

Role of Rural College Libraries of Assam in Digital Divide

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Abstract

Due to the rapid growth in information and communication technology the digital divide has been identified as one of the prime issues in present situation. Again the digital divide occur maximum in rural areas which make barrier for the development. There are lots of opportunities to development in rural areas which are not full filled due to digital divide. But the rural college libraries can play a role of making bridge to overcome the digital divide. This paper contains some different reason of digital divide in rural areas and trying to put some solution to overcome from this situation so that the rural society can grow as faster as the nation grow.

Keywords: College Library, Digital Divide, Information and Communication Technology, Assam - Rural Areas

1. Introduction

A decade before some terms like ‘Information Gap’, ‘Information Rich’, ‘Information Poor’ etc were very popular. But now a day the Digital Divide is a prime issue to discuss for development of a society. Due to the development of technology and digital revolution, has done tremendous effect to all by overlooking from rich to poor, from entrepreneur to farmer etc., to the society. But there are some gap found in different areas due to some unavoidable circumstances. These digital divide can occur due to different reasons. A college library has a vital role in society which can effect in digital divide too. As we know that the rural areas are the back bone of Indian economy. Thus to make a healthy India the rural society or the rural economy should have a strong position. To make this the information communication or the information technology in rural area need to be a strong position. The people

from the rural areas should be familiar with this kind of technology and the devices. In case of digital era the digital divide is the strong barrier to access information or use digital devices in rural areas of Assam. The college library can play a vital role to disseminate information or by helping to collect information by the local people. The college libraries can build a bridge to overcome the digital divide at the rural areas of Assam.

2. Definition

Time to time the definition of digital divide has changed. Some of the definitions from different sources are given bellow:-

The term digital divide has been coined by the former united state Assistant Secretary for Commerce for telecommunications “Larry Irving” a decade ago. According to him “The existing gap in access to information service between those who can afford to purchase the computer hardware and software necessary to participate in the global information network and low income families and communities they cannot.” (Dragulanescu, 2002).

According to ALA its definition is “Differences due to geography, race, economic status, gender and physical ability

- ❖ in access to information through the internet and other information technology and services.
- ❖ In the skill, knowledge and ability to use information the internet and technologies. (ALA,2002).

According to K L Paul, “The phase digital divide refers to the unequal and disproportionate pace of development in societies in having access to digital infrastructure and services”. (Paul, 2002)

“The lack of Access to information and communication technologies by segments of the community. The digital divide is generic term used to describe this lack of access due to linguistic, economic, educational, society and geographic reasons”. (Security of Act and regulation committee 2005)

According to Oxford English Communicative Dictionary (OECD, 2001) defines digital divide as “The gap in opportunities for individuals households or companies of different social and economic backgrounds and geographies in accessing information and communication technology and abilities on the internet.

According to webopedia (2017) digital divide is a term used to describe the discrepancy between people who have access to and the resources to use new information and communication tools, such as internet and people who do not have the resources and access to the technology. It also means the discrepancy between those who have

the skills knowledge and abilities to use the technologies and those who do not.

3. Digital divide in rural areas of Assam

To develop a nation the rural area should be developed first. Due to the development of information technology the rural areas are also developing very fast. But still there are some digital divide which effect the development of the rural areas. The people of rural areas of Assam are facing many problems to run with the new development. Some digital divide in rural areas of Assam has been observed during the study.

3.1 Computer Education

The computer education or the computer literacy among the common people of rural areas is very less ^[10]. The young generations are now familiar with the computer but still there are lots of people who are not aware about the internet, computer etc. now a day’s government also takes initiatives to make aware about the information technology or the computer among the people lives in rural areas of Assam. The government facilities, government grants are also transfered digitally now. So the people are also now interested to learn computer. But in Assam the rural areas are lacking behind regarding computer education. For which the people are not familiar with the new technology and its uses. This is a prime digital divide observed in rural areas of Assam.

3.2 Infrastructure

The main digital divide in rural area of Assam is because of poor infrastructure. The access of internet in the rural areas is very poor ^[2]. There are lots of areas where even mobile networks are also not available. The density of population in rural

areas of Assam is very less so for a mobile network company or any other internet provider face lots of problems. In this case the companies are investing more money but they are not getting the profits according to their investment. Thus the internet providing companies are also not so interested to improve their services in the rural areas of Assam. In Assam lots of small hills are located in rural area, for which the Aerial signals for networks are disturbed. This is also one of the reasons why the internet service is poor in rural area of Assam. Therefore we can say that the poor infrastructure is also one of the digital divide for rural Assam.

3.3 Electricity

The problems of electricity supply in rural area of Assam are one of the key reasons to slow down the computer literacy or the digital literacy in Assam. Now a day's government is also trying to overcome from this problem. But due to the environmental condition government also fails to supply electricity properly in maximum rural area of Assam^[2]. But off course now the problems are minimized to some extent but still there are some lacunas. Due to the lack of electricity supply the common people are not able to enjoy the facilities of information technology and communication. All the digital equipment required electricity more or less, but due to lack of supply of the electricity, the rural people cannot use those properly, which becomes a prime digital divide for the rural community of Assam.

3.4 Skill in Internet

The use of internet or skills in internet is very less among the rural people compared with the people living in urban or semi urban areas of Assam. The common people in rural areas are not so familiar with the internet^[10]. Though they bound to use internet

in some case for example, to use banking facilities or to achieve the government schemes etc. they only know how to operate a mobile phone or a computer but they are not so familiar with the internet facilities. The young stars of rural areas are now a little bit familiar about the use of internet, the old people are taking help from those kids. The government provide fund for internet service in Panchayat, and rural block offices. But due to unavailability of skilled people the projects are also not working properly. The block development offices of rural Assam are providing computer education and use of internet to the common people. But the old people are not taking the training due to the distance of those offices to their village is very far, so they are not interested to come to the block office to learn computer and internet. Hence the internet literacy or internet skill is also one of the digital divide for rural areas of Assam.

3.5 Value of Information

The people from rural areas of Assam cannot feel the value of information. They know that information needed for doing any development work like in agriculture, handloom and handicraft etc. but they cannot understand the value of the information at proper time. If a farmer gets information regarding the rain or about the insect attacks in crops at proper time, then they can take protection for the same. In this case the farmers get more benefits from their field. Thus proper information in proper time has its own value. This kind of understanding by the common people of rural areas of Assam but they don't know how to collect those information and from where to. Thus the ignorance of the proper value of information by the people from rural Assam is one of the digital divide. If they realize the value

of the information in proper time then definitely they will try to overcome from the situation arising at the time of information collection and again they should change their information seeking behavior also. The value of the information is one of the digital divide for the people of rural Assam.

3.6 Economic Conditions

An economic condition of rural area people of Assam is a prime digital divide. The economic condition of the rural area people is very poor ^[2]. To use digital equipment or digital service the user need to pay some amount of money. But now government is trying to facilitate this kind of information service free of cost, but some areas are still not covered by this government project. The mobile networks are covered maximum places but in Assam due to the geographical conditions and flood condition, it is very difficult for an internet provider to provide internet service smoothly. The rural areas of Assam covered with hill or plane area where flood affected areas are maximum. Thus for a vendor it is very difficult to provide internet service regularly without any interruption. The rural people also do not have strong economic condition to facilitate on their own. Thus the economic condition of rural people is one of the prime digital divide in rural areas of Assam.

3.7 English Literacy

Another most important digital divide in Assam is literacy in English Language. Basically the rural adult people are not familiar with English language ^[4]. Now a days the English medium schools are running in the rural areas of Assam but few years back there were no English medium schools. Thus the common people are not so familiar with the English language. To use the digital devices or the digital information service the user must have

minimum knowledge in English language. The devices are running on the bases of English language. And the information also serves in English language mostly. So without minimum knowledge of English a user cannot access information or can't use any digital device. Thus literacy in English language is one of the important digital divide for rural areas of Assam. The Assam basically the rural areas of Assam, English language is still a problem. Today English medium schools are running in the rural areas but the old people or the adult people are still not familiar with the English language. The official letters, schemes, information are published in English language thus the information is not communication in maximum numbers. The internet is fully running with English language, so a user without knowing English can't access or cannot understand the information. Thus we can recognize the English language is a digital divide for people lives in rural areas of Assam.

4. Role of College Libraries

It is seen that there are lots of digital divide occur in case of rural area of Assam. The colleges in this region are very important organization for developing the rural society. The college library can play a vital role in building a bridge between the digital divide and rural community. Today the role of college libraries at rural areas of Assam plays partially but if they played the vital role then definitely the rural society as well as the nation like India will develop more rapidly. Basically Indian economic growth depends on the rural economy. Thus if the rural economy can grow then the Indian economy will also develop automatically. In this digital era the role of college libraries are to provide information to the user. But due to best practice in college libraries the service should extend from the

students to the other general rural people. The user and the expectation from the college library services are changing day by day. To meet the user needs the college libraries have to adopt and implement some new technology, new tools, new service etc. due to the changing technology the college libraries are forced to convert from the old traditional library to a modern information centre. The college libraries need to provide lots of web-based services by using new technology and applications. The college libraries can build the bridge between the digital divide and the rural communities of Assam.

4.1 Internet & Computer Education

The rural college libraries can play an important role on computer and internet education among the rural society. This may increase the computer literacy in rural society. The rural college library can provide computer education and training to the local people near by the college. There are lots of problem in computer education or training for the common people of rural areas of Assam. One of the reasons is the lack of computer training institution available at rural areas for the common people. Thus they are not familiar with computer which occurs as a digital divide for rural Assam. By offering this kind of training or practice by the rural college libraries can increase the computer literacy at rural areas of Assam. Once the computer literacy is increased then rural people can use computer as well as internet. Thus rural college libraries can make a bridge by playing the vital role on decreasing the possibility of digital divides in rural area occur due to lack of computer literacy and lack of use of Internet.

4.2 Developing Infrastructure

Most of the rural college library has a set up of Wi-Fi connectivity which is accessible for the college

teachers and the students only. But if the college library makes this connection open then the local people also can take advantage of internet connection. The college library can give access to this Wi-Fi connection to the guardians of the student so that they can benefit from the internet. In rural areas of Assam is having a problem with the internet service. The common people of rural areas of Assam face problem with the internet access due to unavailability of internet provider. But the rural college libraries in Assam are having internet connection without any disturbance. So by allowing the internet connection through Wi-Fi to the common rural people's college libraries can make a bridge between the digital divide for the rural peoples of Assam. The rural college libraries are having computer lab for the students to access internet. College libraries can allow the local people to use computer for internet access after the college time. This type of service now a day's very popular by the name of best service of college libraries. The NAAC also encourage the college libraries to provide this kind of community services by which a society can develop. This kind of service overcome the digital divide occur due to the lack of infrastructure in rural areas of Assam.

4.3 Overcome From Lack of Electricity

In Rural areas of Assam lack of electricity is a prime digital divide. Due to the geographical or economical condition the supply of electricity in rural areas of Assam is very poor. This kind of digital divide may overcome by the little effort of the rural college libraries. Almost all college in rural Assam has emergency power supply. Thus a college supplies the emergency power to the libraries. But these kinds of facilities are not available for the common people of rural areas. So the people face problem to use

computer or to access internet service or any other communication digital devices. Thus the digital divide occurs due to less electricity in rural areas of Assam. A college library can offer the information services to the common people by using their emergency power supply. The library may allow the local people to use the internet or computers from the college library itself. Thus a rural college library can overcome from the digital divide occur due to the lack of electricity supply in rural areas of Assam.

4.4 Information Dissemination

Everyone is using information somehow the other. But they are not able to understand the value of information. They use information in case of weather report, about the insect dangerous for the crops. About the germs attack in the health sector, etc. the rural people collect information regarding this facts and they take precaution against this. But they understand the value of this information in correct time. A college library can provide information by using internet in the library. The current information can disseminate to the rural people which is really useful for the people. The college library can arrange the e-journals, e-Papers, e-books and can serve the rural people. The e-document management is one of the prime functions of the college library because for rural people it is very difficult to collect information from the flood of information sources. A college library can compile such relevant information and disseminates among the rural people. The student or the rural people are using mobile phone. The rural college library can disseminate the important current information through the mobile phone and make available in their hand with a single click. So the college library can make use of groups, whatsapp groups by which the library can disseminate the current information to

the rural community. Thus a rural college library can play the role to overcome in digital divide occur due to problems in proper information dissemination in rural areas of Assam.

4.5 To Overcome Economic Barrier

The rural society of Assam is basically economical poor. The digital equipments or digital services of information are little expensive. But due to the economic condition of rural society the situation of digital divide arises. To overcome this situation the rural college libraries can play a very important role. The rural college library should serve to the rural society. The rural people can use the resources of the local college library. They can access the internet service from the college library. They can even use the computer for access internet at the college library too. The rural college library can make some extra work to communicate with the rural people. The library can make user information group, e.g. the agricultural group where the college library should serve the current information related to the agricultural field. Some services can be making available with the free of cost. The news paper and magazines are already available at the college library. The rural college library can make available those to the local rural community after the college hours. Then the local people can be benefited from the current information without spending extra money. It is not possible for a person to collect many information sources by themselves. But for a college library it is possible to some extent. The common people can access information from the college library. If a rural college library share their information resources (both Printed and digital) with the local rural people then the rural people get benefited. Thus a rural college library makes a prime role to overcome

the digital divide arise due to the economic condition of the rural society of Assam.

4.6 Overcome from Language barrier

The digital divide in rural areas of Assam still arises due to the English language. For the common people of rural areas of Assam is very difficult to collect information from internet or from any other digital services. It is also difficult to use digital devices easily without knowing English language properly. In this situation a rural college library can play a major role to overcome from this problem. The rural college library can access important or required information and can translate into the local language and disseminate to the people. The college library can provide translation services to the local people. Again the rural college library can conduct some training program on the English language for the local people. Then at least the common people can use the digital device or they can collect information from the internet by their own. The language problem is a major problem for the rural areas of Assam. The rural common peoples of Assam are not familiar with the English language. But the maximum information or services are in English language. Thus they face problem to collect information or to operate some digital devices. A rural college library can only help to the rural local community to overcome this problem by providing translation service or the language training program among the local people. Thus the rural college libraries can play the role to overcome the digital divide occur due to the English language.

5 Conclusion

The college libraries have a major role to play to overcome the digital divide in rural areas of Assam. The information explosion and paradigm shift

towards electronic media and resources have changed the needs of the user as well as the role of the college libraries. The rural society of Assam also depends on the digital devices and digital information sources or services. But due to some major problem the society is lacking behind on the development. They face lots of digital divide in the form of education, economy, geographical location, etc. The rural college libraries can overcome this digital divide for the society by offering some services and facilities to the rural society. Thus a rural college library plays a vital role to overcome the digital divide for the rural areas of Assam.

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