

ROLE OF LIBRARIAN IN THE DIGITAL INITIATIVES OF WEST BENGAL

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Abstract: The digital age of the present era encompasses with the lots of opportunities to the common mass. It is expected that these opportunities will have direct impact on the development process as a whole in the society. Digital initiatives are the process of imbibing digital infrastructure to provide digital services. The paper tries to emphasis on the aspect of digital initiatives in terms of the community information services. The efforts of the Govt of West Bengal in this regard have been stated in detail. The role of the librarian in the regard also depicted through this paper. The basic objective of the paper is to identify the govt. initiatives taken in the west Bengal for smooth functioning and deliver the digital services. The significant contribution can be made by the librarian by proving the infrastructural facilities and providing the timely information to the general mass through any kinds of instauration.

Keywords : Information needs, Community Information service, Digital initiatives, Librarian, West Bengal

1.0 Introduction

The basic need of the human being is food, cloth and shelter and this need be further amplifying after reaching to a certain level. This need is to be ascertained by their upbringing and influence of environment. The advanced environment helps them to judge their requirement and based on such judgement their information has been refined. Information is now considered as one of the basic and vital needs of human beings. It is not only great potential as a powerful and reusable resource for the social and economic development of mankind, but also becomes an essential requirement for survival in life.

To meet the general as well as additional requirements of information human beings two types of information are very much required. One is general information requirement and onther is specialised information requirement. To disseminate these two types of information, different mechanisms are required. Because, these kinds of information are very much required to the common masses especially to the non-users of information. Non-users are the groups of people in an affluent society who are never given the means to satisfy their needs or are geographically cut-off from centres of provision which are theoretically open to them or are so occupied that even while surrounded by all they need never stop to enjoy it and suffer a form of (information) malnutrition. These non-users live in an information society or information-rich society and still voluntarily suffer from information malnutrition. These non-users can become the potential user in future. These users can be proved potential for the future generation. Again, these non-users can be sub-divided into two groups, firstly, adamant non-users and secondly, deprived non-users. Adamant non-users are living in upper strata of social life; they may be rich and have the access to the efficient information resources but don't use the resources as they don't feel the requirement of the information. There are only few people are in the first category. Second group of users which is the major part in the society, are not able to use the proper information resources as they don't know how to use the access mechanisms and procedures. The second group of non-users is usually poor and live in rural areas and these non-privileged groups are hindrances for the overall development of the country. So, the government of different nations takes initiatives to upgrade them. To equip the 75% inhabitants of the third world countries with the weapons of information, firstly we must identify the users and non-users of information. These non-users of information may become a potential part for any country. In short, information is the basic need of life which helps us to meet the other needs like food, shelter etc. Basically, without proper information the survival and development of any community is almost impossible.

2.0 Background

India is a big country where a vast population of the world lives, and it is very diverse in nature. Different caste, creed, religion, rituals are found in our country. India has a very rich tradition of community information services as it is evident from the above discussion. Community information services exist in India long before the present civilisation but not in structured form. Currently our country is suffering from different social problems. It is due to the uneven progress in different area. Only few numbers of people have the access to the different facilities and benefits and others major section of people are remain in dark. They don't have some

access to some basic facilities like food, shelter, sanitation. Human Development Report 2010ⁱ shows the following condition in India:

- Among South Asian countries, Nepal ranks second among the top movers on non-income Human Development Index while India is among the top 10 movers in GDP growth.
- India ranks 119 on the HDI and is among the middle human development countries.
- Life expectancy in East Asia and the Pacific climbed to an average of 73 years in 2010 from 59 in 1970. In South Asia, life expectancy is now estimated at 65 years, compared to 49 in 1970, though with wide national variations. Over the past 40 years life expectancy increased by 23 years in Bangladesh, 18 years in Iran, 16 years in India, and 10 years in Afghanistan.
- The Multidimensional Poverty Index – which identifies serious simultaneous deprivations in health, education and income on the household level in 104 countries – calculates that South Asia is home to half of the world’s multidimensionally poor population, or 844 million people. Eight Indian states, with poverty as acute as the 26 poorest African countries measured, are home to 421 million multidimensionally poor people, more than the 410 million multidimensional poor people living in those African countries combined.
- Across the globe—in Bangladesh, India, Kenya and the Philippines—cellular phone services have become more accessible to poor people as competition and technological advances have brought down prices.
- In India 92 percent of people of Scheduled Tribes lived in rural areas, 47 percent of them are in poverty.
- In India 42 Percentage of people living in poverty.
- 51% poor living in south Asian countries.
- In India 81 percent of people of Scheduled Tribes are multidimensionally poor
- Mean years of schooling is 4.4 in India.
- In India Gross national income (GNI) per capita is 3,337.
- In India population with at least secondary education 26.6(F), 50.4(M)
- In India percentage of Births attended by skilled health personnel is 47%
- Percentage of Labour force participation rate in India is 35.7%(F) 84.5%(M)
- In India Population living on degraded land is 10% in 2010
- Percentage of population without access to sanitation and water in 2008 is 12% and 69% respectively in India.
- In India deaths due to indoor and outdoor air and water pollution 954 in 2004.
- In India average % shortfall in minimum dietary energy requirements in 1990/1992 is 17% and in 2004/2006 it is 15%.
- Average annual growth In India is 2.0(1990–1995) and expected in 2010–2015 it will be 1.3%.
- Population without electricity In India is 34.2%.
- In India Daily newspapers accessed per thousand people in our country is 71
- In India internet users (per 100 people) are 4.5(2008) and % growth population-based is 0.5% from 2000-08.

The above information from the Human Development Report 2010 clearly indicates that our country is progressing but in an uneven way. There has been a clear distinction between two groups of people. One group has access to all the different types of luxurious amenities which are needed for life and other section don’t have the access to the minimum facilities like health, education, food etc which are the basic and essential needs of human being. We call our country a developing but these developments are usually meant for limited number of upper section people. Social problems have been started from this perspective.

3.0 Community Information

Information becomes pivotal point in our daily life as it is the main constituent part for progress over the time. Faibisoff and Ely stated “Information is a symbol or a set of symbols which has the potential for meaning”ⁱⁱ. Development is a continuous process and to build a country properly continuous development is essential. Overall and harmonious development is not concerned with a single person. It is concerned with the different groups of community. According to David Smith “A community is made up of persons who bring the common life a variety of resources both materials and of knowledge and skill. Each member of the community has needs and has resources. In the most profound sense we are functions of one another and it is the interpenetration and co-ordination of these resources which creates the community.”ⁱⁱⁱ. Now, the concept of ‘community’ and

‘information’ or ‘community information’ has got much more importance in the society. Earlier the concept was there but the emphasis was not given in the present manner. Now community information becomes one of the essential elements of the community development.

Community information helps people to deal with daily life problems and to participate in the life of their community. Different persons have defined community information in different ways. Edwards said “Community information is considered to be that information required by members of the public (or those acting on their behalf) to make effective use of the resources potentially available to them in the communities in which they live. Such information may be needed to help solve problems in the field of housing, disability, household finances, marriage, employment and so on.”^{iv}. In other way community information is “Any information that helps citizens with their day to day problems and enables them to fully participate as a members of their democratic community. It is information pertaining to the availability of human services such as health care, financial assistance, housing, transportation, education and child care services; as well as information on recreation programs, clubs, community events, and information about all events.”^v. It is clear from the above two definitions that community information is the vital part of the society and it helps to provide information on their basic problems like health care services, financial assistance, housing, transportation etc. Rosalie Day showed “Community information exists in both structured and unstructured formats. Printed community directories and electronic or web based databases are examples of structure community information. Unstructured community information can exist in a wide range of forms including websites, pamphlets, notice boards, newspaper articles, newsletters and tacit knowledge held by groups and individual. Community information can help to improve the quality of life for individuals, with benefits as well to the broader community-but only if it is accessible to them and able to flow from its source to where it is needed.”^{vi} Therefore, it is the basic responsibility of local, state and central governments to provide community information to improve their life standards. Community information is the information for survival or the growth of the community or it is that information which is required by the member community to make effective use of available resources around them in which they live. The information service through which community information, both general and specific is provided to communities is called Community Information Services. Library Association’s (UK) Working Party on Community Information Service defined as “a positive decision to concentrate on enabling people, particularly those in lower socio-economic groups, to act either individually or collectively on their problems in the fields of housing, employment, family and personal matters, consumer affairs, household finance, education, welfare rights and civil rights”^{vii}. Therefore it is evident from all the definitions given above that community information service is meant for lower socio economic groups of people to make their living standard better by providing appropriate information services relating to their basic needs.

Information services are provided to a community in a modern society in a number of ways and means. This may be through formal educational channels; through formal education institutes such as libraries, information centers; through semi formal education institutes such as distance education modes, short term courses, in services training, etc.; through mass media; privately through professional consultants and experts such as doctors, lawyers, tutors etc.; through different types of NGO activities; but mostly through informal networks of relatives, friends, peers, colleagues and day to day activities; and most recently through internet. Of these, formal library use and use of internet information can be large part of self-help activities. But most of the people in developing and under developed third world countries are not able to use these channels for accessing the information due to different reasons. So, the community information service can become a powerful tool to the development of the third world countries in the present situation. Any information service is an attempt at the fulfillment of certain purpose. The basic purpose of community information service is to support development of a community in all respects. But community information service in its technical implication is a reaching out service and attempts to reach the points where normal and formal channels are either inadequate or unavailable or inefficient or inappropriate or when the members of the community are unable, unwilling or unaware to use available means.

The world around us is changing very fast and to keep current in this world we have to use the technological tools. With the recent development of information generation and information technology, the social system is undergoing a vast change, which has clearly divided the society into two groups that is ‘information have and ‘information have not’. This has been evident from the clear distinction between these two groups of people. Most of the people in the world belonged to the second group. They don’t have the facilities of proper education and information access mechanisms. These have not group has lead to the formulation of a section called disadvantaged group and the people under this group are not in a position to help themselves. In this context, community information service can be proved as one of the indispensable part for the development and for the over all development of the country there should be free flow of information about the various helps provided to this disadvantaged community. Lack of access to information that is both private and public is one of the major

drawbacks for community development. Access to information leads them to upgrade their certain standard of life. In addition to lack of access to governmental information leads to low level of participation in governmental process, which hampers the developmental process of a community as well as a nation.

Society and social system must change with the time. Lack of community information service affects this changing process and creates social imbalance. Therefore community information service is very much needed for the common mass of a community, which help them to continuously inform about the changes around themselves and to improve their living standards in all respect.

Community Information Service (CIS) is an age old concept. The concept of CIS took various forms in practice in different periods in different culture and communities. The current concept of CIS is however specific and developed in post second world war UK and USA. CIS is also an old concept in India however it is in different form. In ancient times, there was formal institutional learning in *Gurukula*, *Ashrama*, *Chatuspathis*, and *Temple School Universities* in India. Here the popular channel of dissemination of knowledge and information was almost totally oral and the latter can be taken as example of a true type of traditional CIS in India. Year after year people of India had heard the stories of childlike performances of *Dhruba*, *Prhallada*, suffering of *Sita* etc. Local formal and informal system of Panchayat also played a significant role to maintain the flow of information. These were again supplemented by formal religious gatherings like *Mela* and *Parvana*. It may be claimed that tradition similar to CIS was prevalent in India but it was not same as the modern western concept of the term.^{viii}

4.0 Inception Of The Concept Of Community Initiatives/ Digital Initiatives

Development of the rural mass is another important area for our country because 65% of our population lives in villages. Development is a continuous and dynamic process, which aims at promoting the well being of the people. The government has undertaken several projects so as to improve the standards of life in the rural areas. All the projects aim at increasing the level of satisfaction on the basis of need of social targets (population). The rural development activities/programmes, may differ in places, solely aim at the gradual removal of disparities among various classes, between regions and within regions. Though the programmes aim at balanced development, due to flaws in implementation at field level, disparities are widening between the targeted groups. Thus the rural development programmes should be specific and meet with the requirements of the lowest possible strata of the population viz., need, poor, illiterate, weak, etc. Due to the lack of technological infrastructure in the rural areas, the digital divide is created between rural and urban people. This “digital divide” or “information and technology gap” refer to the gap between those who can effectively use new information and communication tools, such as the internet, and those who cannot. The digital divide is the gap between those people and communities who can access and make effective use of information technology and those who cannot. Simply, a common assumption is that the haves and have nots of the information age, usually urban versus rural communities. The digital divide is the socio-economic/technological difference between communities in their access to computers and the Internet. The term also refers to gaps between groups in their ability to use ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies) effectively, due to differing literacy and technical skills, and the gap in availability of quality, useful digital content. Efforts are now being made in different parts of the country towards developing the information infrastructures, specifically suitable dissemination mechanisms, utilizing Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). These are being done by three types of agencies

- Government (directly or indirectly/ semi government/autonomous agencies)
- Non- Government Organizations (NGOs/ associations)
- Corporate Agencies (i.e. corporate organizations/ industrial houses, etc.)

Some times more than one type of agency is also involved in this work. Even a few International Agencies are also collaborating in some cases.

Thus the concept of ICT based community Initiatives creeps in the society to cater such a large number of population. Sometimes this can be termed as digital initiatives or online community initiatives.

5.0 Community Initiatives

The socio-economic sectors of any country need to give proper emphasis in order to maintain the equitable development. The community development is therefore integral part of the activities of the govt administration. Community usually refers to the group of people with a division in terms of norms, religion, values, customs, or identity. Communities can also limit in terms of the geographical location. In broader sense the community refers to the people subdivided with some distinct features. Community may also refer to large group

affiliations such as national communities, international communities, and virtual communities. The word "community" derives from the Latin *communitas* "community", "public spirit". Usually in social science when we refer communities we tend to say human communities with distinctive features like intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, and risks in common.

Community development is the integral part of the development process where the deprived communities have taken care of. Basically when we are talking about a particular community we actually tend to talk about the deprived in terms of their Community Initiatives is activity that goes beyond the provision, improvement and management of housing with the aim of improving the economic, social and environmental circumstances of the communities within which we operate.

6.0 Need Of Community Initiatives/ Online Community Initiatives

Information is now considered as one of the basic and vital needs of human beings. It is not only great potential as a powerful and reusable resource for the social and economic development of mankind, but also becomes an essential requirement for survival in life. Now, we are living in an information society where growths of our lives are very much dependent on information. In general information may be categorized as public information and local information. Public information works as a general reference service which makes "no discrimination in favour of specific groups". Local information service is "building up detailed local information files and publishing directories and generally acting as a signposting agency to other services". To meet the general requirements of human beings these two types of information are very much required. To disseminate these two types of information, different mechanisms are required. Because, these kinds of information are very much required to the common masses especially to the non users of information. Non-users are the "... groups of people in an affluent society who are never given the means to satisfy their needs, or are geographically cutoff from centres of provision which are theoretically open to them or are so occupied that even while surrounded by all they need never stop to enjoy it and suffer a form of (information) malnutrition...". These non-users live in an information society or information-rich society and still voluntarily suffer from information malnutrition. These non-users can become the potential user in future. These users can be proved potential for future generation. Again these non-users can be sub-divided into two groups, firstly, adamant non-users and secondly, deprived non-users. Adamant non-users are living in upper strata of social life; they may be rich and have the access to the efficient information resources but don't use the resources as they don't feel the requirement of the information. There are only few people are in the first category. Second group of users which is the major part in the society, are not able to use the proper information resources as they don't know how to use the access mechanisms and procedures. The second group of non-users is usually poor and live in rural areas and these non privileged groups are hindrances for the overall development of the country. So, the government of different nations takes initiatives to upgrade them. To equip the 75% inhabitants of the third world countries with the weapons of information, firstly we have to identify the users and non-users of information. These non-users of information may become a potential part for any country. In short, information is the basic need of life which helps us to meet the other needs like food, shelter etc. Basically without proper information the survival and development of any community is almost impossible.

7.0 Community Initiatives in West Bengal

There are numerous community-based initiatives in online mode are currently running in our state. But there are significant e-governance based initiatives are there to cater to the mass at large. Following are the major state contributed projects run the Govt of West Bengal:

- **West Bengal State Data Centre (WBSDC):** The primary objective of WBSDC is to provide essential e-services to the State Government, Line Departments and Public Sector Units. It hosts many critical mission projects related to Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS), Land Records, Commercial Tax, Stamp Registration, Excise, IFMS, etc. The Data Centre also facilitates the hosting and management of various software applications online with the use of a common centralized system.
- **West Bengal State Wide Area Network (WBSWAN):** It offers a dedicated, secure, closed user group with data encryption capabilities and has been created to provide a minimum 2 Mbps bandwidth up to the Block level. With 346 points of presence, the WBSWAN connects more than 500 offices of various departments in the State level up to the Blocks.
- **West Bengal e-District Mission:** It is a project with the objective of making the State's services available to the citizens through an online system. The services may be availed through internet personally, by visiting the nearest CSP (Customer Service Point) or a nearby Kiosk. There is no necessity to visit the Government office for submitting the application, knowing the status or receiving the certificate.

- **State Portal & Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG):** This online Single Window Portal (Silpa Sathi) provides a single window service under the applicable Acts, Rules, Policies and Schemes. It also provides all facilitations and handholding supports to the investors intending to start or operate a business in the State.
- **Crime & Criminal Tracking & Network System (CCTNS):** CCTNS is a Mission Mode Project conceptualized and sponsored by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of police departments across the country. It will create a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of policing at all levels and especially at the Police Station level through adoption of principles of e-governance on real time basis. It includes virtual connectivity of police units (linking police units at various levels within the State - police stations, district police offices, state headquarters, SCRB and other police formations) as well as horizontal connectivity (linking police functions at state and Central level to external entities).
- **Centralized e-Office:** The State government has created several employee related portals such as IFMS (Integrated Financial Management System), HRMS (Human Resource Management System), E-Pension and Workflow based File Tracking System (WFTS) which has created an open and transparent environment for the employees. The State Secretariat, Government Departments and Directorates and almost all the district magistrate offices in West Bengal have a centralized e-office system which is developed based on the Central Secretariat Manual of e-office procedures of DAR&PG. It provides a role-based access mechanism, electronic file processing system, central repository of documents with managed access, single employee directory and a centralized Management Information System.
- **e-Municipality:** The Urban Development & Municipal Affairs Department has provided a portal for the citizens to pay municipal taxes, apply for various licenses and complete the entire mutation process online. The same portal has a separate login facility for the Municipal employees from where they could access their IFMS and HRMS related issues.
- **e-Panchayat:** Under the Institutional Strengthening of Gram Panchayats Scheme (ISGPS), almost all the Gram Panchayats in West Bengal have been connected through internet facility and most of the functions are now carried out through the E-governance portal. Individual entrepreneurs are motivated to open Tathya Mitra Kendra (CSP) in the remote villages from where the ordinary villagers could apply online for various schemes at nominal costs. Such CSPs frequently double as Computer Training Centres providing much needed computer skills training to the rural youth at subsidized costs.
- **e-Land & Land Records:** West Bengal is perhaps the first State, if not the only one, to completely digitize the entire Land Records, Land Registration and Land Mutation process, with the help of the National Informatics Centre (NIC), West Bengal. The government had initiated digitization of 68386 map sheets in 2008. Initially the activity was slow but picked up in the last three years with the support of the State Government. NIC has completed 62000 map sheets. The digitization is made in layers such as area, line and point which is termed as "GIS ready digitization". All the 3 objectives were fulfilled with the software "BHUCHITRA" custom developed by NIC and implemented at all the 341 Block land offices of the State. The State has also implemented the 'On Registration Mutation Service', under the Centre's 'edharti' scheme. All the 247 Registration Offices distributed across the State has implemented Registration Process Automation System called "CORD".
- **e-Procurement:** This system enables the eligible bidders with proper credentials to download the tender schedule free of cost and then submit the bids online through the same portal (wbtenders.gov.in). This results in transparency and ease of participation and the entire tender process could be tracked online. All the stakeholders have to login using their own Digital Signature Certificates (DSC) which negates the chance of impersonation.
- **Smart Card:** The West Bengal Transport Department has developed a Smart Card (Automatic Fare Collection System) for daily commuters of government buses which functions similar to the ones used in Metro Railways. On Bus Intelligent Transport System (OBITS) and Pathadisha Mobile Application are the other innovative commuter friendly schemes for booking seats and tracking the movement of buses respectively.
- **Computerization of Court Cases (CONFONET):** The CONFONET project was implemented in the backdrop of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. It provides online information on Consumer Rights and Protection, Online Cause Lists, Online Judgements, Online Case Status and Case History and Statistical Reports (for State Commissions and Forums only). This project caters to a wide range of beneficiaries such as consumers, advocates, consumer activists, Bar Councils, members of Consumer Courts and law students.

- **Utsashree Portal:** Government of West Bengal has started a new scheme called Utsashree Prakarpa which mainly focus on schoolteachers those who are facing problems and are seeking for transfer near their Home or their own District. It is an online portal for teachers where they can request for transfer to their home district. Currently Govt. has using Utsashree (Ver 1.0) for online teacher transfer portal. The portal has become active on 2 August 2021.
- **M-Paridarshan Mobile App:** Department of School education has taken an initiative for creating an online repository of data related to Students, Teacher, and School Infrastructure under the shade of Banglarshiksha web based online platform. During last few months users related to this initiative relentlessly worked to upload over 1.3 crores student's data along with 63700 schools' basic information. Now, on the platform of such huge data already feed into the system it is most important to validate the data and make it usable from the next academic season in full phase. To perform such a huge data validation process department has taken another initiative named "Mission Banglarshiksha" during the time period 7th November-30th November 2019. The validation process will be covered through 3 web-based format and a school basic detail update format along with a mobile app based inspection format designed by the department. Web based formats will be available under ePortal and Mobile App based form will be available under mParidarshan mobile app.
- **Banglar Shiksha Portal:** The Banglar Shiksha portal, developed by the West Bengal government, offers real-time information about state-run and government-aided schools. The Banglar Shiksha portal, located at banglarshiksha.gov.in, would maintain real-time information on 1.5 crore students, 5 lakh teachers, and 1 lakh schools. It will be tested for two months to identify any bugs before becoming fully operational on May 1st, 2019. The system will make it possible for the class teacher and headmaster to access a student's academic progress. By installing the Banglar Shiksha app, parents may also get the information. The West Bengali administration is continually thinking of ways to assist its citizens. This time, the government launched the Banglar Shiksha SMS Portal App to provide faculty and staff with real-time data.
- **VAHAN (Vehicle Registration System):** is a mission mode project under Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, GOI aimed at creating national register for registered vehicles in the country. The application has been designed and developed by NIC. The Transport department, GoWB has implemented the VAHAN project with e-services application including online vehicle tax payment by citizens and Vehicle registration (new, transfers of ownership, address change, NOC, duplicate RC etc.). The application has gone live for the citizens and is being used by the department extensively for these services.

8.0 conclusion:

The state has been enlisted and provides the facilities of online access to the online community-based initiatives to cater society at large. This facility enables to provide the infrastructure for the deprived communities. It is expected that in future there may be formal channels and network to provide information to cater the basic information needs.

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