



**Access to information by the rural communities in
Indian villages: the role of Raja Rammohun Roy
Library Foundation (RRRLF)**

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Abstract

Realizing the need to help supporting development, growth and modernization of public libraries in India, Government of India has established Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) with laudable objectives. The RRRLF supports the State Governments with the matching, non matching grants and other assistance to public libraries. RRRLF aims at these public libraries function as community information centers to meet the information of villagers in their day to day life. Their information needs include variety of agricultural operations, agricultural products, fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, crops, agricultural education, agricultural marketing, poultry, sheep and goat rearing etc. The RRRLF has established four Regional Centers in the South, North, East and West, and its Directorate is located at Kolkota in India. This paper examines the role of the RRRLF in the development and modernization of public libraries in providing information to the rural communities in India.

Key words – India, Public libraries, Library foundation, Access to information

Introduction

Public libraries in India are the neglected lot. Their progress is not on par with the development of the university and research libraries. They function under the administrative control of the state governments. Libraries are not a priority item as for as the state governments are concerned. Realizing the need to help supporting development, growth and modernization of public libraries in India, Government of India has established Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) with laudable objectives.

Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation

The RRRLF was created by the Central Government in 1972 on the occasion of the bi-centenary of the birth of Raja Rammohun Roy for “supporting and promoting a network of libraries, which could carry books and the reading habits to the remotest parts of the country”. Raja Rammohun Roy was a social reformer and a founding father of the Indian Renaissance.

The RRRLF was inaugurated formally on May 20, 1972 at the campus of the National Library, Beelvedere, Kolkata. The Foundation had laid down 29 objectives for its operation. The most important objectives are mentioned below.

Objectives

- (i) to promote library movement in the country;
- (ii) to enunciate a national library policy and to work towards its adoption by the Central and State Governments;
- (iii) to help build up a national library system by integrating the services of National Libraries, State Central Libraries, District Libraries and other types of libraries (children’s academic and special) through inter-library lending system;
- (iv) to propagate the adoption of library legislation in the country;
- (v) to provide financial and technical assistance to libraries;
- (vi) to establish in the country Regional Library Service Centers which will offer reprographic and book preservation services to assist in the reproduction and proper preservation of reading material, whether printed or in manuscript form;
- (vii) to maintain a national register of qualified librarians and their fields of specialization;
- (viii) generally to take all such measures as may be found necessary from time to time to promote library development and its utilization in the country.

The Govt. of India in order to implement and supervise the objectives stated above established a Directorate of Libraries in the Ministry of Culture. The RPRLF during the last 35 years had initiated many schemes for the establishment and development of public libraries in the country. The foundation had assisted about 35,000 public libraries all over the country. Some of the accomplishments of the Foundation are mentioned below.

Accomplishments

- Survey of the conditions of the public libraries.
- Aid to establish the public libraries in the country.
- Provision of matching grants for purchasing and distribution of books directly by RRRLF to the public libraries in the country.
- Aid for the construction of building and purchasing furniture and other requisites.
- Modernization of public libraries by applying ITC and automation.
- Pursuing the DPLs to open the separate sections for women and children, physically handicapped, blind etc.,
- Arranging annual lectures on public libraries in various parts of the country.
- Assisting Library Associations and of the NGO’s to conduct conferences, seminars, workshops etc.,

- Announcing the best libraries awards.
- Training and retraining the library personnel working in public libraries.
- Encouraging research on public libraries issues and problems.
- Publications of Grandhana, RRRLF news letter and other publications.
- Establishment of four zonal offices in four parts of the country

Library Legislation

- (i) The RRRLF from its inception has been persuading and insisting on the State Governments to enact public library legislation. Due to its efforts the public library legislation has been enacted in West Bengal (1979), Manipur (1988) Kerala (1989), Hariyana (1989), Mizoram (1987), Goa (1994) Gujarat (2003) Assam (2005-2006), Orissa (2005) and Uttar Pradesh (2006). Still it is continuing its efforts to convince the State Governments in the remaining states and union territories to enact the public legislation in the country..

(ii) National Policy for Public Libraries (NAPLIS)

The UNESCO in its publication "*Guide Lines on information policy*", insisted its member states to publish their policy for public libraries. The Govt. of India appointed a committee in 1985 under the Chairmanship of Prof. D.P. Chattapadhyay for drafting comprehensive NAPLIS. The Director of RRRLF was the convener of the committee and helped it in formulating its recommendation. The draft policy was submitted to the Government and the RRRLF has been perusing the Government of India to adopt this policy on par with the National Educational Policy the National Science Policy and the National Industrial Policy etc. The Draft policy is still pending with the Government of India. It has recently appointed a knowledge commission to review the entire scenario in the country and submit its recommendations on public libraries.

(iii) Survey of RRRLF on public Libraries

The RRRLF established four Zonal Offices in the four zones of the country. The Administrative Officers in the Zonal Offices who are professional's in Library and Information Science regularly visit all the public libraries in their zonal jurisdiction and inform their Head Quarters about the State of affairs on public libraries. Further the RRRLF recently got a survey conducted on the State of conditions of the public libraries by a private organization viz. A.C. Neilson Org. Marg Pvt. Ltd. The report stated that there are only 49757 villages have libraries, out of 5,57,137 villages in the country. This reveals that only 9% villages are having public libraries and per capita income incurred on public libraries is only Rs.0.07ps. The RRRLF based on the AC. Neilson Org. Marg report classified the states into three categories namely 1) Lagging 2) Developing 3) Developed. So the RRRLF from time to time either directly or through agencies has been conducting survey on the public libraries in the country. *The Neilson Org. Marg Survey Report* pointed out the following perceptions towards RRRLF initiatives by the libraries

- Majority of the libraries perceived that the RRRLF schemes are instrumental to solve the problems faced by the public libraries.
- Different category respondents perceived that the RRRLF Initiatives are the only effort in it's nature for the betterment of the public library system in the country.

- Substantial number of respondents perceived that the Library would be in deep trouble in case the RRRLF stops assistance.
- However, voice to increase the assistance and initiatives from the RRRLF, mainly in-terms of financial assistance observed from the different category libraries.
- Substantial number of respondents perceived that the RRRLF needs to communicate their schemes more explicitly to the beneficiaries, so that they can avail the schemes depending upon their need and eligibility.

(iv) RRRLF initiatives for the establishment of Public Libraries

The RRRLF has been pursuing the state governments to give priority and to provide funds for the establishment of public libraries in more and more villages. It provided funds for purchasing of lands, construction of buildings and also acquisition of required furniture. Through the efforts of RRRLF several villages libraries were established in the villages with its financial assistance to the states. The Foundation has taken long strides in promoting library services in the country. It has spending more than 35 crores annually for the growth and development of the public libraries in the country.

(v) Matching grants to the states

The RRRLF provides matching grants to every state annually for purchasing of books, furniture, and computers etc., If a state government give 50% of the estimated expenditure the RRRLF provides the remaining 50% of the expenditure. The RRRLF provides assistance for the following programmes of the public libraries.

- Assistance towards organization of seminars, workshops, training courses (orientation/refresher) awareness programme and book exhibitions.
- Assistance towards supply of storage and display materials and reading room furniture.
- Assistance towards development of Rural Book Deposit Centers and Mobile Library Services.
- Assistance to public libraries for increasing accommodation.
- Assistance to public libraries to acquiring TV-cum-VCP sets for educational purposes/computers for application to libraries.
- Assistance to voluntary organization providing public library services.
- Assistance to children's libraries and children's section of general public libraries.
- Assistance towards organization of seminar/conference by National level organizations.
- Assistance to libraries towards celebration of Golden Jubilee year/Platinum Jubilee year/Centenary year/125 year/150 year/175 year and like.
- Assistance towards collection and compilation of library statistics through official and non-officials agencies.
- Assistance towards establishment of the RRRLF children's corner.
- Assistance towards development of District Youth Resource Centers.

(vi) Aid for construction of building for public libraries in the state and union territories.

State governments in general lack finances for the development of public library infrastructure. Building for a public library in villages is an important component. Philanthropist have been coming forward to give land for the construction of library building in the villages but the Directorate of Public Libraries are not in a position to meet the expenditure for the construction of the library buildings. RRRLF has come forward to extend financial assistance in such cases. A village library without a building is a difficult proposition. Besides the district sub-divisional and town libraries, the RRRLF has been sanctioning Rs.4 lakhs for each rural libraries. During the period 2007-2008 the foundation released building grants to one hundred twenty eight public libraries in the country involving an assistance of Rs.327.09 lakhs. Hence, the RRRLF program to aid the construction of public library buildings is a laudable one.

(vii) Modernization of public libraries.

The interface of computer technology with the communication technology made the flow of information easier and faster. The networking of public libraries has become essential. The public libraries in order to bring the latest information to the doorstep of the clientele the modernization of their collection and services has become inevitable. The RRRLF realized the lack of automation in public libraries. In order to fill in the gap, the RRRLF came forward to provide computers to all state central libraries (SCLs) and district central libraries(DCLs). It wants to network the SCLs and DCLs in the first phase. It also proposes ultimately to cover and link up all the public libraries, mandal libraries, village libraries and book deposit centres with the DCLs, SCLs and desire to establish the network of Indian public libraries on the model of Jannet in England so as to satisfy the ever increasing thirst for knowledge and easy access to information by the clientele in the rural communities. The modernization of the public libraries in the villages will enable rural communities in having access to needy information. It is desirable to establish a photo digital library to help the public libraries.

(viii) Opening New Sections or Reading Corners in public libraries

The RRRLF after making various surveys realized that certain sections of rural communities like women and children have not been provided sufficient opportunities for their reading needs in public libraries. Women are important in family development. The neglect of these two sections in the rural communities would weaken the democratic foundation of the Indian society. The RRRLF has been insisting and also financing the public libraries to open separate new sections for woman and children in Public Libraries. These sections are to be provided with required collection of books and information material. This would result generally in improving the reading habits of rural children and women. The RRRLF during the financial year 2006-2007 released Rs.56.93 lakhs for establishing the children and women sections in the public libraries.

(ix) Annual lecture program

The RRRLF arranges annual lectures in various parts of the country in order to create the public library culture and awareness which is lacking at present. These

lectures impress on the people on the importance of public libraries among the educated for life long education.

(x) Assisting LIS Associations and NGOs.

The RRRLF assists all library associations at national and state levels to hold conferences, seminars debates, and workshops on library issues. Such debates and discussions among various other things create the importance of public libraries, village libraries and community information centres in the society.

(xi) Instituting awards for the best public libraries, best librarians and fellowships.

The RRRLF has been giving awards annually to the best public libraries and the best public librarians to motivate the library professionals to render positive services to the people. This provides a sense of enthusiasm in the library staff to provide more and more services to the rural people.

(xii) Training and Refresher courses to the library personnel.

Periodical grants are provided by the RRRLF to the Directorates of public libraries in the states to conduct refresher training courses to update the skills of the professionals in the modern technology.

(xiii) Encouraging research programs on problems and issues on public libraries.

The ultimate goals of the governments in the democratic countries is to establish an information society or a knowledge society. As stated by J.S. Mill that the worth of the state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it. The RRRLF strives through its different programmes to improve the knowledge of people and the social fabric it provides funds to research activity on public libraries, The young and experienced professionals are provided with grants to carry out or to conduct research on public library issues. This provides feedback to the RRRLF and enable to reorient its programmes and plans.

Conclusion

- The RRRLF is the only national agency which is devoting its full time for the growth and development of public libraries in India. It is anxious to establish public library network for flow of information from top to bottom and from bottom to top.
- It is deeply concerned to help the rural communities to have the access to information for making better decision in their day to day transactions.
- The RRRLF hopes to establish, through the state government authorities, libraries, in backward areas, tribal areas and forest and hilly areas in order to bring the illiterate, and innocent people into the main stream of public life.
- The RRRLF has many splendid programs and plans. But its financial budget is scarce and limited. The government of India should provide atleast 3 to 4% of its annual budget for the development of public libraries in the country. Public libraries should be considered as important as the educational institutions, like schools, colleges and universities. The central government by establishing the central schools, central universities cannot think that it has provided sufficiently for the education of people. It has equal responsibilities for the establishment of

the public libraries as these are the gateways of information. According to the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto the establishment of public libraries, community information centres is mandatory on the part of the government. The central government cannot leave this important responsibilities completely to the state government authorities which have limited resources to provide public libraries in every village. The RRRLF should also strive hard and impress on the central government to bring out a National Public Library Policy all at the earliest. The national policy alone can provide the direction, and guidance for the development of the public libraries in the country.

- The establishment of public library network is already delayed in India. There is Banks Network, Railway Network, INFLIBNET for the academic libraries but there is no such network for the public libraries in the country.
- The RRRLF should think of better programs and policies to take the cutting edge of information to the rural communities at a grass root level to usher India into knowledge society. Unless and otherwise such programs are adopted that the rural communities will remain backward and suffer stupor for ever. The RRRLF should strengthen the Directorates of Public Libraries in the states by providing more money on the basis of percapita of the population instead of giving match grants on adhoc basis. It also should bring great pressure through the Ministry of Culture/HRD to enact library legislations by all the States and Union territories in the country.
- The RRRLF in order to be active and effective it has to change its institutional and composition of its various organs and include more LIS professionals in activities.
- There is every need for introspection and improvement on the part of the foundation in the following areas.
 - Changing requirement of users.
 - Attention on improving reading habits in the rural communities.
 - Fast adoption of modern technology like in the country. The present piece meal assistance.
 - Improve and increase its financial assistance is not sufficient and found inadequate, to the libraries in the backwards states.
 - Need to provide internet connectivity and establish a National Network and supply to the public libraries multimedia resources.
 - The programmes of the RRRLF should reach the people at the grass root level more explicitly in order to avail them.
 - The foundation should adopt proactive approach but not a rigid open to percolate the benefits of its schemes.

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