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8-3-2021

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Thomas, Tibin; M K, Joseph; Nazar, Laya; Ravi, Sreekutty; and P V, Vijesh, "Engaging in Community Development Practices, Public Libraries as Flagship Bearers: A case study of Mulanthuruthy Public Library in Ernakulum District, Kerala, India" (2021). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 6119.  
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# **Engaging in Community Development Practices, Public Libraries as Flagship Bearers: A case study of Mulanthuruthy Public Library in Ernakulum District, Kerala, India**

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## **Abstract**

Libraries are reservoirs of information, curated and systematically organized to be accessible to the community to meet their knowledge and leisure needs. It is a one-stop location that provides access to a wide range of information, knowledge and references. Public Library is defined as “a library which is accessible to the public and generally funded from a public source as its name suggests, it is for the people, by the people, and of the people”. Libraries can contribute to a lot of the development of the local community. The interventions they can make in a community is tremendous. Community development happens due to various processes coming together, such as empowerment, capacity building, and rural development, achieving self-sufficiency, and developing community self-sufficiency. To realize the same, collective action, ownership, and improved circumstances are basic. With community development, what is achieved is economic development and improved living standards and the capacity for change for a better future. This paper is a case study of Mulanthuruthy Public Library in Ernakulum district in Kerala, India. The case study is focusing on the role of public libraries in community development. The article emphasizes the various initiatives, programs, and activities done by the library and how those programs and actions contributed to a change in the community. The library promotes an extensive amount of activities in the community that foster the skills and qualities of life of people in the community and its development in multiple dimensions.

**Keywords:** Public Libraries, Community Development, Peoples University, Library Extension Initiatives, Community Involvement, Social Trust, Information Services

## 1. Introduction

Libraries are reservoirs of information, curated and systematically organized to be accessible to the community to meet their knowledge and leisure needs. It is a one-stop location that provides access to a wide range of information, knowledge and references. Public Library is defined as “a library which is accessible to the public and generally funded from a public source as its name suggests, it is for the people, by the people, and of the people”. It exists for the various requirements of humanity and plays a vital role in the preservation and transfer of human culture, knowledge and social customs. UNESCO outlines the public library as the local gateway to knowledge that provides an essential condition for lifelong learning and independent decision-making in cultural development and social groups. The UNESCO manifesto also states that it should be an institution established under the clear mandate of law maintained fully from the public fund, offering all its services free of cost and open for all. The origin of the public library service vests in antiquity with the first recording of human thought. The institution that could preserve such ideas for future use gradually became referred to by the term library. Ever since, the essential functions of all libraries remained the same collection, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge (UNESCO manifesto, 2005).

Mulanthuruthy Public Library (MPL), Register number: 7/KYR/1208, located in Mulanthuruthy grama panchayath, Kannayanoor block in Ernakulam district, Kerala, India, was established in 1932. This library is not just a place to read and lend books. Many public engagements have been undertaken by the library in recent years, creating positive outcomes in the locality. The library was operating in the old building that was built in 1932. M.T Vasudevan Nair, a prolific and versatile writer in modern Malayalam literature, laid the foundation stone for the new building on 24 October 2004. The inauguration of the new building was held on 11 November 2006. Organic farming of paddy and pea, a medical library for medical students, magazines for students of Government Higher Secondary School Mulanthuruthy, Women library, production and distribution of LED bulbs, Soaps, hand washes, detergents, lotions, and Cloth bags under “*Vanithavedi*”, the women group of MPL are some of the socially productive activities initiated by the library. As per the data on 31.03.2018 library owns a total of 20262 books worth Rs.1007473. There are 3184 members in the library with 171-lifetime members. Library holds 3.5 cents of land and a building as fixed asset having market value of Rs.52 lakhs. Three groups are working under Mulanthuruthy public library, *Vanithavedi*, for women Baalavedi, for children and *Vayojanavedi*, a forum of elderly to promote the community-based groups attached to the library (Mulanthuruthy Public Library, 2009). This case study has analyzed the context and the activities and interventions done by Mulanthuruthy Public Library (MPL) for the last three years, from 2015 to 2018.

## 2.0 Review of Related Literature

The article by (Abu et al., 2011) sees the public library as a social and social foundation that offers a consistently changing scope of social assets for the local area. It is a report on some early discoveries of an examination concerning rustic public libraries' local area advancement commitment in Australia and Malaysia. Public library's role in local area advancement in contribution to local development found in the accompanying manners; (1) Libraries give a climate for individuals collaborating with different individuals who might not typically be their

companions or associates (2) Serving as a significant asset for meeting the enlightening necessities of the local area (3) Role in building social capital in their networks by giving a public space where residents can accumulate and chip away at individual and local area issues. (4) Public libraries should turn into a vital piece of local area financial improvement devoted to improving overall personal satisfaction. The vast majority of the projects, administrations, and exercises are equipped with the necessities and assumptions for the local area individuals. The local area accepts that the country public library makes a binding commitment to the local area, particularly kids. (Monika Elbert, David Fuegi & Ugne Lipeikaite, 2012) the investigation centers around the impression of public and neighborhood partners and general society in open libraries in six nations about the capability of public libraries and to see how these partners could best be emphatically affected to make, asset, uphold, or utilize public libraries. The examination found that seventy-four per cent of library clients discussed their library client experience, chiefly with companions or grown-up relatives. The vital explanation behind utilizing libraries is instruction. Administrators see libraries to be principally tending to school focused requirements and consider clients are profiting most in procuring new abilities just as acquiring new things. The examination gives a wealthy group of information to begin conversations with partners about the job that libraries play locally and their potential for guaranteeing the turn of events and the maintainability of library administrations. (Lamani M.B, Talawar A. B & Kumbar B.D., 2014), have directed an investigation that breaks down the current status of the local focal library in Dharwad. They have likewise considered the public library as a local area data focus. The public libraries have a job in local area improvement, and a public library has to satisfy the data prerequisite of a local area. The investigation shows that the area focal library has neglected to give local area data administration to the local area. (Krishnamurthy, C., Hadagali, G.S. & Jamdar, M., 2012) have led an investigation that shows the significance of local libraries in improving country networks and the job of rustic libraries as local area data focuses. The examination likewise features the public authority projects of Karnataka state for the advancement of provincial territories. The paper underlines the part of regional libraries in making mindfulness among the local area as local area data focus, giving data about various projects and plans of the public authority. (Scott, R., 2011) in the article, the writer expresses the five parts of public libraries as offices of local area advancement: (1) how libraries fill in as a medium to get to data and learn. (2) How libraries uphold social incorporation and value. (3) How libraries advance local area commitment. (4) How libraries empower monetary imperativeness inside the local area. The article shows instances of library local area improvement. The report likewise shows a few procedures that libraries used to make and execute programs successfully, bringing about the formation of a library local area. (Behera, K. & Parida, B., 2014) This study stress language for document reading, time preference, reading place preference and reasons for not reading. The objective of this study is to determine and regarding information of society for benefit by different communities in day to day life. Study analysis of basic information about library awareness, status, facilities in rural areas by the various communities. The membership of libraries and reasons for not using the libraries by the communities. The tenacity of the users to visit the library, usage statics, and preferred library materials. The sources of benefit by users impact socio-economic development as global information of social, cultural, political and economic help by the library. (Ruksana Sultana, 2014) the paper shows the little attention given to the rural libraries in West Bengal, though they can play in the overall development of west Bengal. It has been observed that the rural public libraries in West Bengal have not yet

developed up to the mark. The rural community are the victim of these developments, and they are not having any individual means of becoming literate. The people are suffering from information poverty. The paper examines the status of services provided by the rural public libraries, looks at the roles and sources of funding of these rural public libraries and identifies problems faced by them. The paper studied how far a public library's activity in practice contributes to attaining its social objectives. (Niti Mollah, 2013) In the article, the writer investigates the techniques for transforming rustic libraries into local data habitats. The creator recommends that it is compulsory to outfit rural libraries to give the necessary kind of data to the individuals locally. The country libraries should provide data and information about cultivating, showcasing, wellbeing and cleanliness, and other local area concerns. The panchayath can assume the part of the nodal organization in stretching out the critical data administrations to the local area. (Dr. A. Seeran, Dr. A. P. Shanmugam & Dr. R. Kathirvel, 2014) This examination manages the effect of local area improvement through the public library in the Salem region. The Centre was to discover the client's disposition towards the motivation behind visiting the public library, distinguishing well-being-related data, family-related data, horticulture-related data, customer-related data, and fulfilling data. It is observed that among the respondents (220), 50 % of respondents (110) are utilizing the public library to peruse the book and different materials. About 74.55% get data from the library about immunization, most of the respondents 142 (64.55%) get data about marriage, most of the respondents 166 (75.45%) of the clients fulfilled in Consumer rights, most of the respondents 174 (79.09%) of the clients are happy with the new cultivating strategies.

## **2.1. Need for Public Libraries**

Setting up public libraries is to meet the requirements and needs of the community towards the goal of an informed and educated democratic society. Through this, the libraries serve the higher purpose of contributing resources, both material and human, which adds to the nation's growth. The Right to Information is any citizen's right as guaranteed by the Constitution. Reading is the best way to increase and improve one's knowledge, remain aware of the world's happenings, and develop critical thinking. Through their great material resources, public libraries help the people achieve the above mentioned irrespective of caste, creed, gender, sex, religion, nationality, culture, languages, colour, socio-eco-political status. Libraries in the country's rural contexts have a lot of importance considering the service provided to the rural community ranging from solving day to day problems to getting the information. Therefore, rural libraries improve the quality, capability, and potential of the people. More rural libraries with all the required facilities will positively change the people's standard of life and the nation's growth. (B D Kumbar & Manohar B Lamini, 2014)

## **2.2. Community Development**

"Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much" – Helen Keller. Human beings exist together. A community can be a group of people with something in common. It doesn't always have to be defined by geographical or physical boundaries. Sometimes it can be just the little interests that form a community. Development is another word that is often associated with certain specific factors such as growth or expansion. Development needs not be that always. It can be the overall well-being of an individual or a group. Community

development aims to develop the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities focusing on marginalized people. Solutions to community problems are designed by local people based on their local knowledge, resources, and needs. Moreland and Lovett (1997) see community development as a learning process that involves people in experiences from which they will learn ways of enhancing their capacity for self-directed activity and destiny. Community development is described as "the process of animation that gives rise to a process of self-education, the essence of which is a heightening of the capacity for self-determination. (Draper, 1971)

Effective community development should be:

- A long-term attempt.
- Properly planned.
- Comprehensive and reasonable
- Holistic and assimilated into the bigger picture
- Initiated and reinforced by community members
- Grounded in the experience that leads to best practices

Community development helps to build community capacity to address issues, take advantage of opportunities, find common ground, and balance competing interests. It does not just happen – capacity building requires both a conscious and a conscientious effort to do something (or many things) to improve the community. *Community development* is a process in which community members create jobs, income, and infrastructure and help the community manage change. *Community development* is a process that increases choices. It creates an environment where people can exercise their full potential to lead productive, creative lives. (Ron Shaffer, 1989) Community development is often associated with community capacity building, community vitality, empowerment, rural development, or self-reliance. The essential elements of collective action, ownership, and improved circumstances are common to all these ideas. *Community development* is a process that leads to not only more jobs, income, and infrastructure but also communities that are better able to manage change. Community members can better mobilize existing skills, reframe problems, work cooperatively and use community assets in new ways. (Jim Cavaye, 2006). Mulanthuruthy Public Library (MPL) has demonstrated the power of people's organizations in realizing local development through the concerted efforts of the people. Besides its conventional library-related functions, MPL has been involved in the problems and challenges faced by its members, resulting in designing and implementing various innovative community development projects in the locality.

### **3. Novel Initiatives of Mulanthuruthy Public Library: A Journey from 2015 -18**

#### **3.1 Magazine: Marivil; an initiative for school students**

MPL publishes a magazine named *Marvel*, which includes the various literary works of students in the Government Higher Secondary School Mulanthuruthy. The library has published Magazines comprising essays, short stories, poems, drawings and paintings of children. Several magazines are given to the students free of cost to promote the reading habits among the children. MPL spends Rs.8000 on this project every year. The main objective is to develop and nurture the skills of students in creative writing.

#### **3.2 Medical library**

The cost of medical books are very high; hence many students could not afford to buy textbooks. There is a medical library in MPL for medical students; it is a remarkable collection of medical books in multiple fields. Most of the medical and paramedical students of the locality come to the library to read and lend books.

### **3.3 Restoration of paddy cultivation in the locality**

Mulanthuruthy was a rural village that gave importance to farming and agriculture as the dominant livelihood option of the people. The major agricultural commodities were Paddy, Coconut, and Rubber. During the 1980s, the conversion of paddy fields into landed properties on a large scale for housing and commercial purposes was due to the increase in population, which severely affected Mulanthuruthy's paddy production. From 1980 to 2010, many paddy fields got filled up and converted into land for housing and business purposes. After 2010 Kerala state government initiated actions to control the conversion of agricultural land for housing and other commercial purposes to promote paddy cultivation. Since many farmers kept their paddy fields uncultivated for a longer time, their fertile lands became almost wastelands. In 2016 the newly elected Mulanthuruthy Grama Panchayath (MGP) committee came forward to promote the restoration of paddy lands back to farming. The Panchayat committee began initiatives to restore paddy cultivation in the locality. Mulanthuruthy Public Library (MPL) worked with MGP hand in hand in all the ecosystem restoration initiatives, including paddy cultivation, to ensure local food security. The MPL board members interacted with the owners of the 50 acres of *Chengola* paddy fields. 80% of them showed an interest in restarting paddy cultivation. Since there was no paddy cultivation for the last 30 years in the locality, the organizers faced many difficulties converting the land suitable for farming. The cost incurred for cleaning up these wastelands and preparing the cultivation area was huge, which the farmers could not afford; hence, MGP has made the necessary budget allocation to clean up these lands and prepare them for cultivation. Individual farmers met all the other expenses for cultivation. MGP also bear the cost to sow the seeds in the *Chengola* Paddy fields. For the whole process, MGP spent around Two Lakhs rupees. The timely action of the MGP has prevented further conversion of paddy land to commercial plots. Because of the inactivity in the paddy fields, the houses in the locality began facing water scarcity, and the dumping of waste from industrial places in the paddy field has polluted the water sources in the locality. On 24 October 2017, under the guidance, help, and support of MPL and MGP, *Chengola* Paddy fields restarted paddy cultivation after 30 years. 120 – 150 days are required to harvest the paddy. In 2018 January, MPL conducted the first harvest festival in *Chengola* Paddy fields with satisfactory yield. They sold the rice under the brand name *Chengolapadam Kuthari*. *The mobile marketing unit named "Arivandi", another initiative of MPL, became operational from February 2019 to scale up the marketing of the products through direct sales in various local markets.* In September 2019, MPL did Paddy cultivation in 7- 8 acres of land.

### **3.4 Cultivation of Pea**

In February 2018, MPL borrowed 5 acres of land in *Chengola* paddy fields and started organic pea cultivation. The main aim was to provide organic peas to people at a low cost. The first harvesting of Pea was in April 2018 with good production, and the agency could make a reasonable profit out of it. MPL members, as well as other members of the community, participated voluntarily in the farming program.

In 2019 MPL obtained Rs.19000 as profit from organic pea cultivation. One of the challenges faced by MPL was the deficit of working capital for farming activities. The co-operative credit society of Mulanthuruthy agreed to provide loans for MPL with zero interest rates as a support for the sustainable development initiatives of the MPL. In recognition of the agriculture restoration activities, MPL received a cash award of Rs.10000/- for the best library that conducts organic farming in Ernakulum district. MPL has also been recognized as the best library in Kanniyanoor Taluk in the year 2017 -18.

### **3.5 Vanithavedi: A Forum for women**

Vanithavedi is a woman cultural forum for the women under MP, which provides training for women in multiple skills, which may help them fetch a livelihood. Twenty-eight members are actively participating in all the activities of Vanithavedi. The following are some of the pertinent programs initiated by the MPL for women empowerment.

#### **3.5.1. Women library**

MPL started *Vanitha Vayojana Pusthaka Vitharanam Pathadhi* (distributing books for the elderly) in collaboration with the state library council. The library has employed a women librarian who lends books to older people and homemakers in the panchayat. Every week, the librarian visits the older people in the locality who faces mobility issues in reaching the library and lends books. The beneficiaries of this scheme have to pay some voluntary contribution, but it is not mandatory. There are 106 beneficiaries of the program in the village.

#### **3.5.2. Tailoring Unit for the production of cotton bags**

MPL has started the production of cotton bags as a campaign against plastic bags and pack the rice produced under the farming programs of the library. Women in the Vanithavedi received special training in the production of cotton bags which was instrumental in creating local employment.

#### **3.5.3. Light-emitting Diodes (LED) electrical lamps production**

*Suryakanthi* is an innovative project implemented by MPL to assemble, prepare, and sell LED bulbs and tubes under *Vanithavedi*. They produce various categories of LED lamps, and MPL took initiatives to market the same to ensure the project's sustainability. The main objectives of project *Suryakanthi* are reducing the domestic consumption of electricity, generating employment for women in the community, and making women empowered through self-employment activities.

#### **3.5.4. Household products**

*Vanithavedi* is undertaking the production and selling of various detergents like bathing Soap, Washing Soap, hand washes and lotions. The main objective of this activity is to promote the use of products that contain fewer chemical substances and generate local employment—the MPL market the products in their brand.

#### **3.5.5 Baalavedi; a forum for children**

Baalavedi is a cultural forum for children who are associated with library programs. Nineteen children are members of this forum. Every Tuesday, a forum meeting occurs where the children come together and have training in elocution, coaching for competitive examinations,



communication skills, drawing and painting. The Baalavedi focuses on the development of children by imparting knowledge and skills through the informal education programs of the library. The forum also promotes reading habits among the children to mould a generation that loves books.

### **3.6 Vayojanavedi; a forum for elderly**

It is a forum for the elderly to provide them with psychosocial support. Thirty-one older people are members of this forum. An excellent program for the elderly is the mobile library for the elderly. Many older adults love to read and spend time with books or love to sit in a place with people of the same age, share their stories, interact, and spend time together. In the elderly book distribution program, a women librarian will visit the houses and lend books to the elderly. It is a great opportunity and helps the elderly who cannot travel and borrow library books. The library also provides opportunities for the elderly to come together and spend time together. The library also conducts various programs for the elderly, like honoring them on special occasions and recreational activities, to provide psychosocial support.

### **3.7 MPL Sales Outlet**

In 2017 October library started the outlet very close to the library. MPL sells various types of cloth bags, Soap, hand washes, LED bulbs, and lamps. The unit could provide full-time employment for two women. Many newspapers have reported the different kinds of initiatives that the MPL library has done. The MPL initially started the outlet to sell the LED bulbs, tubes and stars, and later products like cloth bags, soaps, detergents, hand washes, and purses. The MPL outlet is one of the significant sources of income for the library. It is also a place where people could get good handmade products for a nominal and affordable price. The various community engagement of MPL aligned to the library's primary function has benefited the local community. The following are the proactive outcome for the local community, namely, 1. Holistic development of children, 2. Motivating new generation to read books 3. Energy conservation through the promotion of LED lamps 4. Restoration of traditional agriculture through a partnership with local government and community organizations of farmers. 5 Organization of elderly and women for their welfare and development. People participation in local development is the strategy deployed by the library leadership in this endeavour. MPL has demonstrated the power of people's organizations in realizing local development through the concerted efforts of the people. Besides its conventional library-related functions, MPL actively participated with other stakeholders like local self-government, farmer organizations to address the problems and challenges faced by its members, resulting in designing and implementing various innovative community development projects in the locality. (MPL, 2017-18)

## **4. Analysis of the performance of Mulanthuruthy Public Library (MPL)**

Mulanthuruthy public library has been creating an impact in the community over the years through its journey in providing library and allied services for the community. The following diagram depicts the performance of MPL in the years 2015-2018.

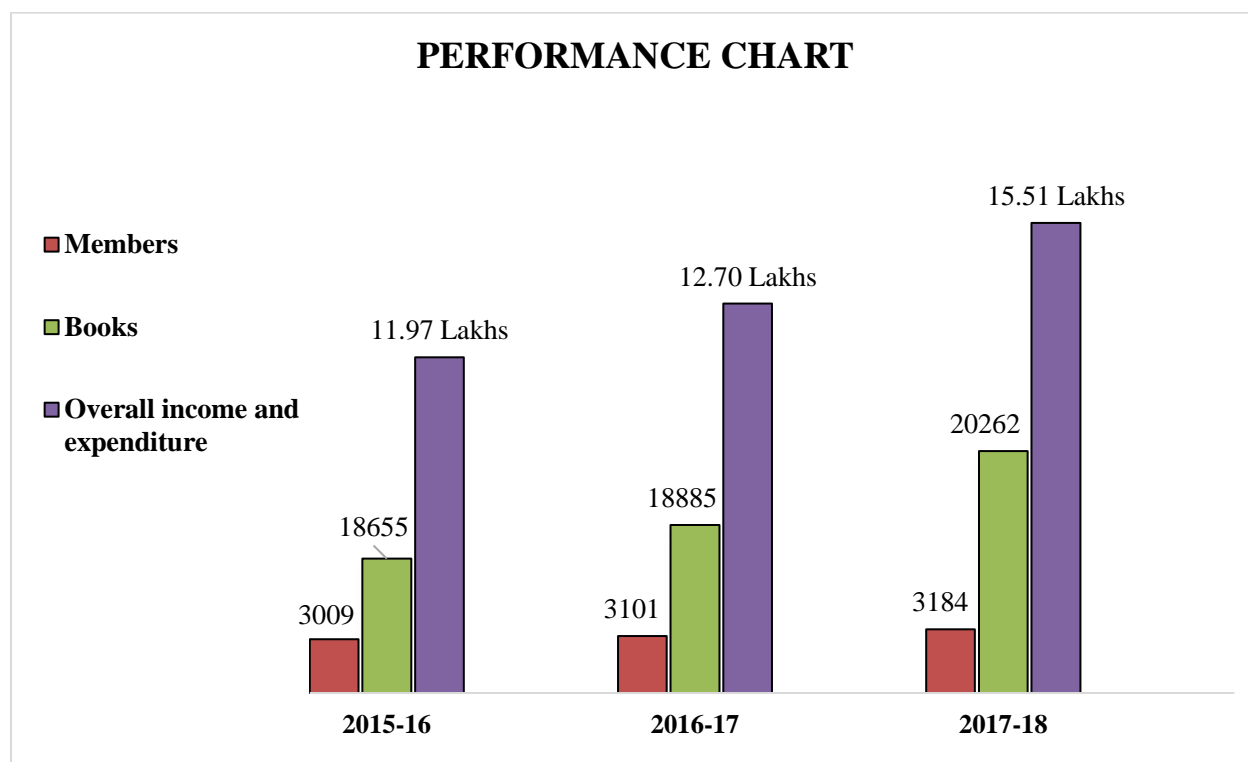


Fig 1 Mulanthuruthy Public library performance chart 2015-18 (MPL, 2015-16)  
(MPL, 2016-17) (MPL, 2017-18)

The library membership, volume of books and income and expenditure have increased marginally during the period. An institution that conducts and coordinates a series of community activities becomes a power centre in the community. Libraries that initiate such actions fulfil the role of a facilitator in community development. The income and expenditure statement has depicted the volume of work the library has performed for the community. The library has spent its income on setting up the medical library, mobile library facility for senior citizens and homemakers, purchasing new books for the library, training women for employment, and restoring paddy cultivation in the village.

## 5. Conclusion

For the last 86 years, MPL has become part of the cultural life of Mulanthuruthy Village, and with all the activities in these years, MPL could mould a generation that loves letters. MPL could bring back people into agriculture. MPL is not just a library; it is an institution with various intervention levels in a community dealing with language & literature, agriculture, sustainable energy, development, culture, education, women empowerment, and child development. Community organization is a process propelled by community participation and local leadership leading to mobilizing resources to realize the goal of development where the agency is facilitating the process. The Mulanthuruthy Public Library is a model for local libraries to proactively engage in the community's welfare and development.

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