

## School Libraries: Current Scenario in Rural India

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### ABSTRACT

*Libraries have always been considered as an essential part of the School Education System. However, in India, the School Libraries are neglected a lot. The condition of school libraries in rural India is even worse. This paper attempts to highlight the need and functions of a library in the School Education System and discusses the efforts made by govt. of India to establish the School Libraries. Further, this paper details the current scenario of the School Libraries in the rural India.*

**Key Words:** School Library, Role/functions of a School Library, School Libraries in India, Current scenario of School Libraries in rural India.

### Introduction

Libraries have always been considered as an essential part of the school education system. The libraries are like ocean of knowledge that provides the opportunities to the curious minds to pupils to know the world they live in. Francis Bacon once quoted that Libraries are as the shrine where all the relics of the ancient saints, full of true virtue, and that without delusion or imposture, are preserved and reposed. To impart good education to children we must provide good quality schools, which means providing certain minimum facilities in the schools to create a congenial atmosphere for the children to study in. The school library is such one of the important facilities, which should be available in each school. (Anonymous,1999). Morris (2004) contends that a school library serves as a center and coordinating agency of all materials used in the school.

### Role of libraries in the school education system

A library at school not only supports the students to develop educationally but also intellectually. It also equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination enabling them to live as responsible citizens. School libraries have always been an indispensable adjunct to education a base for gathering innovative thinking, a stimulus to culture and an aid to self development (Onal, 2009).

As emphasizing the role of the library in school, Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, the Father of Library Science in India, stated that the school libraries should act as laboratories for students and the librarians should function as guides to help the students in learning and using the books for improvement of knowledge and scholarship. Dr. Ranganathan also describes the role of the library in the content of modern education in the following words "The library is the heart of the school, from which every activity in the school radiates and by which in all gets irradiated. The library should literally and figuratively be the hub of every educational institution and the librarian should be a guide philosopher and friend of all it inhabitants". (Lahiri, 1994).



Libraries support the curriculum, promote literacy development, and foster lifelong reading habits among children through the collection of library such as books, magazines, activity charts, maps, toys, etc. In addition (Prasad 2011):

- The library strengthens the school in its vision and mission to educate and teach.
- School library makes books and other learning materials available in order to facilitate a self-sufficient action, the creation of one student's own thinking and the awareness of the importance of his/her activities and hobbies.
- The library is useful for students and teachers as an information center, both for learning and recreation.
- The library gives equitable access to learning material to all students without social groups, creed, and income levels.
- The library is a location that encourages individual study, group discussions, group collaboration and group presentations.

Further, to add in this list in order to make the list more comprehensive, the following points may also be added:

- The library promotes the continuous reading and learning habits that gives a child a strong academic foundation.
- The library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society.
- Provide teachers with access to relevant curriculum information and professional development materials within and outside the school; and opportunities to cooperatively plan implement and evaluate learning programs.
- The library attempts to develop an inquiry based learning skills programme in collaboration with the class teacher.
- Provide and promote quality fiction to develop and sustain in students the habit and enjoyment of reading for pleasure and to enrich students' intellectual, aesthetic, cultural and emotional growth.

## Standards for School Libraries

To impart good education to children at the school level, it is imperative to provide a good quality library meeting the certain minimum standards. These standards can be used to measure the degree of development of a school library and also to identify the areas where more efforts may be required to develop a school library to make sure that every child gets at least the minimum required basic service.

The standards, which are developed professionally, indicate a direction for the libraries as to what tasks and objectives it should strive for. They provide school management with information on the management of libraries. Standards can have an international, national and regional scope. Internationally, standards are not only developed by the library organizations, such as IASL (International Association of School Libraries) and IFLA, but also by UNESCO or ISO. Keeping in view the vital role a school library plays in supporting the curriculum, such organizations have issued a School Library Manifesto whose 1998 version became a known text and is used by the school librarians all around the world. The manifesto indicates the role of school library, its mission and the most important tasks as well as the exceptional importance of a qualified school librarian. „School Librarians: Guidelines for Competency Requirements' was published in the series- IFLA Profound Reports as number 41 in August 1995. The Library Association (CILIP) has also published a completely revised



edition of the guidelines for „school libraries in secondary schools' in 2002. These standards usually describe the staff requirements, acquisitions of collections, audiovisual and computer equipment as well as budgetary calculations (Mahajan: 2010). Undoubtedly, the standards perform the role of guide that directs the path to meet the targets and gives a mechanism to compare the services of two libraries.

## **Role of the Govt. to develop School Libraries**

At the dawn of independence, the framers of Indian Constitution had realized the need of the profound role of state in promoting school education. Therefore, it was suggested in Article 45 of the Directive Principles that the states should provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years. Further, in 1953, the Government of India, Ministry of Education appointed Secondary Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar. The Mudaliar Commission in its report recommended for provision of school library for every secondary school in the country. It stated that as the proper use of a well equipped school library is absolutely essential for the efficient working of every educational institution and for encouraging literacy and cultural interests in students, every secondary school should have a library, class libraries, and subject libraries should also be utilized for this purpose. The provision for adequate funds was also stressed. The commission identified the School Library as the heart of the school. The commission also stated that trained librarians, who have a love for books and an understanding of student's interests, should be provided in all secondary schools, and all teachers should be given some training in the basic principles of library work in the training college as well through refresher course.

The next positive step in the direction of vitalizing the School Libraries was taken by the Directorate of Extension Programme for Secondary Education of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The directorate organized an All India seminar on School Libraries in 1962 in Bangalore which was directed by the late Dr. S.R. Ranganathan. This seminar also made very positive recommendations to improve the general conditions of School Libraries.

Later, in year 1985, Indian Library Association (ILA) and Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) prepared separate drafts on National Policy on Library and Information Science. The ILA draft highlighted the requirement of developing qualified manpower and also proposed the establishment of a National Centre for Education and Research in Library and Information Science. On the other hand, RRRLF draft called for uniform pattern and standards for LIS education for India. It also stressed on the need of research and specialized courses to be offered by universities and leading research and library promotional organizations.

In October 1985, the Government of India set up a Committee on National Policy on Library and Information System (CONPOLIS) under the Chairmanship of Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyaya. Its report entitled National Policy on Library and Information System—A Presentation was submitted in 1986, and was subsequently assessed by an Empowered Committee chaired again by Prof. Chattopadhyaya to draw up an action plan (Anonymous, 1986). The Empowered Committee in its report submitted in March 1988, recommended that IT should be used as a tool for maintenance of standards in LIS education. Professional development activities be strengthened in a systematic way. An accreditation agency for LIS courses was suggested to check falling standards due to proliferation of schools. It was also



suggested to establish a National Centre for Higher Education and Research in LIS (Bhandarkar: 2013)

The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 inserted Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. Article 21-A and the Right to Education (RTE) Act came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. According to section no. 19 of the RTE Act 2010, no school shall be established, or recognized unless it fulfills the norms and standards specified in the schedule. The schedule mentioned that the library shall be in each school providing newspapers, magazines and books on all subjects, including story books.

## Current Scenario

In order to see the real scenario of the condition of the School Libraries in rural India, it will be pertinent to go through the Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2014, ASER Centre, New Delhi. The data provided, is collected from 577 Government schools out of 585 districts of the country. The finding clearly highlights that the School Libraries are at neglect in rural India. The detailed data is as follows:

State wise distribution of Schools in rural areas without a Library during last five years					
State	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Andhra Pradesh	8.0	5.4	5.3	3.8	2.8
Arunachal Pradesh	87.0	82.1	84.1		75.0
Assam	79.2	71.9	60.4	59.4	54.7
Bihar	47.1	38.9	25.4	25.4	23.7
Chhattisgarh	27.1	21.3	11.7	13.0	10.5
Gujrat	16.2	17.0	14.4	14.6	7.7
Haryana	35.4	21.8	15.5	10.8	15.8
H.P.	19.7	11.4	3.4	3.6	4.4
J&K		49.3	50.1	41.5	45.6
Jharkhand	38.4	26.5	21.0	13.4	10.3
Karnataka	7.6	7.4	5.8	9.0	8.2
Kerala	16.9	1.9	4.3	3.3	5.3
Madhya Pr.	43.7	41.3	29.1	19.3	15.0
Maharashtra	14.0	16.2	13.7	10.2	17.4
Manipur	90.8	92.9	88.5	89.4	82.0
Meghalya	78.0	63.8	76.0	62.0	76.4
Mizoram	93.6	72.9	77.8	80.7	83.2
Nagaland	86.7	91.0	87.8	66.8	85.4
Odishia	34.7	15.3	11.7	17.1	12.0
Punjab	4.1	5.6	9.4	23.2	11.3
Rajasthan	36.3	33.0	23.1	24.5	12.2
Sikkim	55.9	36.1	52.3	49.0	44.7
Tamil Nadu	20.9	23.2	16.2	10.9	13.5
Tripura	64.6	71.7	67.7	45.0	40.0
Uttarakhand	52.3	17.7	17.9	21.3	14.1
U.P.	51.4	22.9	17.8	23.5	25.5
W. B.	50.5	39.2	35.3	33.8	33.7

(Source ASAR (Rural) 2014)



- In about only 40.7% of schools that were visited, children were seen using library books.
- Nagaland displayed the gloomiest scenario with 85.4% of its school running without any sort of library. In year 2011, this number was even worse i.e. 91%.
- The conditions of all the North Eastern states are somewhat similar. 75 to 85.4% of schools in this region do not hold any library. Amongst all the states in India, only the states of this region are holding schools without library in such a large proportion. There is no other state in India falling in this range of 75 to 85% schools without libraries. However, Assam and Sikkim remains an exception with 54.7% and 44.7% of schools respectively without libraries.
- The condition of Assam and Sikkim is not as pathetic as of other states of North Eastern states. However, the condition of Assam and Sikkim cannot be taken as satisfactory. Almost half of the schools in these two states are not holding any library.
- In Andhra Pradesh, the scenario is appreciable as it holds on 2.8% schools without any library. During last five years, this state has performed well and the schools without libraries are decreasing every year.
- Some other states viz. Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Gujrat, and Karnataka are doing well with 4.4%, 5.3%, 7.7% and 8.2% schools without a library.
- The proportion of schools with library books has increased substantially, from 62.6% in 2010 to 78.1% in 2014. In about 40.7% of schools that were visited, children were seen using library books as compared to 37.9% in 2010.
- In year 2011, Kerala had only 1.9% schools without libraries. This is the best level touched by any Indian state during last five years.
- In year 2010, there were as many as 93.6% schools without libraries. This is the worst position of any Indian state during last five years.
- There are 78.1% govt. schools with any sort of libraries in 2014. It is ironical to find that there are 21.9% schools without any library. However, the proportion of schools with library books has increased substantially, from 62.6% in 2010 to 78.1% in 2014.
- Certainly, the circumstances have improved allover India (except North Indian states) states during last five years. Notwithstanding, it cannot be accepted that there are 21.9% schools spread all over India in rural areas that do not possess one of the most basic necessity such as a Library. The Chattopadhyaya Committee once commented that “no library no school”. In these terms, above 21.9% schools can never be called schools and almost all the schools in the rural areas of North Eastern Indian states cannot be treated as schools as such.
- Further, North Eastern states demand immediate attention to improve the condition in this region.
- There is not even a single state in India with all the schools holding libraries.

## Some suggestions

The scenario of school libraries in Indian rural areas cannot be treated as satisfactory. Considering the present situation, urgent attention should be given to this basic requirement of the education system. Here are a few suggestions to improve the scenario:

- It should be a mandatory condition for a school to have a library. The schools without a library may be given recognition by Education Boards.
- All the states should appoint well qualified and trained librarian in the schools.
- The librarian should work coordinating with the class teacher to help the students in a better way.



- A pre fixed percentage of total budget of school must be spent on libraries.
- The libraries should be well equipped.
- A consortium of School Libraries should be established.
- It should be made mandatory for school librarians to go for training and refresher courses on a regular interval.
- Standards for School Libraries in India should be developed that may contain the minimum criteria of Staff requirements, collection, services to be provided and finances required etc.
- Libraries in schools should be treated as an essential requirement of the education system and not an amenity.
- Special grant must be sanctioned to boost the pace of improvement of School Libraries. This becomes highly recommended for the North Eastern states of India. In this connection, the Central Govt. should support the states by providing bulk of funds to improve the conditions of School Libraries.

With the importance of libraries in schools, The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) has also submitted its recommendations on School Education to the Government of India stated that:

- Set up a National Commission on Libraries.
- Prepare a National Census of all Libraries.
- Revamp Library Information Science (LIS) Education, Training and Research facilities.
- Re-assess staffing of libraries.
- Set up a Central Library Fund.
- Modernize library management, encourage greater community participation in library management.
- Promote Information and Communication Technology (ICT) applications in all libraries.
- Facilitate donation and maintenance of private collections.
- Encourage Public Private Partnerships in LIS development.

## Conclusion

The libraries are the corner stone of the school education system. It is not an amenity but a basic requirement of the students. Therefore, the need of establishing a good library in every school cannot be ignored. However, the current scenario of School Libraries in India is far from being satisfactory. The section 19 of RTE Act 2010 supports the establishment of a library in every school in India. Still, there are almost 21.9% schools in rural areas without any library. No doubt, some states like Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Gujrat, and Karnataka are paying heed to concept of libraries in schools. Notwithstanding, the pathetic situation of North Eastern States cannot be ignored where the schools holding a library hardly exists in rural areas.

There is dire need to recognize the need to establish the School libraries in rural areas in India to meet the basic requirement of the students. Both, the central and the state Governments will have come forward and work in harmony to improve the situation by revising and accepting the recommendations of various commissions, committees, seminars, conferences and standards regarding school libraries along with proving regular funding.



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