

ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The present study focused on the role public libraries on women empowerment. Indian society is socio-economically male dominated. Women are discriminated and marginalised in socio-economic and political participation, opportunities, access to education, nutrition, reproductive healthcare etc. But the public libraries were started as educational institutions for women. 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. Public libraries serve as an access point for women empowerment in their communities. Instead of this there is variety of facilities and infrastructure was built to support the process of the rural community social and economic development; public libraries are one of these facilities. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the initiatives of developmental activities and programs that underpin the public libraries in supporting women development and empowerment.

Key words: Empowering, borrowed, librarians, successful, enlightened, enrichment etc.

INTRODUCTION

Public library has always been viewed as an important entity in a local community development and empowerment process, particularly in a rural and disadvantaged community. It has been established as a crucial element in the life of community members, as it provides information that is essential for the community progress. Rural development has always be the priority focus of the Indian government. A variety of facilities and infrastructure were built to support the process of the rural community social and economic development; rural public libraries are one of these facilities. Today women is stigmatised and rebuked by the family and the society. In an attempt to bridge gender disparity in the developing world different agencies are trying to elevate the status

of women so that they become increasingly visible in various roles such as socio economic, political and civil leadership. Over two decades of the women's movement across India, we have seen an increasing emphasis on the promotion of grass roots level organisation for women development and discussions as women status and empowerment.

LIBRARY

Library is a place set apart to contain books, periodicals, and other material for adding, viewing, study, or reference, as a room, set of rooms, or building where books may be read or borrowed¹. Library is not just a building stacked with books and manuals. It is a repository and source of information ideas, a place for learning enquiry generation of thought and creation of new knowledge². Libraries have always played a vital role in promoting education and research, developing reading habits and dissemination of knowledge and information. Libraries are one of the most important components of the information age and librarians are dealing successful with new technological advances. Librarians work on helping society; understand the value and contributions of libraries particularly in the areas of organizing, preserving and providing access to information.

PUBLIC LIBRARY

A public library is a library that is accessible by the general public and is generally funded from public sources, such as taxes. It is operated by librarians and library paraprofessionals, who are also civil servants.³ Public library as its name suggests, it is for the people, by the people and of the people. It exists from civilization of mankind and act as the important custodian of human culture, knowledge and social customs.⁴

It is necessary to maintain well trained and highly motivated staff to make effective use of the resources of the library and to meet the demands of the community. UNESCO defines public Library as the local gateway to knowledge provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development and social group. (UNESCO manifesto 2005). The UNESCO manifesto also state that it should be an institution established under the clear mandate of law maintained fully from public fund, offering all its service free of cost and open for free and equal use by all members of the community irrespective their age, sex, religion, language structural level of education. The origin of the public library service vests in antiquity with the first recording of the human thought took birth the concept of a system or an institution which could preserve thought for future use which gradually came to be referred by the term library. Ever since the essential functions of all libraries remained the same collection, preservation and dissemination of knowledge. Public library is a welfare

centre which provides useful service to the community by fostering education, promoting culture, providing scope for healthy recreation and disseminates information to all section of the society.⁵

OBJECTIVES OF PUBLIC LIBRARY

The basic objective of a public library is to assemble, preserve and administer, in organized collections, books and related educational, historical and recreational materials in order to promote knowledge, enlightened citizenship and the enrichment of personal lives.⁶ The explosive growth of knowledge and the direct relation of information to development in all walks of human life have elevated public library which is to give people free access to information, as the most important instrument in their life and progress. There is no other substitute to public library which is of such importance and which can undertake the massive and varied functions, it expected to undertake in the present day society the characteristics of which is tremendous and continuous development.

FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC LIBRARY

Library which is fulfilling the reading requirements of the citizen to the fullest extent without making any discrimination on the basis of membership as other academic libraries Thus it considered as Peoples University and as such library will focus on providing knowledge on all matters including academic and non – academic. But in large number it focus on general knowledge, Novels, Stories, Drama, Autobiography, Magazine, and Daily Newspapers. These resources are used by women in large number. Now –a-day public libraries are functioning as mobile –channels in providing knowledge to the people of rural and urban areas. Public libraries are continuing to serve important community function, but that the future of those institutions is not assured to perform various important roles in educational, economic, political, social and cultural development of the country. Information, as the most important instrument in their life and progress it will lead to explosive growth of knowledge and direct relation of information to developments in all walks of human life have elevated public library which is to give people free access.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND RURAL WOMEN

Rural women remain the most underprivileged group of the developing societies because of lack of empowerment. In the recent years, there are diverse government and non-governmental organisations and initiatives aimed at empowering rural women in order to improve their sufferings yet a lot of rural women are not empowered. Information is recognized as power, a critical resource and sine-qua non for true empowerment and library is an important store house of information⁷. The rural public libraries have given these rural women the

basis input of information to learn and enhance their quality of life in general terms. Most importantly, the rural public libraries activities and outreach programs, on-going, supporting rural women in developing their self-development and self-empowerment.

Public library are the local gateway to knowledge and it should provide basic condition for life-long learning, decision making and it provide information suiting needs of individual and groups. To overcome the poverty library needs to disseminate information which can use for the employment, skill development or in generating self-employment activity. Information is that basic need of life, which is helps in the proper fulfilment of other needs such as food, shelter etc.

The public libraries are also involved in the Community Economic Development. Public libraries can play a significant role in community economic development for several reasons. First, access to a well-stocked library adds significantly to the overall quality of life in a community. Second, librarians are sometimes the most educated and well-trained community information specialists. Third, libraries frequently have up-to-date computer systems, fax machines, Internet access and information retrieval skills that are of growing importance in an information-based economy.⁸

CONCLUSION

Public library is very important in the life of any nation. It attempts to meet various needs of readers, provide various information sources and services. Public library play important role in women empowerment process. Around the world, many rural community members believe that public libraries support and assist their self-development and self-improvement. Residents come to the rural public libraries for more than just reading. Hence it has been established as a crucial place in the life of women, as it provides information that is essential for the women empowerment. It will help for their own development, family and community development. From the analysis, it stated that library has to play a vital role for the improvement of women.

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