

# Disaster Management in University Libraries of Assam: An Important Aspect

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## Abstract

*Disaster can disturb the regular services of a library. Different kinds of disaster affect the libraries in several ways. Libraries have to be well prepared for different types of disasters like natural disaster, accidental failures, criminal damages etc. This study has been undertaken to investigate the disaster preparedness in the university libraries. The present study is done using a survey, through a well-designed questionnaire. Personal observation, interactions with librarians through telephone was made. Both primary and secondary data has been collected. The result of the study reveals that majority of the university libraries have disaster preparedness such as written disaster plans, emergency exits, fire alarms, emergency power supply, prohibiting activities such as smoking, data backup, earthquake proof building etc. But some of the libraries under the study also indicated that they are less prepared to handle a situation coming out of the disasters. The study will help the LIS professionals to know about different disaster preparedness used in university libraries of Assam.*

**Keywords:** Disaster Management, Disaster Preparedness, Disaster Plan, Natural Disaster, Accidental Failures, Criminal Damage, University Libraries-Assam

## 1. Introduction

Libraries are gateways of knowledge. In an institution, library plays the same role as the heart plays in a human body. Disaster has been defined as an unexpected event that may drastically threaten the lives of humans or buildings which destroy the information infrastructure etc. In case of libraries, disaster brings unexpected risk to the collection, the library buildings, staff and also disrupt the services. The management of a library have to give emphasis on the building and library premises so that it become safe for public to come and safe for the staff to work and provide services. A proper disaster planning is very much important in order to minimize the impact of the disaster. The disaster may

be natural disaster, technical failure, malicious damage etc. Hence a proper disaster management plan is required in every library to provide a clear and coherent approach to dealing with disaster.

### 1.1 Disaster in Libraries

A disaster is unpredictable incident which threatens human safety and damages a library's buildings, collections, contents, facilities or services. The result of disasters varies depending on the type of the disaster and most often the location where they occur. Disasters in libraries come in two main forms, namely, natural and man-made. Natural disasters include floods, fires, earthquakes, storms and hurricanes, while man-made disasters include wars, rioting, malicious damage to materials, negligence, power surge/failure, armed conflict, terrorism etc. Disaster could be in the form of using computers to



hack into secure library automated databases to destroy valuable information. Any disaster disturbs various services provided by the library which may effect on users of the library directly or indirectly. Since we all know that a library is of no use, if there is no users. So, to bring fulfillment to a library, users should be always satisfied. So, there should be proper planning and management to handle disaster so that the adverse effects can be minimized and seamless services can be provided to users.

## **2. Literature Review**

Different literatures have been found in this area which states the vital role of disaster management planning in libraries. In a study conducted by Morgan and Smith (1997) titled 'Disaster management in libraries: the role of a disaster plan' stated that disaster management and planning should be one of the most important aspects of library management but in practice it has been found to be a neglected field in librarianship, particularly in South Africa. This article explored the main disaster management issues and reported disaster planning in research, academic and public libraries in the Greater Cape Metropolitan area. Finley (2001) in a paper 'Effective Disaster Plans: Response, mitigation and continuity' stated that every library needs a disaster plan and that plan needs to plan for the worst. Sidney (2002) in an article 'How technology and planning saved my library at Ground Zero' narrated how technology and planning saved the library from a total disruption of services after the 9/11 crises. Azigba and Edet, (2008) said that Disaster management is a dynamic process that requires good cooperative and co-ordination among different types of professionals. Kostagiolas et. Al., (2011) stated that Academic libraries in Greece have adopted a rather passive approach towards disaster

preparedness, limited to a few, elementary protection measures without following creative and modern methodologies so as to formulate an integrated disaster management plan. Disaster preparedness of libraries: insights from polytechnic libraries in Ghana' stated that it is important to note that irrespective of the amount of preparation disasters are in some cases inevitable. The only viable option is to put in place adequate measures to reduce its impact and to quickly recover to fulfill the mandate of the library. Barua (2018) in his paper 'Disaster management in college libraries: a study in India' concluded that Assam is prone to many disasters but the ground situation of disaster preparedness is not found to be suitable as founds in the present study.

## **3. Objectives**

To carry out this study successfully, some of the well-defined objectives were formulated. These are as follows:

- ❖ To know about the present disaster management planning of the libraries and availability of its written form;
- ❖ To know about the contribution of librarian and library committee in planning of disaster management in libraries;
- ❖ To know about the preventive measures used in the libraries; and
- ❖ To know about the problems faced by the libraries during implementation of disaster management planning.

#### 4. Methodology

In this study, questionnaire method; interview method; personal observation and literature review were adopted to collect various data which can meet the requirements of all the objectives that have stated. At first instance some of the existing literatures on different topics were consulted to gain some depth information about the topic subsequent to that a questionnaire was prepared and distributed among the librarians. Personal interview with the library staff of some of the libraries was conducted to collect required data for this study. Some of libraries were visited personally to gather some of the data like availability of preventive measures like fire alarm, fire extinguisher, emergency exit etc. The data obtained through various methods are tabulated, analyzed and interpreted according to the responses provided by the respondents.

#### 5. Limitations of the Study

This study is an attempt to gather some information about the disaster management in university libraries of Assam. The study covers different issues related to disasters in libraries like disaster management, disaster preparedness, disaster plan, disaster management committees, problems faced by the libraries during implementation of disaster management planning etc. To collect all the information mentioned above, a survey was conducted among the librarians of eight reputed universities of Assam. The study was totally dependent on Librarian of the libraries that have been surveyed. The geographical scope of this study is limited only to eight (8) university libraries of Assam. Disaster management area is vast subject for research. Responses from librarian's side were satisfactory. Some of the university libraries are left

out from the study because of communication problems and geographical limitations.

#### 6. Analysis of Data

##### 6.1 Availability of disaster management and planning committee

A disaster may occur anywhere at any time. So, to prevent a library from sudden disaster we should be prepared by means of proper planning along with a special committee constituted for this purpose which can guide the library and its staff to prevent or face the disaster without any loss to the library. As per the study, only two libraries have special committee for disaster management and planning. Out of these two libraries, one is not exclusively for library, but it is for whole the university.

##### 6.2 Initiative taken by Disaster Management and Planning Committee for the Preparation of Preventing Disaster in Libraries

Initiative like conducting orientation program among library staffs and discussions or awareness programs on topic like what are the disaster prevention steps they will take, how to manage library resources during some disasters, how to handle machinery resources used in libraries etc. should be undertaken by the disaster management and planning committee. But responses on this question were very poor during the survey. Even though two libraries have disaster management and planning committee, they have not conducted such initiative till now.

##### 6.3 Availability of Disaster Planning in Written form

Each and every planning or any resolutions taken by the library should be available in documented

form so that it can be reused in future. As per this study, only 12.5% libraries have disaster planning in written form, and remaining 87.5% do not have its disaster planning in documented form.

#### **6.4 Contribution of Librarian in Planning of Disaster Management in Library**

As disaster in libraries can effect on its users directly or indirectly, librarians should be always aware and always prepared to face any challenges come on his path. A librarian should be always dedicated towards the library. On the question about the contribution of librarians in planning of disaster management in libraries, most of the librarians were replied that as a librarian they monitor each and every areas of the library and whenever they come across some struggle in libraries related to any issue, they immediately inform it to concerned committee or administration.

#### **6.5 Special Fund for Disaster Management**

Most of the librarians under this study mentioned that since they do not receive any special fund for disaster management they cannot take any initiative for the preparation of preventing disaster in libraries. Because of lack of fund, they cannot afford some costly preparedness of disaster management which is really essential for libraries.

#### **6.6 Problems faced by the Librarians during Implementation of Disaster Management Planning and Preparedness in Library**

While the question regarding problems of implementing disaster management planning arises, different librarians mentioned different issues, such as financial problem, non-supportive administration, lack of trained staff etc. As revealed in data, seven libraries have financial problem, three libraries mentioned that they do not get support from

institution administration, one library have problems of unskilled staffs, and one library mentioned that they don't have faced any problems during implementation of disaster management planning and preparedness in library.

#### **6.7 Availability of Trained Staff**

A well-trained person can handle each and every situation easily. All libraries must appoint its staff that have some practical knowledge to handle every struggle occurs in a library. To manage, to plan prevention and control theory of disasters in libraries, some well-trained persons should take lead. Data shows that total seven out of eight libraries have trained staff.

#### **6.8 Availability of Preventive Measures**

Preventive measures like earthquake resistant building, emergency power supply, emergency exit, fire and smoke alarm, grills on windows, insurance, emergency connections to key agencies, data backup etc. are the preventive measures used in libraries. On the basis of data received during the survey, fifteen basics measures practiced in university libraries are included here. As per data , 62.5% libraries have fire and smoke alarm, 100% libraries have fire extinguisher, 75% libraries have provision for emergency exit, 75% libraries have prohibiting smoking and eating in libraries, 50% libraries have water proofing walls, 75% libraries have emergency power supply, 25% have solar system, 100% libraries have grills on windows, 100% libraries have data backup procedure, 62.5% libraries have used temperature control method, 100% libraries use regular pest control, 100% libraries have emergency connections to key agencies, 37.5% libraries have its insurance, 100% libraries have CCTV for security purpose, 50% libraries are having earthquake resistant building, 75% libraries are

practicing security check of the library at its closing time

### 6.9 Developmental Plan on this issue for Near Future

On this question, common answer from 50% libraries is “not yet”. Whereas other libraries mentioned that they want to form a disaster management committee in near future especially for libraries, and if they get sufficient fund, they will go for more disaster preparedness.

## 7. Objective wise Findings

### i) Present disaster management planning of libraries and its availability in written form:

Most of the libraries under the study were not giving much emphasis on this area. Only 25% libraries have disaster management planning committee, 62.5 % libraries have the planning for disaster management and 12.5% libraries have the planning in documented form.

### ii) Contribution of librarian in planning of disaster management in libraries:

The study reveals that due to financial constraints and non-supportive administration, the area of disaster management in libraries is still a neglected one, but librarians are giving responses that they monitor each and every tiny aspects of library, and when they observe something wrong, they immediately inform it to key persons, or concerned authority.

### iii) Preventive measures used in the libraries:

Most of the libraries have provision for emergency exit if some sudden disaster occurs, all libraries keep data backup so that some virus and malicious attack cannot destroy it, and CCTVs are available in each library. Grills on windows prevent books from thief and 100% libraries have grill on windows, 50% libraries

have earthquake resistant building and waterproof walls. Only six libraries make a security check at the time of closing the library. Two libraries are using solar system to overcome power cut problem in libraries. The study reveals one major aspect that most of the private university libraries are using much better preventive measures than the government libraries. Most of the private universities think that a well-maintained library can attract students towards their institution and number of students attracted towards their institution is directly proportional to their benefit which is not applicable for government universities.

### iv) Problems faced by the libraries during implementation of disaster management planning:

Financial problem and non-supportive administration are the major problems faced by most of the libraries.

## 8. Suggestions

In case of disaster management, libraries are lagging behind (mostly the government libraries). Most of the libraries do not have fire alarm system installed and if installed, they are not maintaining well. Libraries are facing problems like power cut, as well as temperature control systems. The disaster management plan should be considered important in maintaining a library well.

### Libraries must take care of the following

- ❖ **An effective plan:** A disaster management plan should be flexible. Disaster has three phases-before, during and after. A disaster management plan should be applicable in all these phases. The plan must include the library and information field including staffs, readers, sources of information, equipment and infrastructure etc.

- ❖ **Backup (Mirror Server):** There should be a mirror server in a library. Mirror server means a backup server for all works of a primary server so that if primary server fails data remain safe. Even if all the university libraries practice this method, but they do not practice it daily. The work done on daily basis in a library should be backed daily. Data backup should be done in more than two places.
- ❖ **Prevention of power cut problems:** Power cut during some important work can lead to data loss, installation of solar power system could be good alternative of electric power and it can assure an interrupted electric power.
- ❖ **Fund:** Fund is important factor in planning disaster management. As most of the libraries are facing financial problem to overcome this an additional fund should be made available for procuring necessary equipment
- ❖ **Trained Staff:** Trained staff should be appointed, so that they can handle each and every problem occurs in a library easily.
- ❖ **Insurance:** A library should have its insurance.
- ❖ **Support from authority:** Most of the governmental university libraries do not get proper attention from authority; support from authority can lead a library towards its success.

## 9. Conclusion

Disasters are not predictable; it can cause major losses of library resources and disruption in the library services. Since Assam is a disaster-prone area, libraries of Assam should be well prepared for it. Due to different problems like financial constraints and non-supportive administration the area of disaster management in libraries is still a neglected

one. Among the eight libraries only one library has the disaster management plan in documented form. But librarians are giving responses that they monitor each and every tiny aspects of library and inform the concerned authority if they observe something wrong.

The study also reveals that different preventive measures have taken by the libraries. Each library has used CCTV cameras for security purpose. Among the libraries 50% have earthquake resistant buildings. Six of the total libraries have fire and smoke alarm. Each library has data backup plans so that it can retrieve easily if any disaster occurs.

It is however very needed to conduct further studies so that major factors for poor disaster management in the university libraries of Assam can bring into focus.

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