

RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARY AS A COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE CENTRE: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract : This paper discusses the different extension services offered by the library forums and community service programs conducted by the library. Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library, situated in Kannur district, Kerala is providing tremendous innovative and praiseworthy services. All these services in effect reflected in the overall upliftment of the community it serves. These services are oriented towards children, students, parents, and senior citizens in establishing a thriving community. The rural community of Valapattanam considers this library as a community hub where they can socially engage through entertainment, educational and recreational activities and sets an example on how the participation of community itself can help the library provide the necessary services. This study briefly investigates the use of social networking platforms among the library and the community for updating their activities and services. The study reveals that the library offers various social outreach programs for children, teens, women, and senior residents. The findings indicate, the Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library is an overall model for all the public rural libraries, which is government funded community integrated knowledge centre for the rural people by catering the extraordinary services and programs.

Keywords: Rural Public Library, Community Knowledge Centre, Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library, Extension services, Community support programs, Social networking platforms.

1.0 Introduction

The rural library is a good component of the public library system, termed as "people's university" and "Arsenals of democracy". The current library services we have in our country owe their origin to the west. The concept of a rural library is a phenomenon of the 20th century, especially in India. Rural library as a centre of a social, educational, and cultural hub for the local community needs strengthening and developed to facilitate the best services to the general public of the community (Kunhambu&Mudhol, 2015). In the perception of the Indian context, the majority of Indians resides in rural areas and is engaged in agriculture and small-scale industry. Illiteracy is a curse for the country's social, cultural, and economic development, and it leads to poverty. Therefore, the country's growth depends on the improvements of the rural masses; hence the development of the rural groups can be achieved by resolving the problems of the rural community. Information is considered an inevitable tool for the development of any society. It is a fundamental resource for all intellectual activities, cultural, socio, economic and political development.

Rural libraries play a pivotal role in the development of rural areas by providing knowledge-based information dissemination services to a variety of public groups on social, political, economic, cultural, and other topics. Rural libraries serve a critical role in the well-being of rural communities. By satisfying inhabitants' information requirements and assisting them with day-to-day problem-solving, the rural library can function as a community information centre, helping them improve their living conditions and quality of life. The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) asserts that good education and free and unfettered access to knowledge, ideas, culture, and information are essential for constructive participation and the growth of democracy. The manifesto's missions include ensuring people's access to a variety of Community information services and promoting the development of information and computer literacy skills. Despite the fact that "Rural Library" is not a distinct term, it is a branch of public librarianship, there is a need to devote special attention to rural libraries in India. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to look into the Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library's successful functioning model, including its information sources, extension services, and rural community support programs.

2.0 Literature Review

Lenstra (2021) explored how tiny and remote public libraries facilitated social connectedness among older people during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States. Small and rural public libraries should prioritize strengthening inter-organizational relationships with other institutions that assist older people, according to the finding. Varghese and Thirunavukkarasu (2021) examined the role of the public library in society's sustainable development. The study looked into the library's initiatives to encourage people to read and learn new things during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Koteswara Rao (2019) published a research titled Public Libraries in India: Issues and Prospects, which emphasizes the importance and necessity of public libraries in a knowledge society. The paper explores the current status of public libraries and the numerous causes that have contributed to the system's failure. The study recommended specific structural adjustments and corrective actions to enable public libraries to serve customers with critical information services. Seppanen et al. (2019) researched the public value and performance of libraries. The study discusses how libraries' roles as important knowledge hubs in the information society are changing. The empirical Context of Finland was used to demonstrate the paper's primary claims. The study generated two concepts that will drive future research in the field. First, new indicators and assessment procedures are required to completely analyze the libraries' common values. Second, hold a performance discourse with the relevant interest group to establish the library's public value.

Singh (2017) examined the significance of public libraries in community formation. The study discusses rural development, libraries and information centres, rural libraries and community information centres, research and advocacy, information literacy, and reading habits. Fischer (2015) examined the management of rural and small-town libraries. The findings of a 2015 survey of librarians working in small town and rural public libraries across the United States are presented in this report. The purpose of this research was to investigate if library facilities in low-population areas had improved, as well as what administrative challenges these librarians encountered. Financial conditions have improved or will improve in the future, according to the survey, and the most onerous administrative issue is staffing. Studies related to the rural libraries and rural communities of Nigeria were conducted by Nkechi (2015); Omeluzor, Oyovwe-Tinuoye, and Emeka-Ukwu (2017); and Momodu (2012). Rural libraries' involvement in youth development, rural libraries and information services, and rural libraries' role in community development in Nigeria were all highlighted. Many of the adolescents who are registered in rural libraries do not make considerable use of the library's resources, according to the study. Due to a lack of up-to-date information resources, a lack of awareness, illiteracy, a language barrier, a lack of qualified workers, and insufficient infrastructure and facilities, libraries were clearly failing to meet the information demands of rural communities. Local government councils should be given the right to build and fund libraries in their communities, allowing library services to reach the people. **Sultana (2014) investigated the Rural Library Services of five West Bengal Rural Public Libraries. The study discovered that the number of people who use magazines is higher than those who use other services. Nonetheless, the value of library benefits from magazines is lower than the value of other services.** Through an in-depth research of one such library in Uganda, Stranger-Johannessen (2009) explored and investigated the topic of rural Community libraries (RCLs) in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings of the study show that older students visit the library more frequently. The number of books read in other languages is determined by the education of the parents, and the greater their parents' education, the more probable their children will prefer to read in English.

3.0 Need for Rural Libraries

Like other basic needs of the people, information is another essential requirement. But the people who are living in rural areas are far away from attaining basic information needs. There is a need for a rural library to improve the quality of life and the potential of rural people to participate in a knowledge-based society. The role of the rural library in the dissemination of knowledge and information to the rural population is critical. Rural libraries with all of the necessary facilities are needed for the benefit of rural people and to support rural activities. By providing vital information, rural libraries assist the rural community in keeping their knowledge current. Thus, there is a need for rural libraries, which help uplift the rural community. (Abu et.al, 2011)

To achieve its objectives and works rural library performs different functions as:

- Intellectual learning Centre
- culture preservation Centre
- Information dissemination Centre
- Recreation Centre
- Lifelong learning Centre

Libraries are now developing new forms of works in addition to other publicity strategies. Aside from the fact that they are immediately educational or enjoyable, they also lead to advertising as a necessary secondary product. These activities are referred to as library extension services. The library attracts readers by converting itself into a social centre. The library may organize a lecture, a music concert, puppet show, a drama, a magic

show, celebration of a local festival, a story hour etc.

- The extension services may take the following forms:
- To organize reading circles
- To offer meeting place for local learned organizations
- To arrange public drama, puppet show, music concert, film, magic show, etc.
- To organize reading to illiterates from books or other materials.
- Skill development classes
- Classes for competitive examinations.

4.0 Rural libraries In India

The first All India Rural Library Conference and exhibition was held in Madras. The rural library movement spread to other provinces. A few leaders also emerged who shook off the indifference to vernacular literature and classics and promoted folklore and ballads, harikathas, a play called 'street dramas'. The adult education training school was opened in the Rural Library and reading room, inviting scholars in vernacular languages on different branches of knowledge. Travelling libraries in the form of bicycle and boat library services were introduced to help villagers and farmers by providing the books etc., that they demanded. But unfortunately, with the priority given to higher education since independence, the role of public libraries in rural development was not emphasized. The role of public libraries as key to education has not been placed in priority programs in educational plans or national Adult Education programs initiated in 1978. Only the Government has recognized the role of a rural library as a social elevation program of the rural masses. A rural library should provide all types of information to citizenship and living standards connected with rural development. It should render library service accessible to all community sections irrespective of any consideration and maintain legislative support.

Rural libraries, especially in Malabar, have unique political and social phenomena. The British rulers in Malabar had long had a negative attitude toward libraries because they were the hubs of political activity. As a result, unlike in Travancore and Cochin, these libraries were not eligible for government funding. With the declaration of independence, everything changed. In Malabar, a Library Act was enacted for the first time in India in 1948. Malabar local library authorities were established as a result, with district education officers serving as secretaries. Local library administrations were established in the districts of Kannur, Calicut, and Palakkad after 1959. Several libraries were created on their initiative.

5.0 Objectives

The main research objective is to investigate the role of the rural public library in building a knowledge society through a rural community. Specifically, it attempts to:

- ❖ To find the extension services provided by the library.
- ❖ To investigate local rural community participation in the library services and programs.
- ❖ To explore the different community support programs of the library and how they utilize the social networking platforms.

6.0 Methodology

A personal interview of the librarian was conducted to acquire primary data. Observation methods and questionnaires were used. The questionnaires were prepared after consulting with experts. The investigator visited Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library, and questionnaires were distributed among the users. Personnel statistics, budget, community involvement, programs, technology, managerial issues, and how to tackle the organization's problems were among the areas highlighted. It was challenging to study the whole population. Library records were thoroughly inspected to determine the activities of the library.

7.0 Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library

Valapattanam is a small town in Kerala, India. It is located in the Kannur district. It is also Kerala's smallest Panchayath. It covers an area of 2.04 square kilometres. It is located about 7 kilometres north of Kannur. In Kannur, Valapattanam is an important Muslim settlement region. Valapattanam is well-known for its community spirit. On one bank, there is the Kalarivathukkal Temple, while on the other; there is the "Kakkulangara Mosque." Balyapattanam is another name for this town. This town is located on the banks of the Valapattanam River, which served as the key shipping route for centuries. Valapattanam was the main town. As a result, the town has earned the moniker "Valya pattanam," which translates to "large town" in Malayalam. According to a report provided by Census India in 2011, the Valapattanam Census Town has a population of 7,955, with 3,677 men and 4,278 women. 13.54% of the total population in Valapattanam are children aged between 0 and 6 years.

Valapattanam Grama Panchayath library is situated right at the heart of the Valapattanam village. The library is credited as an A grade library by the Kerala state library council. T.M. Ramaswamy, the then Deputy Director of Municipal Councils and Local Boards, supported the library's establishment on November 5, 1950, with a contribution of Rs. 400/-. The library hired a full-time librarian in 1970. The Kerala State Library Council awarded the library the "Aksharajwala Award" in 2014-15. In Kannur Taluk, the Valapattanam Grama Panchayath library

earned the best library award in 2018. Binoy Mathew, the librarian, was awarded the Kerala Academic Library Association's "Best Young Librarian Award" in 2018-19.

Table No.1 Library Statistics

Year	2018	2019	2020
Members	967	1200	1280
Book collection	10683	12134	12237
Periodicals	22	22	23
Newspapers	11	11	11
CD/DVD	311	311	311

8.0 Extension Services of Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library

The extension services are efforts of the library to increase the number of its users to make the maximum use of its resources, services, and utility. Every year government allows Rs12000/- for conducting various programs. These programs attract the public to the library and finally become beneficiaries of its resources. The Valapattanam Panchayath library mainly has four library forums to coordinate community support programs and activities. They are:

8.1 Balavedhi: It is a forum for the children. It's an unofficial gathering of kids who get together to sing, play games, do experiments, observe things, and learn about science skills. It's a children's forum where fresh educational approaches and experiences are shared. The purpose of the forum is to inspire youngsters to engage in and lead various educational and cultural initiatives. The library forum members are responsible for purchasing books for the children's collection. The Balavedhi is most busy during the summer holidays.

Table No.2. Activities of Balavedhi

Programs	Details
Walk with a mentor	It is a program that provides free mentoring support to children. Mentors are individuals who are expert in a particular field , interacts with children to encourage them.
Vimukthi	It is an anti-narcotics campaign launched by the Government of Kerala to highlight the seriousness of drugs and alcohol and to create awareness among the youth.
Workshops	Program to teach hands-on skills to children
Drama classes	Classes for children to understand the fundamentals of acting and stagecraft
Drawing classes	Classes for children who are interested in drawing
Kinakootam	Programs conducted during the vacation period for children
Origami	Program conducted to teach the art of paper folding, which is associated with Japanese culture.
Children's book house	A small book house created in the Valapattanam park by children. Anyone can borrow a book for free or take a book by replacing it with another book. It is a type of honesty box.
Library diary	Diaries are distributed to children to record their experience and observations in the library and its activities. The diaries are later checked by the library and given awards.
National/international day programs	Programs by children to celebrate national/international days
Reading competitions	Reading competitions are held for children to encourage their reading skills

8.2 Vanithavedhi: It's a women's forum that meets on a regular basis to talk about new women's initiatives and plan campaigns. Vanithavedhi runs initiatives to empower women by encouraging them to develop unique abilities and assisting them in their daily lives. Vanithavedhi encourages women to be self-assured and self-sufficient.

Table No.3. Activities of Vanithavedhi

Programs	Details
School for parents	It is a program conducted by Vanithavedhi for parents. It is a valuable program that provide guidance on how to interact with children and to understand the psychology of children
Seminars on women safety	Seminars are held on women's safety and empowerment. Classes on self-defense, safety in workplace, etc...
Workshops	Women's workshop organizes projects, learning and support for and with women, helping them break down barriers, achieves their goals.
Book discussion	A Program in which a group of women get together to discuss a book or books they've read and express their thoughts, likes, and dislikes.
National/international day programs	Programs conducted to celebrate national and international days

8.3 Yuvasamithi: It is a youth forum based in Kerala, working along with Kerala Shashtra Sahithya Parishath(KSSP) to inculcate scientific temper among youth. It is an organization with a focus upon providing activities and socialization. Their primary mission is to develop and engage diverse young people to positively impact the world.

Table No.4. Activities of Yuvasamithi

Programs	Details
Iftar Sanghamam	People in the community gather together to celebrate the end of Ramadan fast. Dishes are prepared and eaten to break the fast.
Screening of football world cup	Football world cup was screened to the users in the conference room with projector.
Flood relief programs	Lends a helping hand to areas which was seriously impacted by flood in 2019 by providing necessary items to the flood relief camps.
National/international day programs	Programs conducted to celebrate national and international days
Seminars	Seminars are conducted regularly in different areas of subject.
Vimukthi	It is an anti-narcotics campaign launched by the Government Of Kerala to highlight the seriousness of drugs and alcohol and to create awareness among the youth.
Competitive exam coaching	Coaching's are given by subject experts to the students for different competitive exams.
Training and Orientation Classes (PSC)	Classes are conducted give training and orientation to students.

8.4 Vayojanavedhi : It is a forum introduced to set up a stage for the elderly where they could interact and find happiness. Vayojanavedhi works to protect the elderly through advocacy, education, legal help, health care services, etc. The forum conducts programs to keep the senior citizens active and their mind engaged.

Table No.5. Activities of Vayojanavedhi

Programs	Details
Medical checkups	Medical checkups are given to the senior citizens by collaborating with hospitals and other organizations.
Memory project	It is a new program introduced by the library to provide younger generations with the knowledge and experience of the older generation.

9.0 Community Support Programs

Community support programs are community-based initiatives aimed at fostering a healthy and sustainable society. Libraries are critical components of a thriving community. The library provides a feeling of location for gathering by providing opportunities for people to obtain jobs, discover new fields, experience new ideas, and get lost in beautiful stories through its community support programs. Non-formal education initiatives are frequently included in community support activities. The library's community support initiatives are run in partnership with the Balavedhi, Vanithavedhi, Yuvasamithi, and Vayojanavedhi library forums. The main programs undertaken by the library are community awareness programs, training programs, quiz competitions, student support programs, etc.

Collection development of the Library solely rests in the hands of balavedhi. books for the children's collection are purchased from book festivals and exhibitions. All the library forums take up various activities to enlighten the community of different support programs and services. Student support programs like free competitive examination coaching has attracted vast majority of the students towards the library. Candidates from outside the panchayath vicinity also makes use of this opportunity. Quiz competitions, debates, recitals, drawing competition are regularly conducted to show case the talents of the young patrons of the library. In order to cultivate the enthusiastic minds of the children, Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library provides orientation classes for different batches of classes from schools located in Valapattanam Panchayath and outside. Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library considers itself not only as a community knowledge centre but as also as a place of leisure. Film shows and sport matches are viewed in the library in order to have an interactive community and to help the individuals to relax from the busy world.

9.1 Use of technology and Social networking platforms by library

The library has an Internet connection, which is utilized for library purposes. The computer and internet are also available to users. The library's housekeeping activities are managed using Koha software. Valapattanam library is equipped with computers, a television, a printer, and a projector. A reprographic service is also available at the library. The Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library, despite being a small rural library, has a global reach. The library uses social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, Blogspot, and YouTube to provide insight into specific materials and collections, as well as to educate and promote what is available, whether it is the details of initiatives such as seminars, debates, classes, or the library forums' agenda.

Facebook is utilized to provide information about the library's programs. Through its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/library.vpm/about>), the library presented new programs including Creative Homes and Kutty Views during the Covid 19 Lockdown period. Children's engagement in activities is encouraged through the use of Creative Home, a virtual platform. The platform is divided into seven distinct categories, each with its own name. Each team is allocated a mentor who will provide instructions and guidance. They can listen to a selection of experts from across the world via this online platform. They are given instructions to film a variety of undertakings, including poetry and craft making. Birdwatching, etc. 'Kutty views' are virtual news reading, discussion and debate programs introduced as an initiative of Balavedhi. Children are assigned the task of reading the news and discussing current events throughout the world. In April 2020, the Valapattanam GP Library launched a YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/valapattanamgplibrary>) to share the library's activities with the public. There are around 478 subscriptions and 12465 views. The library opened a BlogSpot page in April 2020 (<https://valapattanamgplibrary.blogspot.com/Library>). The blog currently has 37 entries and 7700 views. A Telegram group called 'Library Career Warriors' was created to assist students taking competitive tests. With the help of Karma UAE, the Valapattanam Grama Panchayath library held quiz tournaments on the WhatsApp platform. During the Covid- 19 pandemic, the Valapattanam Grama Panchayath Library used these social networking platforms to provide health information literacy-oriented library services.

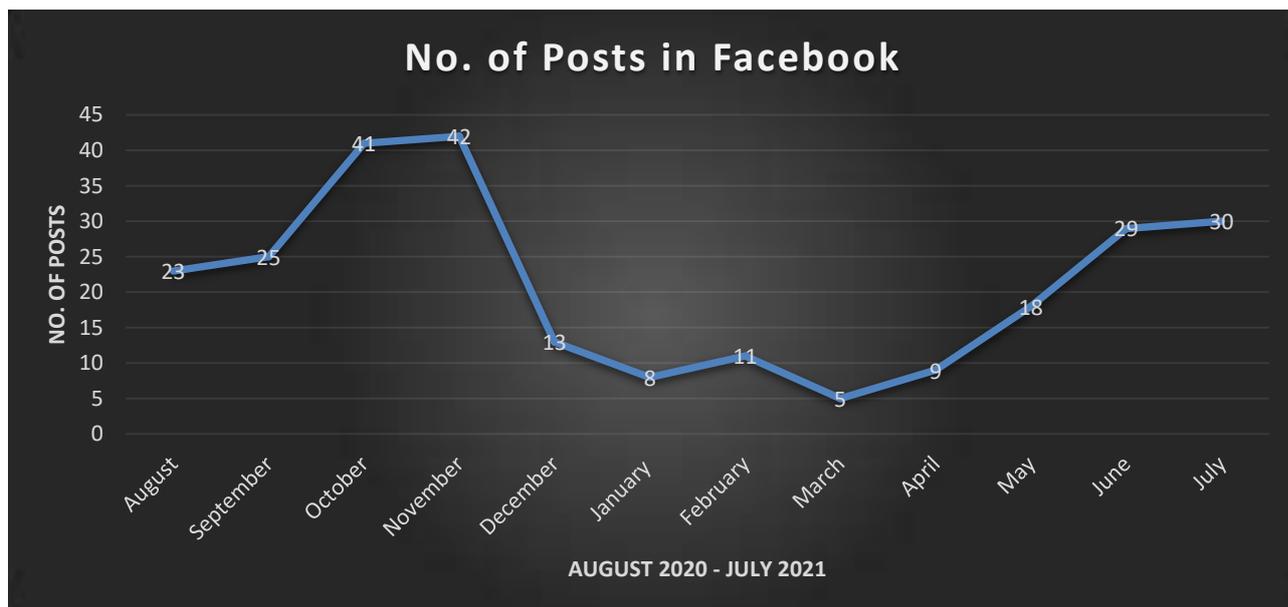


Figure No.1. Number of posts in Facebook by the library during 2020-2021

The Valapattanam Grama Panchayath library makes good use of the social media platform. Between 2020 and 2021, the library published 254 entries about its community support programs and other services in Facebook. Users also contributed their videos. The library has gained new clients and communicated its contribution to the rural community because of its active use of social networking platforms.

10.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that by providing information and community services to the rural community, rural libraries play a significant role in the socioeconomic development of rural areas. The illiterate, neo literate, semi-skilled, children and teens, homemakers, and others should all have access to the rural library. Libraries in rural areas should be able to give free computer and information technology access. Libraries should assist users in locating information, resulting in a more informed community. Rural libraries can serve as a community hub for lifelong learning and literacy, as well as a link between individuals, groups, and government. The rural library should play a vital role in approving the use of leisure of the rural folk. It will serve as a centre of recreation, a centre for culture, and a centre for sustainable self-education.

The Valapattanam Grama Panchayath library is critical to the Panchayath's socioeconomic and cultural growth. The library encourages its customers to demonstrate their potential in the community through community support initiatives. Social networking platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, telegram, YouTube, and blogs are utilized by the library to provide insight regarding their activities and services to the public. Children and youth should learn through both formal and non-formal education, according to Valapattanam Library. The library becomes a community centre because of this concept. The Valapattanam Grama Panchayath library can be regarded a community knowledge centre because of its attempts to establish a progressive community.

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