

Rural Library Services: Lessons from Five Rural Public Libraries in West Bengal

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ABSTRACT: *A well informed society is considered as developed one. In this aspect libraries can take the pioneer role as an efficient 'vehicle' for acquiring, organizing and making information available. Public libraries are an integral part of any community, regardless of size. The development of any rural community is a positive indicator for the development of a nation. Information dissemination via rural public library is an essential ingredient for the development of the rural community. Unfortunately however, little attention has been given to the role of rural public libraries can play in the overall development of West Bengal. It has been observed that rural public libraries in West Bengal have not developed up to the mark. The principal victims of these under-developments have been rural community without having any individual means of becoming literate, due to them being too illiterate, too poor or too ill because of the information poverty. This paper examines the status of services provided by rural public libraries, and then looks at the roles and the sources of funding of these rural public libraries and pinpoints problems bedeviling them. It concludes by recommending ways of revamping the rural public libraries from their miserable situation.*

KEY WORDS: Rural public libraries, rural community, development, information poverty, information dissemination.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rural public libraries are important institution as academic and socio-cultural organization for the rural people. Rural public libraries in West Bengal are part of the State Government in terms of administration and budget procedures. Majority of the population in this state lives in rural remote areas. Most of the inhabitants of these rural areas are without education. The library can have an important role in the advancement of knowledge. This role can be effectively carried out with well-structured and well-planned library services. Ranganathan (1961,p.63) defined "public library as a public institution or establishment charged with the care of collection of books and the duty of making them accessible to those who require the use of them". No country in the world can progress without providing free public library services to the citizens of the remote areas. A public library is a library that offers services to the public free of charge and it also provides educational, social and political information to people in a particular community. Generally, public libraries are accepted as a public good. In the words of Olanlokun and Salisu (1993), public libraries are libraries set up to provide free but traditional service to everyone. A public library serves the community and is generally referred to as a layman's library or university. The library is a service-oriented institution with set goals to be achieved within the resources made available by the parent institution, usually the Government. Maximization of benefit of library resources and services by the users is the main motive of a public library. Such services are always the responsibility of the Government and thus funded totally /partially by them. The main thrust of this paper is to examine the status of rural library services taking lessons from services provided by five rural public libraries in West Bengal.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Public libraries provide a range of economic support in that they bolster the economic prosperity of their communities, contribute to the economic well being of the businesses that surround them, improve the market worth of their communities, support their local economies, benefit local businesses, and they offer highly skilled and often highly technical jobs in an automated environment (McClure and Bertot, 1998, p.11). Rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient in development process (Okoye, 2003). Since the rural communities are farming communities, information on how to improve their farms and means through which they can improve their farming techniques should be provided for them in

a format they will understand (Aboyade, 1990). Deshpande (2000) has studied the importance of public libraries in developing countries and has pointed out the salient characteristics of a public library and grass root services. The services which can be offered to the public are detailed in the study, which are educating the illiterates, providing information services for women, giving children's service, conducting adult education classes, providing information on social evils, giving information service to the farmers, creating science temper, and providing information services to the disadvantaged.

Borcherdt (1977) remarked that "none of the thousands of projects in the developing countries can be executed without the fundamental conditions of the establishment of a literate and numerate (rural) society, and a system for continuous provision of idea- exchange, thought and knowledge on which the rural society can "feed-on; with suitable modifications to construct own cultural and industrial destiny. Thus, rural dwellers need relevant, efficient and current information and hence, the need for libraries. Libraries are not just a centre to keep and read the books but a place to be used as community education centre with facilities for the effective use of non formal education media. Rural libraries could be best used as information centre for effective use in adult education and development plans of the country (Tugbiyele, 1977). Hanif Uddin (2000) has emphasized the importance of establishing rural libraries in each and every village of Bangladesh. They are: 1) To sensitize the people to better health, water supply and sanitation, 2) To find out government policy, 3) To provide better crops, 4) To prevent and control environmental pollution, 5) To provide text books and teaching aids, 6) To provide sport facilities, and 7) To prevent and control social problems. The rural dwellers need to be told the types of information they can get from the library. Judging by their professional background, librarians may not be agriculturalists, but they are usually equipped to provide technical information services to experts in other fields using the language they understand most. In providing agricultural extension services, librarians may need to adopt canvassing or mobile libraries to bring library services to the doorsteps of the farmers in the rural areas (Omopupa, 2006). The collections carried by mobile libraries reflect the requests previously made and the perceived need of the local communities where there are service stations (Nwalo, 2003).

III. DIMENSION & COVERAGE OF THE STUDY

The proposed theme of present paper seeks to evaluate the following hypothesis – Role of library is reflected in the services generated to the public.

This paper investigates how far a public library's activities, in practice, contribute toward the achievement of its social objectives. Several frequently used library services have been selected for analysis for this purpose. They fall under these general categories: library collections, circulation and reference transactions, programming, and electronic resources. The frequency of use of these services in 2008-09 was collected from various public libraries in West Bengal. In this study, services provided during the period 2008-09 are collected from five rural public libraries in West Bengal, namely, Hasanpur Milani Pathagar, Jalangi Kishore Sangha Rural Pathagar, Faridpur Kishore Sangha Rural Library, Belgoria Sudha Smriti Pathagar, and Katiahat Sudharam Pathagarr.

IV. RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES' SERVICES

4.1 Collection of Library Materials

In Hasanpur Milani Pathagar the total collection of books including adult's books and children book is 5050 among which almost 80% belong to the adult's book and the remaining 20% collection is of children's book. The total collection of periodicals magazines and journals is 535. In this library only one daily magazine, 2 weekly magazines, 2 fortnight magazines, 2 monthly magazines and 2 other magazines are kept for the users. The total number of daily magazines is 365, the number of weekly magazines is 288, the number of fortnight magazines is 48, the number of monthly magazines is 24 and the collection of other magazines is 2. In Jalangi Kishore Sangha Rural Pathagar the total collection of books including adult's books and children book is 8575 among which almost 86% belong to the adult's book and the remaining 14% collection is children's book. The total collection of periodicals magazines and journals is 890. The total number of daily magazines is 730, the number of weekly magazines is 96, the number of fortnight magazines is 48, the number of monthly magazines is 12 and the collection of other magazines is 4. In Faridpur Kishore Sangha Rural Library the total collection of books including adult's books and children book is 3301 among which almost 89% belong to the adult's book and the remaining 11% collection is of children's book. The total collection of periodicals magazines and journals is 557. The total number of daily magazines is 365, the number of weekly magazines is 96, the number of fortnight magazines is 72 and the number of monthly magazines is 24. In Belgoria Sudha Smriti Pathagar the total collection of books including adult's books and children book is 7110 among which almost 64% belong to the adult's book and the remaining 36% collection is of children's book. The total collection of periodicals magazines and journals is 524. The total number of daily magazines is 440, and the number of weekly magazines is 84. The collection of monthly magazines and other periodicals is nil. In Katiahat Sudharam

Pathagar the total collection of books including adult's books and children book is 7322 among which almost 63.8% belong to the adult's book and the remaining 36.2% collection is of children's book. The total collection of periodicals magazines and journals is 238. The total number of daily magazines is 215, the number of monthly magazines is 8 and the number of other periodicals is 15.

4.2 Users in the Library

The total users in Hasanpur Milani Pathagar are 4400 among which the number of users in periodicals etc occupies the lion's share (63.6%). In respect of user value, books occupy the largest share of 55.7%. Total number of users in Jalangi Kishore Sangha Rural Pathagar is 5567 among which the number of users in periodicals etc occupies the major share (53%). In respect of user value, books occupy the largest share of 83%. In Faridpur Kishore Sangha Rural Library the total number is 4172. Most of the users (67.4 %) in this library are of periodicals. In respect of user value, books occupy the largest share of 69.8%. In Belgoria Sudha Smriti Pathagar the total number of users is 3733. In this library the number of users in books occupies the lion's share (58%). In respect of user value, books occupy the largest share of 93.7%. In Katiahat Sudharam Pathagar the total number of users is 3445. More than half of the users (53.6%) are of periodicals. In respect of user value, books occupy the largest share of 83.3% in this library.

4.3 Expenditure of and Benefit from Library Services

The empirical estimates of expenditure of & benefits from the services from rural public libraries in West Bengal show that the benefits are much higher than the expenditure for providing various library services. In Hasanpur Milani Pathagar, total expenditure including capital consumption allowance is Rs. 14873.00 and the benefit received by the users is Rs 68636.57. This library organizes lot awareness programmes in the locality. The total current expenditure on all the collections and programming services is of Rs.12433.00 among which 40% is used for books purchase. Estimated Value of benefits received by the library users from Programming Services is of Rs. 3190.00 in our survey period. In Jalangi Kishore Sangha Rural Pathagar, total expenditure including capital consumption allowance is Rs. 20585.00 and the benefit received by the users is Rs 129711.30. In Faridpur Kishore Sangha Rural Pathagar, total expenditure including capital consumption allowance is Rs. 15742.50 and the benefit received by the users is Rs 72898.60. In Belgoria Sudha Smriti Pathagar, total expenditure including capital consumption allowance is Rs. 11060.00 and the benefit received by the users is Rs 75797.87. In Katiahat Sudharam Pathagar, total expenditure including capital consumption allowance is Rs. 12350.00 and the benefit received by the users is Rs 60571.20.

4.4 State Aid for the Library Services

The revenue going to the library comes from two sources – State aid and other sources of funding. In Hasanpur Milani Pathagar, the State aid occupies the lion's share of almost 95% among which 12.5% of total revenue is used for capital consumption allowance. In Jalangi Kishore Sangha Rural Pathagar, the State aid occupies the lion's share of almost 80% among which 19% of total revenue is used for capital consumption allowance. In Faridpur Kishore Sangha Rural Library, the State aid occupies the lion's share of almost 67% among which 15.8% of total revenue are used as depreciation expenditure. In Belgoria Sudha Smriti Pathagar, the State aid occupies the lion's share of almost 75.5%. The depreciation cost is 15.6 % of total revenue collected. In Katiahat Sudharam Pathagar, the State aid occupies the lion's share of almost 80.5%. The depreciation cost is 14.4 % of total revenue collected.

V. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH RURAL LIBRARY SERVICES

Rural public libraries in West Bengal suffers from several loopholes like the lack of children books collection, lack of electronic services, lack of programming services, lack of infrastructure, lack of staffs, lack of reference books collection, shortage of sufficient materials, deficiency of current information, absence of mobile service, lack of information of development activities, lack of scientific & technological information etc.. In order to alleviate these lacks huge amount of funding is necessary. Inadequate or total lack of funding is seriously affecting the activities of the public library. The Government does not fund the rural public library adequately.

VI. CONCLUSION

In rural public libraries of West Bengal, although the number of users of periodicals is higher than that of the other services, yet the value of library benefits from the periodicals is relatively smaller than that of other services. It is mainly due to the lesser per unit cost of daily magazine, etc than that of the books. The rural libraries play the vital role by providing the rural youth, the information of employment opportunities via Karmakhetra, Karmasangathan, etc. to the rural youths. Rural public libraries in this State can also be regarded as the centre of local and regional culture. It is manifested in the various library programming services provided by Hasanpur Milani Pathagar. Hence rural public libraries activity in West Bengal is not only confined that to economic aspect but also ramified to other social aspects. The empirical estimates of

expenditure of & benefits from services of rural public libraries show that the benefits created are much higher than the expenditure for providing various library services. Rural public libraries in West Bengal behave like a welfare organization. Rural public libraries in West Bengal are financed mostly from the State aid, that is State Government plays the crucial role for human resource development of rural communities. The rural public libraries collect the membership fees / subscription fees from the users. The services provided by rural public libraries in West Bengal can be treated as the near-public good, not as the public good.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural public libraries of West Bengal should provide and maintain collections of more temporary materials like brochures, newspaper clippings, etc. which are more easier to understand and more current than collected books. The rural libraries can be utilized to distribute the materials to the rural community which will help the poverty-ridden people to get rid of miserable condition via their human resource development. It is high time to design a blue print by the rural librarians of the State that would accommodate all the rural people and benefit them towards attaining their individual motives, as well as enjoying the country to reap higher heights.

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