Revitalisation of Public Library System in India: A CSR Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the present day globalised world, information and its accessibility place a vital role for the development of human competency and also helps the economy in different ways. The information era with its electronic facilities will come with many challenges in all the sectors of development since information is the base for all developmental activities. Libraries and information centres and librarians will have their share of challenges and risks to partake in this major activity. To bring about this change, India will need to have a vision for the 3rd millennium and each sector will have to adopt the latest developments in information technology. This includes change in the functions of the library to make it service-oriented rather than collection of building oriented; preservation and access may be considered as vital; marketing of information and service development of library professionals to cope with new environment and to deal with the management techniques for effective functioning of library system. To strengthen the system, continuous help and support is required from different angles. The corporate social responsibility (CSR) of various companies/sectors is the one of those. The CSR not only helps the general public but also the company to get good employees for their future recruitment. This article focuses on the importance of public libraries and help to be extended through CSR funding.

Keywords: Public library system, corporate social responsibility

1. INTRODUCTION

"Libraries have a recognised 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." - National Knowledge Commission

"I'd be happy if I could think that the role of the library was sustained and even enhanced in the age of the computer."- Bill Gates

The ability of a nation to use and create knowledge as capital determines its capacity to empower and enable its citizens by increasing human capabilities. India today stands poised to reap the benefits of a rapidly growing economy and a major demographic advantage that will see the country having the largest resource of young people in the world in the next few decades. The challenge and the opportunity are to galvanise India's potential into a dynamic resource: an informed, enlightened and capable young Indian citizenry would not only enhance and enrich the processes of national development, but could be a positive force in the world. In the words of Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, "The time has come to create a second wave of institution building, and of excellence, in the fields of education, research and capability building so that we are better prepared for the 21st century."

A library is not a building stacked with books-it is a repository and source of information and ideas, a place for learning and enquiry, and for the generation of thought and the creation of new knowledge. Public libraries, in particular, have the potential to bridge the gap between the 'information poor' and the 'information rich' by ensuring that people from all sectors and settings of society and the economy across India have easy access to knowledge they seek. Public libraries also considered as community information centres providing access at local-level to a wide range of knowledge and information for the benefit of the individual and society as a whole. Historically, the public library had four functions-Informative, educational, recreational, and cultural. These functions help to strengthen the human kind[1].

The main recommendations of the National Knowledge Commission[2] on libraries are:
(a) Set up a national mission on libraries
(b) Prepare a national census of all libraries

(c) Revamp library and information science education, training and research facilities (Indian Institute of Library and Information Science)

(d) Re-assess staffing of libraries

(e) Set up a central library fund

(f) Modernise library management

(g) Encourage greater community participation in library management

(h) Promote information communication technology (ICT) applications in all libraries

(i) Facilitate donation and maintenance of private collections

(j) Encourage public-private partnerships in development of library and information services

With the internet reshaping so many aspects of our lives, it has become common for prognosticators to speculate about the ultimate demise of all sorts of institutions that many of us have come to take for granted. But still there is a future for public libraries in the internet age. Even with the vast and growing amount of information available on the internet and more competition for public funding, Americans say that public libraries will continue to play a vital role in communities. During the past several decades, there has been a major effort to upgrade technology and Internet access to bring the benefits of these new technologies to all citizens, regardless of economic circumstances. This has added further to public approval of the all important contributions of libraries[3].

2. LIBRARIES FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

When people think about their expectations of libraries today, they generally think about the traditional services that most libraries carry out so well. Topping the public's list of priorities is that the basic services they have come to expect from libraries remain free of charge to the public. They also expect libraries to have enough current books for children; numerous reference materials; and availability of friendly, and knowledgeable librarians. Libraries should offer convenient reading hours and special programmes for children, and they should have well-maintained buildings along with books and information that are organised for easy self-service. The top-ten list of public priorities for libraries also includes making available safe and productive gathering places for teenagers, being open on evenings and weekends, and having plenty of current books for adults.

Public libraries arose worldwide along with growth in education, literacy, and publications. Every country has its own public library history with influential leaders. Monarchs, wealthy people, and philanthropists have all made a contribution to society in the form of public library development. India is no exception. Libraries were established in ancient India, mainly, by the patronage extended by emperors, major capitalists, and scholars. Indian emperors and kings supported scholars and scholarship. There is evidence of well-developed libraries even in the sixth century AD. The famous Nalanda University in Bihar had its own magnificent library with a massive collection of manuscripts covering the universe of knowledge. Admission to library was restricted to scholars. Other ancient universities, such as Taxila and Vikramashila, also had valuable libraries. Muslim influence in India during the 13th century AD marked the dawn of another era of learning and scholarship. The Mughal period gave a further stimulus to the growth of libraries. Mughal rulers attached considerable importance to libraries and appointed scholars as librarians. The Mughal emperors were patrons of art and literature. In the period of Emperor Babur, Humayun, and Akbar, many new libraries were established and existing ones further developed. Mughal libraries featured magnificent buildings, rare manuscripts, and scholar librarians. The names of Maharaja Sawai Man Singh of Jaipur and Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab will be remembered with appreciation in the history of library services in India. The Maharaja of Tanjuar started the famous Saraswati Mahal Library in 17th century AD. It remains a unique institution in its nature of collection and services[4].

3. PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The public libraries play their role in economic development through their informative function which leads to a knowledge society. The role of the information provider to the public has been the resulting solution to the problem, with libraries aiming to prove themselves as vital, necessary and important providers of services. There are many views regarding how a public library can contribute towards economic development. Some believe its role is to serve as a lifelong learning institution[5]. McClure, et al.[6] believe that its role is to provide information literacy. Lozano[7] believes that the library's role is to provide information about its community. Businesses and organisations also need information. Most large businesses have their own libraries while small businesses often donot. Seeing the glorious past and present conditions of the public libraries, definitely there is a need to revitalise the system for the betterment of the future generations. In this process, government can not alone do things better but there is a need to involve each and every citizen in his might to help to strengthen the library system. Particularly, the corporate sector can do better through its philanthropic attitude. Industry has to take care of its surrounding people

and places and activities for smooth functioning of its core activities. There is strong interdependency between industry and environment. In this context, the corporate world has to have special attention through its CSR activity on these public libraries being knowledge centers.

4. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming an increasingly important activity to businesses nationally and internationally. As globalisation accelerates and large corporations serve as global providers, these corporations have progressively recognised the benefits of providing CSR programmes in their various locations. The CSR activities are now being undertaken throughout the globe. The term is often used interchangeably for other terms such as corporate citizenship and is also linked to the concept of triple bottom-line reporting (TBL), which is used as a framework for measuring an organisation's performance against economic, social and environmental parameters. The rationale for CSR has been articulated in a number of ways. In essence it is about building sustainable businesses, which need healthy economies, markets and communities.

The CSR also called corporate conscience, corporate citizenship, social performance, or sustainable responsible business/responsible business) is a form of corporate self-regulation integrated into a business model[8]. The CSR policy functions as a built-in, self-regulating mechanism whereby a business monitors and ensures its active compliance with the spirit of the law, ethical standards, and international norms. The term 'corporate social responsibility' came into common use in the late 1960s and early 1970s after many multinational corporations formed the term stakeholder, meaning those on whom an organisation's activities have an impact.

The CSR is not new to India; companies like Tata and Birla have been imbibing the case for social good in their operations for decades-long before CSR become a popular cause. Inspite of having such life-size successful examples, the CSR in India is in a very nascent stage. It is still one of the least understood initiatives in the Indian development sector. It is followed by a handful of public companies as dictated by the very basis of their existence, and by a few private companies, with international shareholding as this is the practice followed by them in their respective foreign country.

Thus, the situation is far from perfect as the emphasis is not on social good but rather on a policy that needs to be implemented. Proponents argue that corporations make more long-term profits by operating with a perspective, while critics argue that CSR distracts from the economic role of businesses. Others argue CSR is merely window-dressing, or an attempt to pre-empt the role of governments as a watchdog over powerful multinational corporations.

A lack of understanding, inadequately trained personnel, non-availability of authentic data and specific information on the kinds of CSR activities, coverage, policy, etc., further adds to the reach and effectiveness of CSR programmes. But the situation is changing. The CSR is coming out of the purview of 'doing social good' and is fast becoming a 'business necessity'. The 'business case' for CSR is gaining ground and corporate houses are realising that 'what is good for workers-their community, health, and environment is also good for the business'.

5. STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

In every company, there are number of stakeholders for which the company has to satisfy their basic needs for the well-being of the company. These stakeholder groups form the basis of success and failure of the business. Stakeholders both primary and secondary are individuals or groups that have interests, rights, or ownership in an organisation and its activities. Customers, suppliers, employees, and shareholders are example of primary stakeholder groups. Each has interest in how an organisation performs or interacts with them. These stakeholder groups can benefit from a company's success and can be harmed by its mistakes.

Secondary stakeholders are also important because they can take action that can damage or assist the organisation. Secondary stakeholders include governments (especially through regulatory agencies), unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), activities, political action groups, and media. To serve their stakeholders in an ethical and social manner, more and more organisations are adapting the model of CSR.

When an organisation builds ethical and social elements in its operating philosophy and integrate them in its business model, it is said to have possessed a self-regulating mechanism that guides, monitors, and ensures its adherence to law, ethics, and norms in carrying out business activities that ensures the serving of the interest of all external and internal stakeholders. In other words, the objective of being socially responsible business is achieved when its activities meet or exceed the expectations of all its stakeholders.

Human beings are considered both as primary stakeholders as employees and also as secondary stakeholders as public. Libraries play vital role in strengthening the skills and competencies of these citizens by providing right information and guidance to shape up their future career. In this context, the corporate world has to consider for the development of public libraries in addition to their internal libraries. Management of these libraries is also important in

appointing the qualified person to manage these libraries. Required latest technology has to be provided with sufficient funds. Outside good practices have to be borrowed and implemented effectively.

6. CONCLUSIONS

India now has become one of the most developing countries in the world. It spreads in various fields of knowledge and disseminates its resources to the world. It has also established public libraries and community information centers to give and help local community to acquire information from various agencies. Public library services have been expanded to serve the local people, but after 65 years of independence India, public libraries could not be administered and managed with the clear mandate of law in many states of India. There is every need to strengthen this system by using CSR mode and better management techniques.

Government has to bring a stringent law for implementation of funds under CSR. As libraries are knowledge centers, the government and corporate world have to a have special consideration by funding them liberally.

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