

Role of Public Libraries in the Development of Society

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Abstract

Public Libraries have great role to play in the development of the modern society. It is an important institution of informal and continuing education for the people apart from being place of only recreation. It is a place where people have opportunities to strengthen social and mental value for the social as well as their own development. Understanding the importance of public libraries UNESCO has been also promoting public libraries through its several programs. The paper highlights the role of public libraries in the society in details.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Role of Public Library, Social Development, Preservation, Local History etc.

1. Introduction

Information is crucial factor for individual's development as well for social development. Public libraries are social institution having the value for community development based on information exposure to the citizens. Information acquisition, storage and its dissemination to the citizen; is the role of public libraries. Public libraries do not differentiate citizens on the basis of their age, sex, cast and creed. UNESCO public library manifesto says, that "the services of public library are provided on the basis of quality of access for all regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. All age groups must find materials relevant to their needs. Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society as well as the memory of human endeavor and imagination".

The public libraries have very important role in the society. It builds Citizen, educate individual, and fosters thoughtful communities. The free flowing nature of public libraries supports the literacy programme tied with cultural values for community development. Public libraries are local gateways to information for individual and social development. Public libraries provide common platform, make vital contribution towards the social capital, educational and recreational development of local communities and enhances democratic values among people.

Libraries are more than just books, and banks of computers; but libraries are still places where individuals gather to explore, interact and imagine. Edwards, Rausco and Unger (2013) classify to the public library services into five broad categories: (1) Libraries as community builder (2) Libraries as community centers for diverse population (3) Libraries as centers for the arts (4) Libraries as universities and (5) Libraries as champions of youth. The modern era is called information era where information is treated as fifth and foremost factor of production. The nature of society has changed from industrial society to information society. Informed society is more advanced and productive society. In the spread of information among people, public libraries are in center.

2. Role of Public Libraries

The role of public libraries in the present society may be described as under:

- a. Economic development:** Human society has travelled the journey from Agrigarian society to the information or knowledge society where the development of society depends greatly on how much information has is exposed to its members. Information has become crucial and fifth factor in the production of materials. Information is identified as driver of economic growth and productivity. For the national development, the economic growth depends upon the updated and new information. In the spread of new and updated information public libraries play very important role by its services.
- b. Informal and continuing education:** Countries like India where literacy rate is only 65% and in enrollment in higher education is less than 12%; the public libraries have vital role and opportunity to spread education. Public libraries provide information as well as educational opportunity free to all people, regardless of their socio-economic status. It helps in continuing education by providing common discussion forum. Public libraries work as Peoples' University here. There are various extension services provided by the public libraries which are helpful in continuing education.
- c. Recreation and leisure opportunities:** Public libraries do not only provide a place of public juncture but it also give opportunity to utilize leisure time for their amusement, education, skill development, and so and so forth. According to American Library Association³ Survey twenty five percent users who go to the library; learn about political or cultural organizations or leisure activities taking place in the local community, 20% work on a common assignment, 17% to use internet, 16% use to know and discuss the local social and political issues they are involved in, 14% participate in organized meeting speech such as author's night, lecture, meeting with politicians etc; and 10% use library as meeting place to gather family members and friends before going to see a movies or shopping etc. Apart from providing such opportunities and books & reading materials to its users; libraries also organize quiz hours, videos; puppet shows etc. for better utilization of leisure hours. Thus, we see that public libraries play very important role in the people's life to have recreational and pleasant leisure activities.
- d. Cultural exchange and engagement:** Public library is a place where members of different communities religions and social & religious practices come together to meet and understand each other. It leads to social harmony and, finally into national integration. Public libraries organize activities like dramas, lecture series, debate competitions, book exhibitions etc. to enhance and advertize its' services and at the same time as its' positive side effects, it also serve as an engagement of cultural association and exchange.
- e. Promotion and preservation of local culture and history:** Public Libraries preserve historic artifacts, oral histories, and monographs relevant to the local community. Public Library as an organized archive; is a place where people can research genealogy and immigration history, do environmental research and many more. Public libraries also preserve and restore maps and paintings, digitalize vital records and try to create records of oral history. It also helps in promotion of local culture by its different promotional activities.

- f. Promotion of democratic values:** Public libraries are the places where people of the society are equally treated, irrespective of their social status, religious status and economical status in the society. In the same manner democratic values address to each member of the society. Democratic values do not differentiate between members of the society. Every member has equal value whether he/she is from royal family, bureaucratic family or a common man of the society. Public libraries promote the democratic values among people of the society. Public libraries play important role in the political life of the people by providing opportunities to gather community members and encourage them to talk about issues of freedom, justice and democracy.
- g. Catalyst to address the social problems:** The staff members of the public libraries know the local pressures and need of their patrons first hand because they interact to them every day who are from every walk of life? This provides a good opportunity to bring local problems before the local government, Municipal Corporation and other social agencies. In USA PIL's library in 'Summer Food Science Programme' is a compelling example of how a library recognized a social need? brought it to the attention of the community? and partnered with local agencies to address an important issue?
- h. Promotes local talent and artists:** Public libraries provide collection and services of various nature and work closely with local artist to do so. An author in local community may seek the services of public library to promote and make his new creation on internet, a public library may organize an art programme range from simplest to finest of fine art useful from children to adult, it may be on local history, creative writing workshop, and painting classes etc; are some examples of libraries' opportunities to explore local talent and promote it.
- i. Help in women empowerment:** Public libraries provide equal opportunity to all sexes. The women whether they are career women or housewives get a place for discourse to explore opportunities where may be educational, social activity childcare or exposure to the rest of the world. Public libraries are more important for housewives in terms of exploring their knowledge and recreational needs.
- j. Personality development of children:** Public libraries help in children's personality by organizing different kind of activities like painting competition, book fair, essay competition and promoting socialization through sharing of different kind of study materials and providing opportunity to these activities help in their character building and finally their personality.

3. Conclusion

We see that public libraries are not limited to any specific arena of social life, where it is important but it play positive role more or less in all spheres of social life whether it is economic development, lifelong education, cultural exchange or utilization of leisure time etc. The umbrella of public libraries in social development is very vast, covers almost all areas of social life. In this situation public libraries and librarians have to change themselves and adopt new techniques to fulfill new demands of the society through their professional competencies and working culture. Public libraries were always concerned with local and national history. Political, economic and social circumstances create, shape and develop libraries. The promptness and new kinds of emerging library services and techniques are boon for library professionals to understand users' need and fulfill it

within time. ICT and related technologies have made it easy and convenient to reach the unreached users with better facilities and level of satisfaction guaranteed. Library professionals have to identify these opportunities by understanding their responsibilities towards society and act accordingly.

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