN EDUCATION

Library is like a storehouse of knowledge. You will find books in a library in almost all topics, be it history, geography, or even science fiction a library has it all. All schools and colleges have a library. Libraries are as the shrine where all the relics of the ancient saints, full of true virtue, and that without

delusion or imposture, are preserved and reposed- Bacon. A library is like the whole world encompassed in one room. Without a library a school will not be complete. It is very essential to the education and school system. Any problem you have any query unanswered you will find it in one of the books stored in the library. A pivotal role played by the libraries it is one of the factors which helps in the development of a society or an even a civilization. It caters to the knowledge thirsty minds of thousands of people. With the onset and advancement of technologies virtual libraries are created. These types of libraries are present in many colleges. Libraries are an integral part of the education system and one is incomplete without the other.

THE NEED FOR LIBRARY SERVICES:

Its objectives and needs include, the establishment of books and materials to lend to the public for their consumption, Thus the libraries have an essential and close bearing upon the advancement of education and learning at all levels for all the times to come. The Libraries create literacy among the people, give public lectures. Library services improve knowledge and skills for positive productivity as a tool for national development. According to Metzger, (1991), Library services are needed to enable the individual develop full potentials and widening the horizons of perception, interests and skills. Other needs for library services include; public enlightenment or rights in the society, understanding social values and expected conduct in public life; assisting to adjust to existing social, political, spiritual and economic activities of the society, to cultivate and maintain reading culture and promotion of good literatures. Onshwakpor, J. E. summed up the need for library services from the perspective of adult education when he observed that, —If adult education is to have a greater share in the molding and building of a happier individual and a better society, the providers of adult education must go beyond their roles as literacy facilitators to a more practical role of providing libraries for sustaining the newly acquired skills of adult learners.

CONCLUSION

The public library system in India is condemned to remain peripheral to the actual information needs of the masses; that it is in a depressed state, and serves as little more than a warehouse of recreational reading materials, a majority of which are in regional languages. Traditional in-house library services themselves cannot be stretched to meet the material needs of patrons who face distinct and different challenges involving library access and information delivery. Special funding arrangements, proactive planning, and promotion are necessary to deliver equivalent library services and to achieve equivalent results in community teaching and learning, and generally to maintain quality in public library services.

Library leaders must have the skills to create and nurture a new type of library culture in which change is encouraged and new visions of service can be implemented (Kent, 2006). According to Susan Kent library leadership issues mainly revolve around three factors: architecture, technology and planning. In view of the public library setup in context to India, all these factors seem to be nowhere worked out yet.

Christopher Edwards in his article has rightly pointed out —Providing access to information has traditionally been about buildings, based around institutions offering services to onsite users. Building tomorrow's libraries will not simply be a matter of installing rows of computers with Internet access: our users will increasingly expect to be able to access material from where they live and work. Providing access will increasingly be about developing electronic information services such as Internet portals and acting as a broker between content providers and remote users"

(Christopher, 2001).

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