

## Use of libraries by economically weaker group of women in Karnataka state: A study

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the characteristics of economically weaker women and examines the use of library based on a survey of 1800 economically weaker women in Karnataka State. The paper deals with the study of library membership, frequency of visit to library, preferred sources of information in libraries and subjects preferred in obtaining information in the libraries are discussed.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Women, Karnataka

### 1. Introduction

Information, which is available in different formats – print, non-print and electronic in different categories – primary, secondary and tertiary and in different channels – formal and informal, plays a vital role in the overall development of a nation as a basic resource. It has long been recognized as an essential ingredient for the progress of civilization and society for all the times.

Women an important component of a society – a least beneficiary in view of their illiteracy, limited exposure to the outside world, poor communication and expression abilities and very limited or no access to information sources find very difficult to use the information they require. The most essential step under the circumstances is to understand completely the information seeking behavior of economically weaker women in their socio-economic and cultural contexts. Women are mainly reached by indirect methods, usually through extension services. Even if the information is made available to the woman, the willingness of her to change her ability to interpret and use information and the credibility of information are the key factors in making any impact of information on their well-being <sup>[1]</sup>.

### 2. Review of Literature

A literature search made on LISA+ <sup>[2]</sup>, LISTA <sup>[3]</sup>, Emeraldsight.com <sup>[4]</sup> and subject bibliographies <sup>[5-11]</sup> indicates that a number of studies have been reported. *Tadasad* and *Yallappa* <sup>[12]</sup>, report, the results of a study conducted to know the information needs and gathering habits of rural community for identifying the role of rural libraries based on the interviews conducted using structured interview schedules with one hundred and seventy-eight people of Kusanoor village, Gulbarga district and suggests that the awareness of rural libraries has to be created through various outreach programs, the Department of Public libraries, Government of Karnataka has to take vigorous and integrated programs jointly with NGOs in developing multipurpose rural library system. Results of a survey by *Kumbar*, *Biradar* <sup>[13]</sup> reveal that among the public, awareness of mass media is compared to the public library. *Anwar* and *Supaat* <sup>[14]</sup> present an analysis based on the findings of a study of the information needs of the population of a cluster of 3 Malaysian villages with no library service. Out

of 300 households 108 individuals were interviewed during February 1996. Results emphasize that the needs of the rural population must be investigated when planning rural library services. *Barron* <sup>[15]</sup> reports the Community Information Needs/Library Services (CIN/LS) project which was undertaken to address a series of problems related to the public library's role in the delivery of information to rural citizens. The major problem or issue was acknowledged as a familiar one, one which was much easier to identify than to tackle. He stated that, people require information and the mission of libraries is to acquire and disseminate information to meet the needs of people in their service areas. *Ukachi* <sup>[16]</sup> focuses on rural women as information users in order to ascertain the information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural women. The barrier to information flow to them was also identified. The result showed that the rural women do not have access to adequate information because the libraries as well as the local government have been inefficient.

Based on a study carried out *Okunma* <sup>[17]</sup> found out what communication media are used by rural women in Nigeria as sources of development. *Seriki* <sup>[18]</sup> describes a study of the information needs of the Ibillo rural community in Edo State, Nigeria who are largely engaged in cassava production. Makes recommendations for the provision of the required information for rural development and suggests that Nigerian library schools should integrate courses on rural librarianship into their curriculum. *Frylink* <sup>[19]</sup> focusing on the information needs of remote, rural users, reviews Australian initiatives to meet these needs. Innovative activities within the tertiary sector and the positioning of Curtin University of Technology and its Library and Information Service in particular are highlighted. *Dasgupta* <sup>[20]</sup> addresses the diverse facts that influence the information seeking behavior of women in India. She identifies the type of information women need, social factors, economic factors and familial norms and hierarchy. She also considers the role of the librarian and information professional, including well-developed modern library and information dissemination facilities, public libraries in the new information-seeking environment, and information/ communication centers at the rural level.

*Sen* <sup>[21]</sup> feels that rural people are capable of using information and exploiting the same for their betterment, in spite of lack of

traditional education and presence of infrastructural obstruction, which can be demonstrated from the acceptability of e-choupal, initiative of ITC Ltd. In this context rural libraries must reposition themselves in order to be a relevant agent in this developmental work. Libraries can work as a switching mechanism between information and its users. A survey reveals that there is a very weak women member base of rural libraries. This implies that unless the acceptability of the rural libraries increases, the libraries cannot act as a successful agent of change. Hence she suggests for more interaction between rural libraries, and other developmental agencies and carrying the information to the rural women within the framework of standard library services. Chatterjee [22], notices that lack of sufficient information support is hampering the rural development work in the country although rural information kiosks have been set up in different states for providing information needed by the rural folk. These are functioning independent of local public libraries, which is not a good trend. Hence it is suggested for the development of appropriate information products and services and a good information dissemination mechanism. As far as possible, local public libraries should be given the responsibility of running these kiosks. Further, local information dissemination centers should be networked to facilitate information exchange and sharing and an information system for rural development

should be developed for catering to the needs of policy maker, scientists and extension worker. Jeevan [23], analyses the difficulties of the prevalent broadcasting oriented model of information dissemination for rural development and suggests pragmatic utilization of public libraries and school libraries to evolve an information oriented model based on the types, sources and channels of information for rural development and the major impediments for accessing information by the rural community.

### 3. Methodology and Study Population

The selection of sample respondents has been made from thirty districts of Karnataka State. From each district one taluka (block), from each taluka (block) two villages have been selected for this study. From each village 30 respondents have been selected. Thus Total 60 villages and 1800 respondents have been selected for this study. Study population has been chosen by adopting multistage sampling that combines cluster method with stratified technique. Two blocks (village/township/city) have been identified by using cluster method. For every block thirty women have been identified by using stratified sampling and interviewed. Survey method of research has been adopted to investigate the problem using structured questionnaire has been used as data collection tool.

### 4. Results

Table 1: General characteristics of women (N= 1800)

Characteristics	Numbers (%)	Characteristics	Numbers (%)
<b>Age</b>		<b>Languages Known</b>	
Less than 25	222 (12.3%)	Kannada	1800 (100%)
26 to 35	751 (41.7%)	Hindi	151 (8.4%)
36 to 45	577 (32.1%)	English	48 (2.7%)
46 above	250 (13.9%)	Marathi	75 (4.2%)
<b>Educational qualification</b>		Telugu	253 (14.1%)
Illiterate	640 (35.6%)	Tamil	12 (0.7%)
Primary Education	504 (28%)	<b>Languages</b>	
Secondary Education	496 (27.6%)	Mono-lingual	1346 (74.8%)
Diploma, Degree	160 (8.8%)	Bi-lingual	377 (20.9%)
<b>Category</b>		Multi-lingual	77 (4.3%)
GM	707 (39.3%)	<b>Occupation</b>	
OBC	491 (27.3%)	Farmer	300 (16.7%)
SC/ST	602 (33.4%)	Business	70 (3.9%)
<b>Marital status</b>		House wife	616 (34.2%)
Single	310 (17.2%)	Labour	814 (45.2%)
Married	1490 (82.8%)		

Large number of women under study belong to the age group of 26 to 35 years (41.7%, N=751) and 36 to 45 years (32.1%, N=577). It is found that more than one third of women under study are illiterates (35.6%, N=640), while a very small proportion (8.8%, N=160) have diploma or degree to their credit. With regards to educational qualification, 28% (N=504) of women have completed their primary education and 27.6% (N=496) have completed their secondary education. The study population comprises of 39.3% of GM (N=707), 27.3% of OBC (N=491) and 33.4% of SC/ST (N=602) women. It can be analysed that more than 82% of women under study are married (N=1490) and the remaining 17.2% (N=310) are single. This group includes unmarried, widows, divorcees and those who are staying separately. Kannada being the state language is known to all women (100%, N=1800). 14.1% of

women know Telugu (N=253) and 8.4% (N=151) of women know Hindi as well. Marathi is known to 4.2% of women (N=75) while a very few women also know Tamil (0.7%, N=12). Significantly 2.7% of women (N=48) also know English. It is found from the table that nearly three fourth of economically weaker women i.e. 74.8% (N=1346) are Mono-lingual, that is they know only one language. 20.9% of women (N=377) are Bi-lingual that is they know two languages and small percentage 4.3% (N=77) are Multi-lingual that is they know more than two languages. It is shows that women labours (45.2%, N=814) constitute a larger proportion of the study population. More than one third of the women (34.2%, N=616) are housewives and all these have no income. A small percentage of women (3.9%, N=70) are in business, while more than 16% are farmers (N=300).

**Table 2:** Use of library: Category of women

Use of library	Category			
	GM	OBC	SC/ST	Total
Yes	46 (6.5)	19 (3.9)	32 (5.3)	97 (5.4)
No	661 (93.5)	472 (96.1)	570 (94.7)	1703 (94.6)
Total	707 (39.3)	491 (27.3)	602 (33.4)	1800 (100.0)

(Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages)

From table 2, it is found that a greater majority of women GM (6.5%, N=46), OBC (3.9%, N=19) and SC/ST (5.3%, N=32) category use the facilities of libraries. Irrespective of the category to which they belong to do not use library facilities. Only small number of women belonging to

**Table 3:** Library membership among economically weaker women: Category of women

Library Membership	Category			
	GM	OBC	SC/ST	Total
Yes	20 (2.8)	9 (1.8)	14 (2.3)	43 (2.4)
No	687 (97.2)	482 (98.2)	588 (97.7)	1757 (97.6)
Total	707 (39.3)	491 (27.3)	602 (33.4)	1800 (100.0)

(Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages)

From table 3, it can be observed that most of the women library membership. A very small percentage of SC/ST (2.3%, N=14) and OBC (1.8%, N=9) Category of women have not taken any membership of any library. Only a small number become the members of the libraries. 2.8% (N=20) of women belonging to GM category have taken

**Table 4:** Frequency of visit to libraries: Category of women (N=1800)

Frequency	Category							
	GM	Rank	OBC	Rank	SC/ST	Rank	Total	Rank
Daily	1 (0.1)	5	1 (0.2)	5	0 (0)	-	2 (0.1)	6
Once a week	14 (2.0)	3	3 (0.6)	4	12 (2.0)	2	29 (1.6)	3
Monthly	7 (1.0)	4	7 (1.4)	3	5 (0.8)	4	19 (1.1)	4
Yearly	1 (0.1)	5	0 (0)	-	4 (0.7)	5	5 (0.3)	5
Rarely	23 (3.3)	2	8 (1.6)	2	11 (1.8)	3	42 (2.3)	2
Never	661 (93.5)	1	472 (96.1)	1	570 (94.7)	1	1703 (94.6)	1
Total	707 (39.3)	-	491 (27.3)	-	602 (33.4)	-	1800 (100.0)	-

(Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages)

Table 4 depicts the frequency of visit to libraries by different categories of women. It is found that 96.1% (N=472) of OBC of women, 94.7% (N=570) of SC/ST women, and 93.5% (N=661) of GM category of women never visit libraries and do not take any benefit of them. Few percentage of women visit libraries i.e. 3.3% (N=23) of GM, 1.8% (N=11) of SC/ST and 1.6% (N=8) of OBC category.

**Table 5:** Preferred sources of information in libraries: Category of women (N=1800)

Preferred sources	Category							
	GM	Rank	OBC	Rank	SC/ST	Rank	Total	Rank
Books	18 (1.0)	2	8 (0.4)	4	13 (0.7)	4	39 (2.2)	4
Reference books	5 (0.3)	10	3 (0.2)	8	3 (0.2)	11	11 (0.6)	10
Magazines and Journals	9 (0.5)	6	11 (0.6)	3	4 (0.2)	9	24 (1.3)	6
Newspapers	16 (0.9)	4	12 (0.7)	2	15 (0.8)	2	43 (2.4)	2
Political subject	4 (0.2)	11	1 (0.1)	12	4 (0.2)	9	9 (0.5)	11
Science and Technology	7 (0.4)	9	3 (0.2)	8	3 (0.2)	11	13 (0.7)	9
Arts	9 (0.5)	6	4 (0.2)	7	10 (0.6)	5	23 (1.3)	7
Novels	33 (1.8)	1	13 (0.7)	1	24 (1.3)	1	70 (3.9)	1
Biography	17 (0.9)	3	8 (0.4)	4	15 (0.8)	2	40 (2.2)	3
Social science	8 (0.4)	8	3 (0.2)	8	8 (0.4)	6	19 (1.1)	8
Economics	3 (0.2)	12	2 (0.1)	11	3 (0.2)	11	8 (0.4)	12
Handbooks	0 (0)	-	1 (0.1)	12	0 (0)	-	1 (0.1)	14
Guides	1 (0.1)	13	1 (0.1)	12	5 (0.3)	8	7 (0.4)	13
Literature	12 (0.7)	5	5 (0.3)	6	8 (0.4)	6	25 (1.4)	5

(Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages)

From table 5, it can be found that novels are ranked as first source preferred by all categories of women. Books are ranked second by GM category women while SC/ST and OBC women rank books as fourth source of information for them,

newspapers are second ranked sources. Women belonging to GM category rank them as fourth source, while biography is ranked third preferred source. Magazines and journals have been ranked as third preferred source. Novels ranked as first

preferred sources are read by a very small percentage of women, it is a clear indication that sources in the libraries are used to a very little extent.

**Table 6:** Subjects preferred in obtaining information in the libraries: Category of women (N=1800)

Subject preferred	Category							
	GM	Rank	OBC	Rank	SC/ST	Rank	Total	Rank
Education	30 (1.7)	1	14 (0.8)	2	25 (1.4)	2	69 (3.8)	2
Health	30 (1.7)	1	15 (0.8)	1	27 (1.5)	1	72 (4.0)	1
Employment news	24 (1.3)	3	8 (0.4)	4	16 (0.9)	3	48 (2.7)	3
Agriculture	19 (1.1)	4	6 (0.3)	7	16 (0.9)	3	41 (2.3)	4
Current subjects	16 (0.9)	5	9 (0.5)	3	7 (0.4)	7	32 (1.8)	7
International	4 (0.2)	13	3 (0.2)	10	1 (0.1)	13	8 (0.4)	13
Science	6 (0.3)	10	4 (0.2)	9	2 (0.1)	11	12 (0.7)	10
Law	12 (0.7)	8	6 (0.3)	7	6 (0.3)	8	24 (1.3)	8
Social welfare	16 (0.9)	5	8 (0.4)	4	11 (0.6)	5	35 (1.9)	5
Sports	5 (0.3)	11	2 (0.1)	12	5 (0.3)	10	12 (0.7)	10
Finance	5 (0.3)	11	2 (0.1)	12	6 (0.3)	8	13 (0.7)	9
National	7 (0.4)	9	3 (0.2)	10	2 (0.1)	11	12 (0.7)	10
Local news	15 (0.8)	7	8 (0.4)	4	11 (0.6)	5	34 (1.9)	6

(Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages)

From table 6, it is observed that GM category women give preference to subjects like education and health (1.7%, N=30), employment news (1.3%, N=24), agriculture (1.1%, N=19), current subjects and social welfare (0.9%, N=16). These are the first five most preferred subjects in obtaining information in the libraries. Least preferred subjects are science (0.3%, N=6), sports and finance (0.3%, N=5) and international (0.2%, N=4). OBC category of women prefer health (0.8%, N=15), education (0.8%, N=14) and current affairs (0.5%, N=9). They give least preference for international and national (0.2%, N=3), sports and finance (0.1%, N=2). SC/ST women give first preference for health (1.5%, N=27), second for education (1.4%, N=25) and third for employments news and agriculture (0.9%, N=16). They give least preference subjects for sports (0.3%, N=5), national, science (0.1%, N=2) and international (0.1%, N=1).

**5. Conclusion**

The library as information provision instrument is however comparatively recent phenomenon. There is a very weak women member base in rural libraries. This implies that unless the acceptability of the rural libraries increases, the libraries cannot act as a successful agent of change. Hence it needs more interaction between rural libraries, and other developmental agencies and carrying the information to the rural women within the framework of standard library services. These calls for identifying different roles of the rural libraries – supplementary role, coordinators role, role of a friend, and role of input provider to the Government. Awareness of rural libraries has to be created through various outreach programs, the Department of Public Libraries; Government of Karnataka has to take vigorous and integrated programs jointly with NGOs in developing multipurpose rural library system. The rural community should be considered as an element, while planning the library organization and services. Rural libraries should always be supervised by professionally qualified persons to provide the right information to the right person. There should be good public library system in each and every village. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Government has donated some good books to villages and appointed a

Prerak (the person, who looks after the village library). This facility should be continued and new books should be given to each library, so that rural people can read new books. Audio-visual means of information communication must be kept in public library in villages, to overcome the handicaps suffered by illiterate people in free flow of information. Provisions have to be in the rural libraries for listening to radio and watching TV. Library professionals should themselves join hands to come forward to improve the library services with the help of emerging ICT applications. Public Libraries may organize some seminars, informal talks, lectures, workshops, etc. on the various major issues. In these programmes, the specialists may be invited to interact with the public. These would be very much beneficial and attractive to the users of the public libraries.

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