

Role of Public Libraries in Educating the Hilly Tribes of Assam: A Study

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Abstract

Public libraries are those which serve the population of a community or region free of charge; they serve the general public or special categories of users. Thus, a public library aims to serve the general public or special categories of the public in the community concerned. It is basically a service library, which is meant to provide free service to all.

The rural people basically the people of hilly tribes in the state of Assam seems to be deprived of many opportunities and schemes provided by the local government or some other organization, due to ignorance of the information in concerned matter. They do not have ideas about rural library or public library services, its effective use for upliftment in the areas like education. The present work dealt with an investigation upon the role of public libraries towards educational benefit especially for hilly tribes in Assam.

Introduction

Public libraries are those which serve the population of a community or region free of charge; they serve the general public or special categories of users. Thus, a public library aims to serve the general public or special categories of the public in the community concerned. It is basically a service library, which is meant to provide free service to all.

International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) defines (1985) public library as “a library established and financed by a local, or in some cases, central government body, or by some other organization authorized to act on its behalf, available without bias or discrimination to all who wish to use it.”

The UNESCO public library manifesto defines the public library as “the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.

The public libraries happen to cover the widest population possible; their role in spreading literacy and education has long been acknowledged and is considered to be indispensable. The public libraries in this country are in an absurd state without a constantly refreshing print collection and vibrant non print multimedia sources that lure illiterate and semi literate folk due to various infrastructure, manpower and monetary constraints as well as lack of priority on the part of policy makers and implementing bodies.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are a diverse set of technological tools and resources to create, disseminate, store, bring value addition and manage information. In bridging the digital divide Public libraries have a major role to play. Quality of infrastructure, collection, information technology use, manpower, etc., in public libraries of India is very poor, barring few facilities in cities. All these aspects were comparatively better in research, academic and special libraries. Computerization will provide high speed of communication, online access, accurate and better service to their users. It is of vital importance that network is to be developed in such a way to reach to the remotest corner of the country. Modernization and up-gradation of public libraries in terms of staff proficiency and ICT application with the view of meeting informational, cultural and past time needs of unprivileged rural masses and increase their number as registered member. The information society is built on a foundation of collaboration and communication enabled by electronic networks.

Public libraries in India should adopt latest convergence technologies and have well maintained infrastructure ably supported by professionally trained competent staff; and have motivation to work greatly towards removing cultural inhibitions among its users. During recent years though several public library systems have developed but, the irony of the situation is that neither any effective public library system providing meaningful library services to the enormous rural masses or an integrated chain of library network has so far developed in the country. There is an urgent need that public libraries in India must shift its focus from collection to connection. Although Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) was introduced in rural development in the year 1986, rural public libraries largely remained as a forgotten asset in the dissemination of information to the rural population. Secondly the IT policy formulated in the year 2000 shown little interest in the development of rural libraries. The scenario need to change, the information professionals need to come forward and study the present system of operation and find a better solution to transform these reading rooms in to an information/knowledge centre where people, crippled with illiteracy or limited education, find value.

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“Role of Public Libraries in Educating the Hilly Tribes of Assam: A Study” is a comprehensive study in the field of public libraries. It is widely believed that the single most authentic indicator of the country’s future may well be the state of its higher education. Public libraries provide people with an opportunity to react to the critical, social, cultural and moral issues facing humanity, which is said to be a crucial factor for survival.

The library now is the chief instrument for accumulating and disseminating man's intellectual heritage. The value of information as an important and crucial factor in the social and economic development and progress of a nation is increasingly recognized in the present decade in comparison to ever before, and the public library plays an important role in disseminating various types of information to its readers. The role of public library in the society is a living force for popular education and dissemination of knowledge and culture.

Various objectives are there behind the carrying out these works. Nonetheless, the basic objectives are: (i) To trace out the present status of public library system and services in Assam. (ii) To find out the problems and prospects in different types of public libraries under Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao and Dhemaji districts of Assam. (iii) To find out the impact of the public library services upon educating the hilly tribes and tribal people in the said areas under three districts of Assam.

The topic entitled **“Role of Public Libraries in Educating the Hilly Tribes of Assam: A Study”** had been undertaken for the research work which covers the library services in the Karbi-Anglong, DimaHasao and Dhemaji districts of Assam, specially it embraces the public libraries in the two hill districts of Assam along with some rural libraries which serves the tribal communities in Dhemaji district.

The present study hypothesizes that the scenario of public libraries with its problems and prospects especially in hilly areas of Assam. Secondly, the public libraries at hilly districts of Assam need special attention of the government of Assam as the public libraries are basic instrument for educating the tribal people. Thirdly, the people of hilly tribes are not willing to get literate themselves, unless they are fostered by some agencies or people. Finally the communication and social environment are two another intervening factors for unwilling to get education. The study was basically based on primary data collected through questionnaires from libraries of three districts. The public libraries enumerated in full by questionnaire method eliciting the required information. Besides, personal interview and techniques are being followed for collecting data in context with the study. Collected data are analyzed after tabulation and process followed for the purpose. The analyzed data again are interpreted for getting findings and discussed for getting required data and information in context with the present study. Besides the macro and micro literature different types of web sites have also been searched.

Findings

In case of planning of library services in the state of Assam along with hill districts of Assam. The hill areas of Assam consist of total geographical area of 18,561 sq. km which cover only five numbers of public libraries. Public libraries will operate even if there are no educational institutions near or around them because functions of public library are to take care of the intellectual needs and welfare of the community as a whole. Therefore, in hill areas of Assam, there should be establishment of sub-divisional

libraries at various sub-divisions. But, it was proposed to establish only one new sub-divisional library at Maibong during the year 1996-97 by the respective state government. So, proper planning is indeed necessary and bold steps should be taken by the government to establish public libraries for the development of the public.

So far as library legislation is concerned for obtaining best result and also considering the aims of public library in hill areas of Assam, they should be free from under government control. There is a growing need for free public libraries in hill areas of Assam. The public libraries Act should be enacted in Assam for establishment and proper management of efficient, comprehensive and integrated public library service. In case of finance the libraries of hill districts of Assam are mostly maintained by subscription from members, late fines, and grants from government organization etc., which amounts are not sufficient enough for the performance of better library services in hill areas of Assam. The success of public library system in hill districts of Assam has not been possible due to lack of adequate financial provisions through library grants, not sufficient liberal government grants and generous donations. The proper establishment and maintenance of a network of free public libraries in the hill areas of Assam will be possible if people can be educated to feel that they should pay some taxes for their own benefits.

The proper development of public libraries in hill districts of Assam will be possible, if jointly the respective government of Assam along with the autonomous district councils of hill areas have made provision for better grants to the public libraries of hill districts of Assam. The findings showed that the public libraries in hill areas of Assam do not get adequate financial assistance from the state government. The library authorities have commented of financial problems, such as general financial crunch, cut in budget for buying books. Adequate finance provides a foundation to the entire fabric of the public library system.

Public libraries in Assam are required to submit their budget estimates to their immediate controlling authority at the appropriate level. The findings showed that budget plays a major role for the development of public libraries in hill areas of Assam.

The findings showed that infrastructure is mainly responsible for the proper development of the public libraries. The infrastructure consists of the following categories: (a) Library Building (b) Auditorium (c) Furniture

The findings showed that 60% of the public libraries of hill areas of Assam have a building of their own, but, majority of them are not in a good state. The findings regarding auditorium was that most of the public libraries in hill areas of Assam did not have well equipped auditorium. An auditorium in a public library will boost the extension services that could be forwarded to the public. The findings showed that more than half of the public libraries in hill areas of Assam do not have adequate furniture's. Inadequacy of such furniture was due to non-replacement of the old ones for lack of funds. So far no steps have been taken for the preservation of the library materials. The

library authorities have commented that they do not have adequate supplies of preventive materials to preserve the library properties. The finding showed that the concept of networking is a boon for public library. Automated networks can do miracles for public libraries of hill districts of Assam. This will enhance the capability of public library system for making available to all citizens who will lead them personal development of the individual and the social development of the community. Dynamic approach and creative action is required to overcome the main problem of finance for introducing integrated public library system. The findings showed that creativity is indeed necessary for the development of public libraries in hill areas of Assam. The libraries of hill areas should perform their democratic role as independently as possible, both for educational and recreational needs, for the development of the state, which reflect reality. The findings showed the public libraries play a vital role for the development of the educational system of the hill areas of Assam. Almost all the library staff in the public libraries of hill areas of Assam are not professionally trained. No steps are being taken by the government for training the library staff to follow the modern technology. It is also being observed that they are very negligent in their duties and abstain themselves from duty hours which has become a matter of concern to the public. The major findings regarding administration were that, the librarian and his staffs are the main persons who handle administration. But, the librarian makes the final decision. The findings also showed that the public face problems with irregular and inattentiveness of the library staffs and the service provided by them. The library authorities commented that lack of sufficient staff and sanctioning of money from the government are also administrative problems.

Conclusion

The hill areas of Assam have a long way to catch up with the rest of the advanced world. If the librarians of public libraries are truly convinced of the rightful role of public libraries as an essential adjunct to democracy, development of self detected study and lifelong education, librarians have to speak out in all forms and speak boldly and effectively so that their voices is heard. This is the right time when the new policy on education is pleaded for proper place of public libraries in the scheme of things and of reasonable provision of money to support the massive and for reaching efforts expected from public libraries of hill districts of Assam.

In the right of the above discussion, it is clear that there is an urgent need to undertake proper planning of library services in hill district of Assam. It is earnestly hoped that the state government and two autonomous district councils of hill areas should pay attention to those points and take remedial measures for rapid development of library services in these three hill districts of Assam.

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