

Rural Libraries in the North East India Problems and Prospects

Proceedings of the National Seminar held in Guwahati
Jointly organized by the
Deptt of Library and Information Science, Gauhati
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Internet resources have become part of every day life even in remote areas. Rural communities are also experiencing to this technological exercise. In that context, rural libraries should initiate the process of using computers in library activities.

Rural libraries in the region are not in an organized way. They are extending service to the masses without any network at any level, which go against the very objectives of library activities and services. An effort is to be made in order to unite them so that library cooperation and ultimately rural library network can be established. At the end, I express my sincere thanks to all the contributors. Also I am thankful to the Central Reference Library for extending financial support for the seminar and also for publication of this volume.

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Rural Libraries in the North East India: problems and prospects, Proceedings of the National Seminar held in Guwahati jointly organized by the Dept of Library and Information Science, Gauhati University and Central Reference Library, Kolkata during March 28-29, 2007 Edited by Dr Narendra Lahkar and Published by Central Reference Library, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, Kolkata

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Foreword

The Central Reference Library being a subordinate office of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India is actively involved in the development activities in the North Eastern India for past few years. We have been organizing training programmes and workshops for the library professionals of this region. We have covered almost all the seven states of the North East. The Department of Library and Information Science of the Universities and State Central Libraries of different states of the region have co-operated the Central Reference Library in organizing these programmes. Gauhati University authorities have been very active and cooperative especially under the dynamic leadership of Prof (Dr) Narendra Lahkar and his colleagues of the Library and Information Science Department. When the proposal to organize a national seminar on the **Problems and Prospects of Rural Libraries in the North East India** from the Department of Library and Information Science, Gauhati University was received, we grabbed the opportunity and gave the signal to go ahead to the department for necessary arrangements to organize the seminar. The response to the national seminar has been very encouraging. Librarians from far off and very remotest areas presented papers, participated and interacted and expressed their views and problems. Our professional colleagues expressed their satisfaction on the academic and professional deliberation on Rural Libraries, which they feel is one important area of librarianship that need to be given proper heed for their development.

When the library profession is fast changing with the advent of ICT, the rural sector faces a stiff challenge in providing basic library facilities to their clients. They lack in funds and facilities. But at the same time library professionals extending services in those libraries are highly committed. The time has come to establish, expand rural library services even to the remotest areas for composite development of the society. A transition and transformation is the need of the present day in the rural libraries without losing the spirit

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History, development and digitization of rural libraries in India

D D Lal

Abstract: Libraries do not grow in a vacuum; they function in societies. So their functions are determined by social forces. As social conditions change so do the function of the libraries. Library may be described as a social institution as well as a vital societal force.

Rural and public library contributes to sustaining the quality of life in all its aspects-educational, economic, industrial, scientific and cultural- and promote the concept of a democratic society in which equal opportunity exists for all to develop into true citizens with whole and balanced personalities leading to an increase in the sum total of man's happiness and his environment.

A Library and information system constitutes a dynamic agency in modern society with specific objectives; to facilitate the use of all information regardless of his level of education, profession, place of abode, political belief and religious creed; to offer adequate training to users of information in the methods and the techniques of intellectual work so as to enable them to obtain maximum benefit from the facilities and opportunities offered by the system; to support education in all levels and especially lifelong education by developing in users these attitudes and skills which this form of education requires by supporting research programs to provide recreational reading. The functions of a library system should be the provision of information, training and cultural education.

Introduction

In the urban complex of the past, the library was at best as isolated and ephemeral phenomenon. Today a far-reaching and all-embracing library network exists reaching over the entire field of public and private life. Intensive research and education at all levels and in all branches of knowledge makes the services of library inevitable. In recent times institutions of scientific and professional training have multiplied manifold to keep pace with the explosion taking place in the sphere of knowledge. Rational functioning of modern life has become impossible without Library.

Knowledge that is already available is essential in the general struggle for survival, to keep pace with technological development, for rational planning and intervening in a world, which is becoming smaller and smaller through modern methods of communication. The library is the instrument, which collects and make available both knowledge and documentation.

The objectives of rural libraries are as given below

1. Disseminating authentic news and information
2. Providing motivation for learning, reading and writing and helping in maintaining, enhancing and feeding literacy among the people;
3. Helping to keep alive and enhance the cultural heritage;
4. Increasing Vocational competence in raising the technological level of a rural (village) occupation
5. Promoting information of the various factions of the village population wherever they exist;
6. Helping the rural (village) institutions and organizations to improve their programs
7. Developing aesthetic sense and refined taste
8. Helping the people to spend their leisure time profitably

Role of rural libraries in the field of educational, social and cultural development

A Library is one of the most effective means of making the materials of education available to all people. It can help in the

intellectual betterment of citizenry. Library is the only organized social institution, which fosters reading of books.

Rural libraries facilitate informal self-education to all people in the community. It is an opportunity for promotion of universal education as a life-long process. This process is chiefly addressed to the not so well educated, drop outs from the formal pattern of education and also the neo-literate sections. AS Major part of this educational process is to generate among the users of the rural & public library the joy of understanding something which was previously puzzling or overlooked entirely.

The rural library intended for improving reading habit and educational development through the distribution of books, display of pictures, maps, cartons, cuttings of newspapers and magazines, mobile library facility, adult education, nursery school, manuscript magazines vacation classes, free tuition, reference facility etc.

Rural libraries are intended for social development through their social services such as construction of houses, thatching of huts, construction of roads, repair of roads, market cleaning, slum cleaning etc. Besides these, libraries help to change the attitude of the people that are unfavourable to progressive ideas and change. Rural libraries give opportunity for the people to mingle with different types of people irrespective of class, caste, creed, sex and education. They help them to improve their leadership qualities by encouraging them to participate in different programmes.

Rural libraries provide Radio, Television, indoor games like chess, caroms, cards, table tennis, shuttle badminton etc. to the people. Besides, they arrange a wide variety of cultural programmes like field shows, music recitals, dramas, debates, quiz programmes, elocutions, picnic and pleasure trips etc. regularly for the cultural development of the rural folk. Thus they provide greater opportunity for self enrichment, self-confidence, self-responsibility besides the encouragement for participation.

Library legislation in India

Several attempts are being made by individuals and library associations to provide public libraries under law. Apart from Dr. S. R.

Ranganathan, a number of individuals spent their time and energy to put on the statute book public library laws. It is only after India's independence that, Dr. Ranganathan's dream of public Library Act enactment was fulfilled. Through the good offices of the then Minister for Education, a modified Bill was introduced in the state legislature which was passed as the Madras Public Libraries Act in 1948.

It is observed that out of 29 States and 6 Union Territory Administrations, only 12 states, as tabulated below, have so far passed library legislation, enabling the concerned State Government to provide a public library system. Since then the following twelve States have enacted library acts for their respective states:

Sl.	Public Library Act Implemented at the state	Year	Library cess applied
1	Tamil Nadu	1948	(10%) on property tax
2	Andhra Pradesh	1960	(8%) on lands and buildings
3	Karnataka	1965	(6%) on lands, buildings, vehicles & profession
4	Maharashtra	1967	N.A. (State Government meets the expenditures)
5	West Bengal	1979	N.A. (State Government meets the expenditures)
6	Manipur	1988	No library cess
7	Kerala	1989	(5%) on property tax and not less than 1% of State expenditure on education
8	Haryana	1989	Local bodies to levy cess
9	Goa	1993	Surcharge on IFML @ 0.50 ps. Per ltr. And 0.50 ps. On bulk bear per ltr. and 1% on State Education Budget.
10	Mizoram	1993	No library cess - State Govt. meets the expenditure
11	Gujarat	2002	No library cess
12	Orissa	2002	No library cess

Percentage of Literacy in States where Library act existing :
(Data as on 1990-91)

States	Percentage of Literacy
Kerala	69.75
Maharashtra	45.77
Tamilnadu	45.40
Karnataka	35.83
Andhra Pradesh	28.52

Percentage of Literacy in States where Library act not existing: (Data as on 1990-91)

States	Percentage of Literacy
1. Rajasthan	22.57
2. Bihar	23.35
3. Uttar Pradesh	25.44
4. Madhya Pradesh	26.71
5. Haryana	31.91

Average Expenditure on per person for Library Services:
(Data as on 1990-91)

States	Paisa
1. Andhra Pradesh	15 p.
2. Kerala	15 p.
3. Karnataka	10 p.
4. Maharashtra	06 p.
5. Aasam	04 p.
6. Rajasthan	03 p.
7. Uttar Pradesh	01 p.

(Source of above data from: Gopinath Kalbhor: Rural Library Development & Education - Extension: 1990: Rachna Prakashan, Jaipur)

The creation of the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation in the year 1972 as the nodal agency by the Government of India to promote and support public library movement and to take the library movement to the grass-root level is the latest measure adopted by the Government for providing of public library services in the country. The Foundation dedicated itself to do this noble job with the operation of several schemes of assistance as given below:

Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation spent crores of rupees for the rural people of our country. There is no doubt that this Foundation's programme of assistance is most helpful to the cause of public library services in the country. The programme provides the

best example of resource sharing between the centre and the state for the development of public library services at all levels. The Foundation has taken long strides in promoting library service in the country.

Need of the hour to provide better library services is to make provision of free and compulsory public library service. In the wake of the slogan "Education for All" comes in the complementary battlecry of "Books for All". As a consequence of making education a fundamental right, free unhindered easy access to books and libraries also becomes essential. The right to have easy access to books is to be ensured. Now the hour is to open more libraries. According to International Federation of Library Associations & Institutions (IFLA) standards, there should be one public library for every 3000 people with every 1 billion people India needs according to this standard more than 3,30,000 public library units. In order to keep pace with the growth in population and the explanation in knowledge, almost every other village will have to be provided with library facilities. The nearest library unit should not be more than a mile away from the residential areas.

There is a feeling among a section of a people that illiteracy may not need libraries. It must be asserted that illiterate people are not ignorant people. Many of them are quite enlightened and are receptive to new ideas and currents of thought. The whole lot of them could be further enlightened by public libraries through their extension programmes like lectures, discussions, film-shows, folk-dramas, exhibition, puppet-show and reading out books to them etc. The main reason why the public library movement has not yet reached the take-off stage is the acute paucity of funds. It was suggested by a committee of expert that 10% of the education budget should be earmarked for the development of public library system in a state.

The public library has to serve as a cultural and educational centre of the community in which it is located. It has to serve as a school, college or university of the community. In a developing country like ours, the public libraries should have a very energetic extension programme.

Concentration

What needs urgent attention to be done is:

- (a) Networking of libraries for resource sharing and avoiding duplication,
- (b) Creation of compatible computerized databases,
- (c) Formulation of preservation programmes for libraries which have rare books/manuscripts,
- (d) Awareness creation among users and library staff regarding the need for libraries and preservation of books,
- (e) Modernization and automation of libraries for easy accessibility to use,
- (f) Resource mobilization for development of libraries to be made through different agencies involving industrial houses,
- (g) More phases for development of library movement in rural areas, particularly, in backward states like Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh etc.,
- (h) Need for training of library professionals particularly, in computer applications,
- (i) More schemes of grant-in-aid to NGOs providing public library services,
- (j) Setting up of an apex body to oversee and monitor the library and information system in India.

Modernization and Networking of Libraries

The country is making all efforts to take the library movement to the grassroots level and hence efforts are being made to establish libraries in rural areas. The fruits of the endeavours of the National Library should aim to reach not only the research and student community of this country, but also to our remote villages, by employing similar electronic contrivances. The central government together with state governments should come forward to extend these facilities to our readers by means of perspective planning.

Electronic Libraries in Rural Areas

It might be an ambitious and not-so-easy a task to realize this

objective. The obvious reasons would be financial constraints, lack of manpower, lack of technical know-how and so on. The aspects on the receiving side in our rural areas also play an important role in deciding upon the priorities when it comes to the questions of selecting the beneficiaries in a country like ours where the rural areas also play an important role in deciding upon the priorities when it comes to the question of selecting the beneficiaries in a country like ours where the rural population is stricken with poverty and illiteracy and the urban population looks forward with eager eyes to accept such novel ideas.

Complexity for Library Automation

Libraries, especially rural libraries and public libraries in India suffer from the following:

- a) Lack of funds
- b) Lack of trained manpower
- c) Improper physical facilities for the library
- d) Inadequate collection of reading materials
- e) Inadequate equipment
- f) Inadequate support from the Governments
- g) Change of mindset of librarians and library users

IT Applications and Digitization of Libraries (Automation of Libraries)

Computerization of Rural / public libraries is the first step to achieve before the libraries think of becoming Electronic Libraries / Digital Libraries. Today we are living in exciting times; the Digital Library is the most important development in the 21st century. The Information revolution not only supplies the appropriate technology for creating digital libraries but also provides the unprecedented demand for storing, organizing and accessing information. Digital Libraries have the potential to be far more flexible than conventional ones. They are portable; they will be with you wherever you want them to be: at home, in the work place, in the villages or rural areas etc. They are seamlessly integrated with national and international sources of information for access.

Rural India is the heart of India and there are several issues that face rural India of which illiteracy is the biggest issue. Over 60 percent of rural Indians are illiterates and this is the roadblock for the development and Information Technology revolution and is further widening the Digital Divide. The solution of this divide is in the form of Digital Libraries, which can help the National Literacy Mission to achieve literacy. The Digital Libraries with multimedia content can be made available over the Internet to the villages and can also make interactive learning a real solution. Technologies like the Natural Language Processing, Touch screens, voice interfacing, etc. can help the illiterates to use the technology efficiently.

This requires high bandwidth connectivity for multimedia-based applications to reach the villages. The entire country needs to be wire with Fiber optic cables for high speed data transmission. The Village Libraries, Branch Libraries are the best-suited places to have these facilities established for the benefit of literate and illiterate users. These libraries should work as active information resource centers and focal points for need-based information.

Action Plan

Computerization and Digitization in Public Libraries should be taken up in phases:

Phase I

1. National Library, Kolkata
2. State Central Libraries in all the States and Union Territories
3. District Central Libraries covering the entire district in the country.

Phase II

1. Branch Libraries,
2. Private Libraries
3. Village Libraries

Infrastructure Requirements

1. Hardware and application software
2. Database creation in standard formats
3. Manpower training

4. User training
5. E-mail and Internet facilities
6. Fiberoptic connectivity
7. Radio links for remote connectivity
8. Book Scanners for digitization
9. Storage Area Network facilities
10. Digital archival facilities.

Tasks to be achieved

1. Identifying the required hardware and software;
2. Database creation in standard formats;
3. Digitizing and archiving the manuscripts, rare books, audios, videos, maps, artifacts and photograph collection;
4. Creating web pages to access these resources;
5. Continuous structured, hands-on, modular training programmes, to the library staff at various levels
6. User awareness programmes – training in accessing electronic resources;
7. Establishing e-mail and Internet browsing facilities;
8. Creation of small groups – Task Forces at the State Level with time frame to achieve the set targets;
9. Formation of National Coordination Group to set targets, review progress, onetime resource allocation for infrastructure and monitoring the expenditure etc.

Conclusion

Because Information Technology in the field of library and information science is emerging and changing day-to-day and the information needs of the users also changing from time to time. It is very essential to learn more about the digital information technologies, electronic publishing, Internet, Intranet, Multimedia and CD-ROM technology etc. and to adopt new technologies in the libraries. Traditional (Rural and Public Libraries) libraries should be gradually changed and developed as an digital library by collecting, organizing,

managing and disseminating the digital information available in various formats. The basic purpose of digital library is to provide instant access to digitized information from remote database through-out the world.

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