

Status of Children Libraries in Assam: An analytical study

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Abstract

An aim of the study is to visualize current scenario of children libraries in Assam. The study has been carried out on a sample of twelve full-fledged children libraries drawn from different parts of the state using judgmental sampling method. Number of staff strength in the libraries found ranges between 1-4. Books collection in the libraries is in the range of 12000 to 15000 in two, 6000-9000 in two, 3000-6000 in three, while five libraries having less than 3000 collection. Average number of magazines in the libraries is found to be four. Children encyclopaedias are available in 2 libraries with one title each. CDs and DVDs are available in four libraries with highest 38 in one. Video game playing facilities are available in 2 libraries, TV sets in 5, computers in 6 libraries of which four with Internet facility. The availability of other learning aids viz. the Kindle Reader, Globe, Maps and Charts and other materials are there in all the libraries but in very poor in numbers in comparison to the number of daily users. Only two libraries are found to be using Library Management Softwares viz. Koha and SOUL. Number of registered users varies from 75 to 590, while daily users in the range of 40 to nearly 300. It is observed that most of the relatively well-organized libraries are in the urban and semi-urban areas. A note of suggestions has been lined up for betterment of the status of the children libraries.

Keywords: Children Library, Public Library, Assam

1. Introduction

It is a well-known adage that children of today are the citizens of tomorrow. This is the reason that the best investment for a better society tomorrow, the investment in the quality education and overall wellbeing of the children. This is well reflected in the utmost care taken by the parents in investing all possible on education and upbringing their children. This is equally evident in the national education policies of our country, which has put significant impetus towards research and development in framing out most scientific curricula for each

standard in the school education. Development of the critical thinking and reasoning is undoubtedly referred to as the best traits to be inculcated during the teenage and the early teenage period (Barman, 2004). As such, this is the best time to establish the affinity with books which would further foster the skill of visualization, imagination, critical thinking of a child which ultimately nourishes the creativity. The National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) is the organization in the country shouldering the responsibilities of framing the curriculum for different standards of school education. It is pertinent to note that the NCERT has very rightly identified the library as a vital component in the school education and has made it mandatory for the schools to have well equipped



library. The schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) have their libraries following the direction. It is a fact that the schools having libraries offer one or two library classes in a week, which is a mere introduction to the existence of a library in a school. It may be inferred that with the limited exposure to the libraries, it hardly meets the expectations to create a sense of love to books in the minds of the students. Had it kept open in the holidays and/or after the class period, the situation could have been something different. Again, there are very few school libraries having equipped with the proper environment for a child to play and learn as they wish (Kalita, 2016).

Another most discerning fact is that the children studying in the schools under the CBSE enjoys a privilege over their counter parts in the schools under the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA) due to lack of any mandatory provision for library facilities. Another fact regarding the plight of the school education in Assam is that the high dropout rate of children with nearly 15% in the age group of 6-16 years being the highest in the country (<https://community.data.gov.in>). The lack of library facility with adequate learning and reading services is one of the most impacting factors for drop out the child from the education (Jha, 2013). In such a situation, the public libraries near the vicinity of the residence may be instrumental in inculcating the reading habits of a child. A children library in public domain enjoys certain obvious advantages over the libraries in the schools such as convenient opening time for the local community *i.e.* opens in holidays and afternoons, accessible for all students irrespective of any kinds of academic or social affiliations, etc.

Taking cognizance of the fact, a nationwide movement for children libraries is witnessed leading to the establishment of different libraries exclusively for the children in different parts of the country during 80s and 90s (Mohanraj, 2004) and later as well. Mention may be made of the establishment of the Jawahar Bal Bhawans at different parts of the country (<http://www.jawaharbalbhavan.com/>), the formation of the Association for Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC) in the year 1981 (<http://www.awic.in/>) in the line of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) (<https://www.scbwi.org/>), USA.

Assam has a network of public libraries spanning over 27 districts and 23 of them have a children corner. However, except few, the resources and other facilities in the children corners are far from the level of expectations (Kalita, 2017). It is an encouraging fact that there are countable numbers of personal libraries in different parts of the state where special provision is made for the children to read and even take books on loan (Das, 1997). It is noteworthy that even though there witnessed a silent movement for children libraries in certain localities in the state particularly in the rural area, the magnitude is insignificant to bring a visible change as it is yet to receive the patronage from the part of the government in a holistic way (Hazarika, 1998).

Apropos to the context above, a survey has been made to have an exposure to the situation of the children libraries in Assam on a sample of twelve full-fledged children libraries drawing from different parts of the State. The study has covered the eight full-fledged children libraries and other four running under different organizations in the state. Except one, all others are under different societies, trusts, and voluntary organizations.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study is a survey of the full-fledged children libraries in the state of Assam with the following objectives:

- ❖ To know their organizational of the libraries;
- ❖ To know the resources and the services available ;
- ❖ To study the use of the libraries; and
- ❖ To study the status of use of ICT in the libraries.

3. Methodology

The study has been carried out adopting the following methodologies:

- ❖ **Literature Review:** Existing literature on the subject is perused to be comprehended with the historical perspective of the public libraries in the state in general and the children libraries in particular.
- ❖ **Questionnaire Method:** Structured questionnaire has been developed to gather data on various parameters of the study as lined up in the objectives. Both closed ended and open-ended questionnaires have been penned down to extend the exhaustivity of the study.
- ❖ **Personal Visit and Interaction:** Personal visits were paid to the libraries with a view to have a first-hand experience on the libraries on various parameters pertaining to the study and interact with the working library staff.

Data gathered on different parameters have been analysed using MS Excel^(R) and inferences made there of towards achieving the objectives of the study.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Data Source

There are total 39 children libraries in the state so far record available with the Directorate of Library Services, Assam (<https://publiclibraryservices.assam.gov.in>). These 39 children libraries are distributed to 23 districts (out of the total 33) in the state. Out of the 39 libraries, 23 are children sections of district libraries and other four are attached to sub-divisional libraries. There are eight full-fledged children libraries and four others attached with different voluntary organizations and societies. A sample of 12 libraries comprising the eight full-fledged children libraries and others four run by different autonomous and voluntary organizations has been taken for the study.

4.2. Distribution of the Libraries by Parent Organization

The oldest library found to be the Nava Puthi Bharal, Mangaldai, established in the year 1968. The library was initially established in the year 1948 by the effort of great social worker Late Lambodar Bora. However, the name of the library at the time of establishment was “Tarun Sanga Puthiibaral”. The name of the library was changed to “Nava Sangha” in the year 1956 and again in the year 1968 renamed to the present one by merging a library of a “Moina Paarijat” that existed in the same locality and became a full-fledged children library. There are five others run by NGOs, three under trusts, two each libraries under government, and autonomous organizations. There are total eight libraries found to be exclusively full-fledged children libraries while other four attached with the parent organizations.

4.3. Staff Strength in the Libraries

The strength of manpower in the surveyed libraries as presented in the data, depicts that only one library (*i.e.* Bishnu Nirmala Children Library, Guwahati) is manned by a professionally qualified librarian. Total number of staff strength in the libraries found to be 4 in one, 3 in three, 2 in five and rest three libraries running by a single staff.

4.4. Resources in the Libraries

Resources available in the libraries under the survey is presented in data reveals that five libraries out of the 12 surveyed housed with less than 3000 collections. Three libraries within 3000-6000 in three, two within 6000-9000 and two libraries are found to be with books in the range of >12000 to <15000. So far, the collection of magazines are concerned, 18 is the highest number found in only one library. Six to fifteen numbers are found in four libraries, while one to five magazines are found in seven libraries. Average number of magazines in the libraries surveyed is four. Children encyclopaedia is found in two libraries with one title each. CDs and DVDs are available in four libraries with highest 38 in one library, followed by 11 to 20 in two libraries. Video game playing facilities are available in two libraries only, five libraries are having TV sets with highest two sets in one. The availability of learning aids *viz.* the TV set, Kindle Reader, Globe, Maps and Charts and other materials are presented in the data which depicts a poor picture of the libraries with three libraries having one TV set, one with a kindle reader. However, eight libraries are having globes, five having maps and three having charts.

4.5. Services in the libraries

Data about service offering reveals that reading room facilities are available in all libraries but two libraries have restriction in book lending. Reading facilities are present in six libraries, while story telling is offering by seven libraries. Indoor play facilities present in nine, and outdoor in four libraries. The reading for others and storytelling services are known to be popular among the small kids visit the library. This is further not offered on daily basis, but on certain occasions organized by the libraries commemorating great legends.

4.6. Status of Computerization in the Libraries

Data reveals that six libraries have been equipped with computers and internet facilities are available in four only. Number of computers available ranges from 3-15 with highest in the CE CDC library, Dhemaji followed by the Snehabandhan Children Library. It is to be noted that all the libraries are having computers and internet facilities are located in urban areas and four these libraries are in Guwahati. So far LMS is concerned, one each library is using Koha and SOUL (*i.e.* Bishnu Nirmala Children Library and Arohan Library, respectively) while the other four libraries managing their library data in MS Excel^(R)

4.7. Users in the libraries

It is evident that Bishnu Nirmala Children library has maximum 590 numbers of registered users which ranges between 75 and 450 for others. It is attributed to the fact that Bishnu Nirmala Children Library is the first children library set up by the Government of Assam in the year 1987 and located at the heart of the city of Guwahati. Daily users' record in the

libraries is found between 40 -and 300 with highest in the Arohan Library, Beltola Guwahati. The one of the notable factors attributed to the high users turn up is that the library offering a good number of playing facilities and other programs to meet the taste of the children.

5. Conclusion

The Directorate of Library Services under the department of culture, Govt. of Assam has a network of libraries with 252 libraries (Reference library 1 attached with the district library, Guwahati, 27 district libraries, 4 branch libraries, 16 sub-divisional libraries and 204 rural libraries). As many as 23 district libraries and four sub-divisional libraries have their children corners. The irony is that a step-motherly treatment is evident in the district and sub-divisional libraries so far resources and other infrastructure facilities are concern. Recognizing the importance of libraries for the children different voluntary organizations and trusts including some of them clubs and other social organizations have established libraries exclusively for children, but the number of such libraries are not at all encouraging. Most discernable fact is that a good number of children libraries established at different times by different organizations/societies soon turned to an orphan due to lack of sustained support for their survival and growth. It is further evident that societies/trusts and/or NGOs are playing significant role in the movement for children libraries in the state. It is therefore concluded that goodwill, commitment and constant involvement from the part of the conscious citizens, different voluntary organizations and alike is must to bring light to the

movement of children libraries in the state. Different library associations prominent in the state may also play a significant role in the betterment of the scenario of children library in the state. More particularly, if the Government of Assam could be convinced the importance of school libraries, the children library movement would wear a fresh look in the state. It may be concluded that the people of the state at large are eagerly looking for the Government of Assam to enacting robust and functional library legislation toward realizing the dream for a holistic public library system, as well.

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Further Reading

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Note:

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