

# An Examination of the Role of Public Libraries Addressing Social Inclusion in India

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## Abstract

The major objectives of libraries are not just providing books. In today's world, the public library has a vital responsibility in providing services to all excluded groups in the society. This study examines the actual services provided by the public libraries to support social inclusion of different communities. This study was conducted using questionnaires in selected libraries in south Karnataka districts. This study has found lack of sufficient awareness about the role of libraries in inclusive development, and a lack of training, among the library staff towards different social inclusion aspects in the studied public libraries. Some of the social inclusion related services like employment information ; information for farmers, special services for senior citizens, training for competitive examinations, SC/ST cell, health information, awareness about community development programmes, awareness about various Govt. schemes are not being frequently provided in any of the studied libraries. Also libraries are facing shortage of fund. The Government also should provide enough autonomy and funds for such special activities.

**Keywords:** Community, Development, Exclusion, Inclusion, Library, Social

## 1. Introduction

The World Bank defines social inclusion “as the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society. Social inclusion aims to empower poor and marginalized people to take advantage of burgeoning global opportunities. It ensures that people have a voice in decisions which affect their lives and that they enjoy equal access to markets, services and political, social and physical spaces” (World Bank, 2013).

Social inclusion includes every holistic effort and social policies to encourage parity to people from all condition and from every socially excluded group. The situation and the categories of people frequently associated to social exclusion are consequently the conditions and categories to be referred by efforts to improve speedy inclusion<sup>2</sup>.

“National Digital Literacy Mission programme is a dynamic and integrated platform of digital literacy awareness, education and capacity programmes that will help rural communities to take lead in the global digital economy and help them in maintaining the competitiveness and also shape a technologically empowered society<sup>6</sup>”.

Public libraries arose universally along with development in education, literacy, and publications. Each and every nation has its own public library history with influential leaders. Monarchs, rich people, and philanthropists have all made a contribution to society in the form of public library development. The contemporary notion of the public library in our country has its genesis during the British colonial period, with the establishment of public libraries in big cities such as Madras, Kolkata etc. The hierarchy of public library service in the country starts from National Library, and proceeds to State Central Library, District Library, Block /Taluk Library, and Panchayat Library.

The public library has a vital role in providing possible inclusion services for all excluded groups in the communities since it has the benefit of being local and having a number of frequent users. It has the best opportunity to get in touch with the different community members, hence it is noted that no other public service is better situated than the public library to develop an environment of social inclusion<sup>4</sup>.

The public libraries are the heart and soul of any communities they serve, allowing everybody, irrespective

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of their age, caste, race, or social background, to have easy access to the widest probable range of knowledge and information services for speedy social inclusion process. Also public libraries must play a major role in promoting formal and informal education and life-long learning for every needy member of the society. Further, facilities and services they provide must be available at the times when needy people want to use them. The local community must be involved in increasing the range of inclusive services that they provide.

It is generally agreed that the public librarian must be correctly skilled to manage the dissimilar segment of social inclusion that may be widespread in his/her community. Opportunities like training and awareness programmes will allow them to obtain the essential skills and information that will get them ready for the task ahead. Further, a librarian must have the capability to deal with people; capability to work with community associates; aptitude to communicate with needy people<sup>2</sup>.

It is found that many countries in Europe and Latin American nations have made an impressive development in the advancement of public policy related to ICTs particularly in terms of connectivity, technological and scientific communications, public access to required information, knowledge, systematization of events for citizens, intelligibility, community participation, governers, transparency for the speedy social inclusion of

the needy users of the libraries<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Objectives of this Study

- To find out the role of public libraries in promoting social inclusion processes, and
- To find out the policies and programmes, (if any) of public libraries to provide special services to the socially excluded community.

## 3. Research Method

The current study was conducted using a social survey research method using well structured survey questionnaires. It was structured to assess the social inclusion services in the libraries. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the librarians involved in the study. One state central library, 4 district level libraries, 10 taluk level libraries, 7 munsif level libraries and 3 academic libraries (total 30) were selected for the study. A total of 35 different librarians were contacted for data collection. Data was collected from both visitors and the library staff. Around 75 readers belonging to disadvantaged communities in different libraries were also interviewed to get their views. The data has been analyzed using *NUD\*IST* database software and the quantitative data has been analyzed using SPSS software (Table 1-3).

**Table 1.** Demographic features

Variable	Visitors N=75		Librarians N=35		X <sup>2</sup>	df	P value
	F	%	f	%			
<b>Educational Status</b>							
Illiterate	---	--	---	-----	0.32	6	0.09
Primary/middle school	18	24.0	---	-----			
High school	13	17.3		-----			
Intermediate	21	28.0	6	17.1			
Graduate and above	23	30.6	29	82.8			
<b>Social group</b>							
SC	18	24.0	7	20.0	0.57	1	0.44
ST	8	10.6	3	8.5			
OBC	41	54.6	22	62.8			
Minority	8	10.6	3	8.5			
<b>Awareness about Social inclusion</b>							
Yes	32	42.6	14	40.0	2.069	1	0.150
NO	43	57.3	21	60.0			
<b>Gender distribution</b>							
Male	45	60.0	29	82.8	30.28	6	0.00
Female	28	37.3	6	17.1			
Third gender	2	2.6	---				

**Table 2.** Knowledge about different aspect of social inclusion

Variable	Visitors N=75		Librarians N=35				
	F	%	f	%	X2	df	P value
<b>What is Social Inclusion?</b>							
Holistic development	22	29.3	8	22.8	0.42	6	0.09
Development of every one	11	14.6	5	14.2			
Full participation in the developmental process	12	16.0	3	8.5			
Social and economic development	18	24.0	3	8.5			
No idea	12	16.0	16	45.7			
<b>How Libraries Can Play a Role in Social Inclusion Process</b>							
Training for the youth from the excluded group	23	30.6	6	17.1	0.57	1	0.44
Socio-economic development through information and knowledge services	15	20.0	9	25.7			
Engagement with Govt. and NGOs	22	29.8	4	11.4			
No idea	15	20.0	16	45.7			
<b>Mode of Intervention of Libraries in Social Inclusion Aspects</b>							
Awareness	11	14.6	3	8.5	0.32	2	0.22
Knowledge and information services	12	16.0	10	28.5			
Community out reach	17	22.5	3	8.5			
Skill Training	7	9.3	4	11.4			
All the above	10	13.3	8	22.8			
No idea	18	24.0	7	20.0			
<b>Urgent Field of Intervention of Libraries in Social Inclusion Aspects</b>							
Youth	22	29.3	6	17.1	0.11	1	0.27
Poor/Destitute/orphans	12	16.0	9	25.7			
Formers/aged	23	30.5	10	28.5			
Widow/single women	18	24.0	10	28.5			
<b>Types of library activities that have applied social inclusion process</b>							
Library tour	12	16.0	0	0	0.34	6	0.00
Book talk	2	2.6	--	---			
Exhibition	19	25.3	11	31.4			
Virtual references	11	14.6	2	5.7			
Online library user guide	11	14.6	6	17.1			
Book recommendation	8	10.6	10	28.5			
News posting	12	16.0	6	17.1			
<b>Requirement of Social Inclusion Training for Librarians</b>							
Required	24	32.0	14	40.0	0.57	1	0.44
Not required	31	32.0	12	34.3			
No idea	20	26.6	9	25.7			
<b>Necessity of Specific Budget for Social Inclusion Services</b>							
Yes	30	40.0	25	71.4	2.069	1	0.00
No	45	60.0	10	28.5			
<b>Library Involvement in Government Policy Implementation</b>							
Yes it is required	23	30.6	9	25.7	30.28	6	0.00
Not required	31	41.3	16	45.7			
Don't know	21	28.0	10	28.5			

**Table 3.** How often are you conducting these programmes (for library staff)?

Events	Public Library	Academic Library
1 Skilled training	No	No
2 Awareness workshop	No	No
3 Special programme for aged/formers	No	No
4 Special programme for unemployed	No	No
5 Cultural events	No	No
6 Health information services	No	No
7 Job fairs	No	No
8 Coaching for competitive exams	Yes (occasion)	Yes

“Libraries have a recognized social function in making knowledge publicly available to all. They serve as local centres of information and learning, and are local gateways to national and global knowledge”<sup>6</sup>.

From the above it is clearly shown that library staff has least awareness about the different aspects of social inclusion. More than 45% of the library staff does not have any idea about social inclusion. None of the libraries are having any programmes for social inclusion since their inception. In India public libraries aims and objectives are not being fulfilled because, there is no clear policy on the role libraries should play in social inclusion. This has consequences and has led to slow inclusive development and poor decision-making. Libraries are like trusted community resources central to meeting local development goals. Libraries can contribute to the enhancement of quality of life by providing access to much needed ICTs, and a space for citizens to connect with their state and community which leads to speedy social inclusion process. However, it is also significant to note that public libraries in India are not autonomous in framing their own policies or in the execution of any socially useful events<sup>4</sup>. This study suggests that in spite of a rhetorical promise of social inclusion, the technical alteration of Indian public library services need transformation and modernization of existing services, with a user-centric approach. Recently The National Knowledge Commission<sup>6</sup> has envisaged a vital role for libraries to engage in ushering in both the inclusive society and the knowledge society through sharing and providing information.

In carrying out its role, public libraries can also train the workers carrying out similar educational and health related programmes in the community with the help of NGOs. This can be done by the library conducting seminars, workshops and conference to promote literacy and health programmes. Public libraries can also carry out their roles as education providers for their community by setting up literacy centers such as adult

literacy programmes in their community and can provide various training programmes and also can provide various skilled training programme. They can even work with the aged, people having health issues, disabled sections, single women, widows etc. Public libraries can successfully carry out job opportunity campaigns in its working space<sup>1</sup>. More over it is a fact that many of the public libraries may not be able to provide all the required information services due to the challenges they face. They are also facing acute budget shortages. The Government should give more autonomy to the public libraries to have more collaborative work with both the community and NGOs for inclusive development. The real prospect of India’s public libraries providing service to community as an information centre needs to be highlighted.

In recent times a few district level libraries have started separate section for SC/ST students preparing them for various competitive examinations. Also it is learned that mobile library schemes are being implemented in various pockets where a large section of marginalized people live in slums, out skirts of big cities where large number of migrant people normally stay. The government has instructed to conduct special programme for creating awareness about various government and private employment opportunities regularly in libraries. Online library service is also being implemented for aged and disabled people. Planning commission in 2012 had also mentioned about public libraries and their potential of being very vital and responsible in various development programmes in the country especially for the underserved people in remote parts. Few NGOs also have started multicultural library services, based on knowledge of the particular social groups represented in the given community and their essential information needs.

## 4. Conclusion

Public libraries can play a vital role in developing social assets, including learning behavior, and community and

civic norms. It also can endorse harmony among the multicultural units in society. Public libraries, with the support of their communities, private organizations and NGOs, can put in place a series of activities that promote social inclusion and engage citizens' contribution and participation in their communities. It is found that required social skills guidance should be included in the current library sciences programmes.

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