

Rural Library Services- A Survey Study In Assam

Dr. Hari Charan Das.
Librarian, Bilasipara College.

The Main Points

- 1. The Rural Libraries are non-formal academic institution.**
- 2. Rural Libraries in Assam started at the age of Srimanta Shankardeva.**
- 3. These are also socio cultural organization.**
- 4. All the Rural Libraries are not up-to date.**
- 5. Government is not so interested with the Rural Libraries.**
- 6. Sundaridiya Satra Library is the oldest living Rural Library in Assam.**

Abstract:- Rural libraries are important institution as academic and socio-cultural organization for the country people. To study the services rendered by these libraries, a survey was done in some rural libraries of Assam, and a special survey was done in the Madhavadeva library of Sundaridiya Satra of Barpeta district which is the oldest living rural library in Assam. The paper reflects the study report.

Introduction:- Library services not only include the book lending services but also include various services like CAS, SDI etc. Current awareness service is to aware the readers about the books which fulfills the first law of library science. If there are books in the libraries, but readers do not know about them, they will not search these books. So readers' awareness is important library service. Another important library service is arrangement of the books in scientific order so that readers can find out there necessary books from the big heap of the books. This scientific arrangement is done by following classification procedure, cataloguing, computing and so on. This fulfills the second law of library science. This means every reader has to find out his necessary books which are available for him in the library. The scientific procedure of arranging the books also fulfills the third law of library science. It means that every book has its own readers, but the book has to be provided to the reader. If books are not arranged in scientific order, book may not be found out by its concerned reader. So it is the librarians' duty to make the match of right book with the right readers.

According to the fourth law of library science librarians should save the time of the readers. To follow this law the librarians can go for selective dissemination of information (SDI) service. To provide this service the librarian has to select the necessary information for the readers and disseminate to them.

The fifth law of library science is, library is a growing organism. Day by day new books or reading materials will be deposited in the library. Librarian has to provide some management services to manage this growing portion of the library.

In the rural libraries of Assam all those above mentioned services are not available. Book lending service, reading room services are regularly provided in the rural libraries. Generally the rural people are poor. Interested rural readers among them depend on the libraries to satisfy their urge for books. So lending service is very much essential by the rural libraries. Rural libraries provide readers service by availing them reading room facility. The rural readers gather in the reading room and generally they read newspapers and journals in the reading room.

The Survey Study:- A survey was done to know about the present scenario of the rural libraries of various districts of Assam. Some 65 nos. of libraries were studied among which Gurunanak Gramya Puthibharal of Barkola under Nagaon district has the highest collection (20,055). It was established in 1955. The daily readers are hundred and twenty five nos. per day. This library subscribes two daily newspapers and many journals. There are some libraries which are having the collection of Sachipat Manuscripts. Some libraries are having their own publication. The Nankar Bhaira Gramya Puthibharal of Nalbari district has been publishing a journal on poems and poetic literature "Seuji Seuji" for long thirty

five years. Some libraries publish yearly journal or souvenirs. These libraries are having a great impact on society as the centre of information and literature. The rural correspondents of newspapers not only take references from these libraries but also get day to day information as because these are the public gathering place in the rural areas. But many libraries are unutilized by the reporters due to lack of reference stock and lack of awareness.

Out of these sixty five libraries sixteen libraries are regularly utilized by the correspondents as the source of information, forty-one libraries are casually utilized and six libraries are not utilized by the rural correspondents of the newspapers at all. So, 24.61 % are regularly utilized, 63.7 % casually and 12.30 % libraries are not utilized by the rural correspondents of newspapers.

To aware the readers some rural libraries arrange seminars or meetings. Most of the rural libraries are attached with local clubs, which are responsible to run library. Such clubs organize debating, competition, Quiz Competition, extempore speech competition and discussion to develop the personality of the students which indirectly impact on the readership of the library. They become aware about various information. Competitive mind of the students are encouraged by these functions and they become interested to go to the library to enrich their knowledge.

Most of the librarians of the rural areas are social worker and most of them provide honorary service. Only the government registered library's librarian get Rs. 1500 as salary which is quit minimum. Even, then they render their services as a social service. Due to this reason, rural libraries can not provide the services like the district libraries or sub-divisional libraries. Most of the rural librarians are ignorant about the techniques of organizing the library. They do not know to classify the books or how to catalogue them. They provide their managerial services in traditional way. Selective dissemination of information service is almost absent in the rural areas. Of course some of the rural libraries provide documentation service. They provide this service by sticking the paper cuts of related news to the local areas in an information board. Information about job, cultural information, sports information etc. are provided by documentation process.

Publicity service or general information service also provided by the rural libraries to the rural readers. Notice Boards are used for this purpose.

Some rural libraries also share their resource with the locally established schools and colleges. They not only share the reading materials but also the equipments like chairs and tables for the reading room, almirahs to preserve the books, building to set up reading room or stack room etc. In most cases this type of resource sharing with the rural libraries and educational institutions are informal but done it in a cordial manner.

The rural libraries are the centre of various social functions like Bihu, Puja, Idd, Tithi of Shankardeva, 15th August, 26th January and so on. Most of these social functions are organized inside the libraries and librarian takes the leading role in these functions. These functions have indirect impact to increase the popularity of the library in a rural area. In most of the cases rural libraries are centre of non-formal education, information dissemination and sports, cultural and library promotions.

These rural library services are contributing a lot to educational, intellectual, cultural upliftment in of the rural people of Assam.

A Case Study was done in the Sundaridiya village of Barpeta district.

The report follows-

Madhavdeva, disciple of Shankardeva established 'Sundaridiya Satra' in 1570 and stayed there for long fourteen and half years. He was supported economically by one of his friends Madhava moral who was a rich and influential person in the area. Organizational support was provided by Thakur Ata, who was a disciple of Madhavdeva. Both these helping hands made Madhavdeva strong enough to organize the Satra with the different creative activities. Madhavdeva wrote the great books 'Namghosha' and the dramas like 'Chordhara Pim Pora Gushua', 'Bhojan Behar', 'Zumura' and so on while he was residing here. He organized the village people in a systematic manner. He divided the village in four parts as Pub-Hati, (East part) Pashim Hati (Western part) Uttar Hati (Northern part) and Dakhin Hati (Southern

part). All these parts of the village were provided special responsibilities for the development of the Satra. The youth of these villages were taught in the Satra and engaged them to copy the manuscripts of library. They were also taught to sing, dance, play drama and made the arts and crafts. Such manifold education uplifted the personalities of the youths of Sundaridiya and they became experts in every sides. The tradition of this education system is still followed by the rural libraries of the village. There are three libraries in the village. The Madhavdeva Library, Students Library and Shankardeva Library. The Madhavdeva Library was established in the year of 1917. These libraries distribute books, journals, newspapers etc. to the readers. The religious books like Bhagawata, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc.; biographies of great men were also distributed among the readers. Students library has a special stock for children also. The almiraahs of these libraries are still full of such books which are now not so popular among the readers. Now the readers need newspapers and journals rather than entertainment books.

In the 'Students Library' of Sundaridiya, out of 40 readers in a day only 5 readers borrow books. Other 35 readers are the readers of newspapers and journals. The electrical entertainment media has reduced the demand of entertainment information books in the village libraries also. There is a TV set in the Madhavdeva library where the users get news information as well as entertainment information. So these libraries provide entertainment information to the users with the help of audio-visual media. Before invasion of TVs, radios were kept in the libraries.

Libraries in the villages used to be a symbol of prestige. A village with a well equipped library was considered as culturally developed village. During the time of pre-independence, these libraries were frequently visited by the leading personalities. To get the honour as well as to catch the eyes of higher authority, the villagers enter into competition with the neighbouring villages in regard to its services. After Madhavdeva library the youths of Pub Hati of the Sundaridiya village started 'Students library' with this idea and motive. This library was established in 1953. It competed with Madhavdeva library and continued to survive with good numbers of readers and reading materials. In 1965, this library was visited by Bishnu Prasad Rabha, the great writer, artist and freedom fighter. He commented on this library as follows- "Visiting the Students Library of Sundaridiya, I have come to know that the students of this village has great eagerness to learn. They have tremendous spirit in their mind and hope, this spirit will make the library a successful one. The library should organize discussion or seminars for intellectual upliftment of the readers. They should also try to acquire more books for the library. I wish bright future of the library".

Bishnu Prasad Rabha commented this in 7-2-65 which is hung on the wall of library.

Like the Students Library the third library was also developed in the north part of the village by the youths of Uttar Hati. It was named as 'Shakardeva Library'. This library has no books. It is meant for newspapers only. There is a reading room in the library, where about twenty readers read in a day. The reading room is kept open from 7a.m. to 8 p.m. There is no holiday for the reading room, like Madhavdeva library and Students Library.

Thus three libraries are continuing the information services to the people of Sundaridiya village keeping open more than 12 hours per day in the days of the whole year. They try to fulfill the information needs of the people of the village by providing them books, journals, newspapers and facilities to enjoy electronic medias also.

But, these libraries are not run by trained or professional librarians. These are directed and managed by the committees or the clubs with financial help of public.

Worth mentioning that these three libraries and the Satra (where about sixty manuscripts of Sanchipat books are preserved) support not less than 250 readers cum listeners everyday. Such eagerness for information is really a sign of healthy education in the village.

Conclusion:- The government support for rural libraries is very negligible. These are run by the societies. But as a centre of open education and learning rural libraries are very much important. They should be provided enough facilities and trained library personals to serve the rural readers. The rural libraries should be improved as rural library and information centre.

References-

1. Bhuyan Jogendra Narayan, preface, Mahim Bora, (a biographical book on writer Mohim Bora), Rumi Rupak Enterprise, Nagaon, 1989, PP 5-9.
2. Sarma, Mukunda Madhava, Inscription of ancient Assam, G.U., Guwahati, 1978, PP 1-297.
3. Sarma, N.C. Essays on the folk lore of North Eastern India, Bani Prakash, Guwahati, 1988, PP 1-12.
4. Datta, Birendranath, A handbook of folk lore materials of North Eastern India, Ananda Ram Barua Institute of language, Art and culture 1994, PP 1-78 ; 116-135 ; 151-395.
5. Barua, B.K., A cultural History of Assam, Lawyers, Guwahati, 1969, PP 225.
6. Patgiri, Jagannath, Abibhakta Goalpara Jilar Satra Aru Math-Mandirar Itibritwa, Monorama Prakash, Guwahati, 1991, PP 103-209.
7. Sarma, Narendra Nath, The Growth and Development of Public Library Services in Assam, changing trend in librarianship in Assam, edited by Bhupen Goswami, GLA, Guwahati 1997 ; PP 1-15.

#####