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Storehouses of Knowledge to educate the Masses

The Indian Library System: A Present Day Scenario

India is a country of diverse cultural practices, religions, traditions, and languages. Since independence, the country has come a long way, battling the evils of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. The government has taken some concrete steps towards their eradication using the potent weapon of education for the masses. Hence, unhindered access to libraries becomes an essential outcome of making education a fundamental right. India needs to imbibe the »Unesco Manifesto«, which declares that the public library is »the local gateway to knowledge, [and] provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.« Libraries can play a very important role in educating the masses and creating social, political and cultural uniformity, especially in rural India.

How can one define India? There is no one language, there is no one culture. There is no one religion; there is no one way of life. There is absolutely no way one could draw a line around it and say, »This is India« or, »This is what it means to be Indian«. (*Arundhati Roy*)

The Country

According to its constitution, India is a »sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic«. Spread over 3.29 million square km and with a population of 1.1 billion, it is the second most populous nation in the world. India has 28 states and 7 union territories (UT). Although it occupies only 2.4 percent of the world's land area, it supports over 15 percent of the world's population. Nearly 70 percent of the population lives in villages.

India has a rich and unique cultural heritage, and has managed to preserve its established traditions throughout history while absorbing customs, traditions and ideas from both invaders and immigrants. Many cultural practices, languages, customs and monuments are examples of this intermingling over centuries. Religion is central to Indian culture, and its practice can be seen in virtually every aspect of life in the country. Hinduism is the dominant faith in India.

India has 22 officially recognised languages. Hindi and English are the languages of communication for the Central (Federal) government. Due to rapid industrialization and a bustling multinational influence in the economy, English continues to be a popular means of communication even in day-to-day business.

In its 59 years of independence, India has waged a long battle against hunger and poverty. Two hundred years of colonial rule created a country incapable of meeting the basic needs of its own people. But today, India is the world's largest democracy and the world's tenth largest economy. India's economy has become one of the most vibrant in the world, driven mainly by information technology (IT) companies. Exports, especially those of services have grown, due to the IT boom.

However, there is a flip side to this boom. Even today, more than 250 million people live below the poverty line. We cannot undermine the success of the IT industry and its role as a path to a new era of prosperity. But IT only contributes around two percent of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs only about one million people. India's

poor primarily live in rural areas, farming small plots of land or working as agricultural labourers and are unlikely to benefit directly from the technology boom. If the country wishes to sustain its economic boom, it must broaden the benefits of economic reform to 70 percent of its citizens and a quarter of the economy, which is primarily agrarian.

Today, we seem more concerned with turning India into a leading global exporter and technology hub than resolving the massive poverty problems. Substantial disparities persist within the country, and rural India still suffers from poor education, health and infrastructure. The development of the rural sector is the key to raising India out of poverty. We need

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growth with equity and social justice. People-centric technology campaigns need to be initiated in rural India to create a sustained source of income for the people. Agriculture and labour-intensive sectors hold the key to poverty eradication and growth.

The most effective weapon to combat rural poverty in India is education. Libraries as storehouses of knowledge can go a long way in contributing to educating the masses. No country can progress without providing good library services to its citizens. Therefore, it is imperative for a democracy like India to establish sound information infrastructure to impart social, cultural, historical, scientific and technical knowledge to the population. This could, in turn, help us tackle the substantial disparities persistent within the country. The government is seriously considering bringing about a conceptual change in the rural library sector by coordinating its activities with the continuing education schemes of the National Literacy Mission (NLM).

Library scenario in India

The diversity of the Indian library scenario is an important aspect for consideration while different library sectors in India are in various stages of development. The Indian library and information sector can be divided into following five main areas:



Transportation in Haridwar, North India

(Foto: Bettina Snyder)

The National Library Sector

The National Library sector can be divided into two types of libraries. The first one comprises the National Library, Calcutta and the recipient public libraries under the Delivery of Books Act i.e., Delhi Public Library (DPL), Connemara Public Library, Chennai and the State Central Library, Mumbai. These are the depositories of the printed cultural heritage of India under the Delivery of Books Act. India is a vast multi-lingual country with a rich linguistic heritage and everything published in India is available in these depository libraries. These are financed by the Department of Culture of the Government of India.

The other part comprises the national level subject specific libraries such as the National Science Library, and the National Medical Library. During the 20th century, all these national level libraries developed in isolation.

The Public Library Sector

The public library system in India has developed over the years for more than a century. The first landmark in the history of the public library system in India is the enactment of Delivery and Registration of Publications Act of Bombay government in May 1808. The setting up of the Baroda State Public Libraries Network in 1910 was another important step in the development of public libraries in India. The second phase of the library movement in the country lasted from the begin-

ning of the 20th century to 1937. In the third phase of this movement, when the Congress came to power in certain provinces, the main trend was the setting up of village libraries through governmental effort. It is estimated that in 1942 there were 13 000 village libraries in India.

Between 1948 and 1951, three major events, which boosted the library movement in the country, took place.

However, there is no notable national-level association in India which is contributing substantially to the development of libraries.

1. Madras Public Library Act, 1948 (the first concerted effort in India to institutionalise, co-ordinate and organise public library services)
2. Setting up of the National Library in 1948
3. Setting up of the Delhi Public Library at the initiative of the Unesco in 1951.

According to the Constitution of India, public library development is a state responsibility. Therefore, all states are vested with the mandate to set up libraries within the state at different levels. However, due to the diversity in the level of state-wise development, the Department of Culture, the Government of India set up the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) to act as a nodal agency for development of public libraries and to spread library services all over the country in active cooperation with

FRANKFURTER BUCHMESSE

Gastland 2006: Indien

pr/BuB. – Die Frankfurter Buchmesse 2006 findet vom 4. bis 8. Oktober statt. Gastland in diesem Jahr ist Indien. Unter dem Motto »Today's India« hat sich das Gastland einiges vorgenommen:

Mit dem Ziel, das heutige Indien und seine zeitgenössische Kultur möglichst umfassend ins Blickfeld der internationalen Öffentlichkeit zu rücken, werden 2006 in ganz Deutschland eine große Anzahl Lesungen, Musik-, Tanz- und Theaterveranstaltungen, Filmreihen und Ausstellungen stattfinden. Darüber hinaus sind auch Veranstaltungen mit wissenschaftlicher Ausrichtung geplant.

Der Auftakt für den Veranstaltungsreigen fand im März 2006 auf der Leipziger Buchmesse statt, wo renommierte indische Autoren lasen und mit dem Publikum diskutierten.

Den Höhepunkt bildet die Frankfurter Buchmesse, wo mehr als 30 Autoren ihre Werke vorstellen werden und zahlreiche weitere Veranstaltungen und Ausstellungen auf dem Messegelände und in Frankfurter Kultureinrichtungen geplant sind.

In dieser sowie in der Oktober-Ausgabe werden indische und deutsche Kolleginnen und Kollegen in BuB unter anderem über die aktuelle Situation der indischen Bibliotheken berichten sowie das Sondersammelgebiet Südasiens/Indien der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg vorstellen.

State Governments, UT Administrations and Voluntary Organisations working in the field.

The RRRLF was created to give an everlasting push to the library movement and since then, it has taken long strides towards promoting library service in the country. There are now 28 State central libraries funded by the RRRLF, situated in different cities. Out of 60 000 public libraries scattered across the country, 31 274 libraries at different levels have been covered by RRRLF in the last 28 years. The foundation is also responsible for mobilising resources to modernise the



Street scenes in New Delhi



(Fotos: Bettina Snyder)

state and district central libraries, the development of infrastructure, and training of personnel.

Today after 59 years of independence, India recognises the need for public libraries. But still, the growth of public libraries has not been remarkable, and there is no uniform library scenario in the country. As states differ in size, population, literacy rate, status of books produced in regional languages, economic growth, etc. the public library system also differs from state to state in terms of infrastructural facilities and patterns. The rural li-

braries in some states form a part of the public library system and in others; they fall under the jurisdiction of the Adult Education Department or the Public Relations Department.

In many parts of the country, rural libraries are established and maintained by local clubs and voluntary organizations. Thus, the different types of rural libraries prevailing across the country vary not only in size and nomenclature but also in the type of management and level of financial support even within the same state. In some states like Bihar, the growth of the library movement is stunted because of insufficient financial aid from the government. So much so, even some of the existing old reputed libraries have become non-functional. The highest level of public library development is found today in the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, in terms of the number of public library units per 100 square km, and the percentage of population that has access to free public library service.

According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) standards, there should be one public library for every 3 000 people. So, with a population exceeding one billion, India needs more than 343 000 public library units. According to a survey (conducted by Prof. Kalia) only 12.38 percent of the literate population in India has access to free public library services. India spends about Rupees 0.70 (0.01 Euro) per capita on public libraries against a minimum level of Rupees 10 (0.17 Euro) per capita required.

Despite the development of several public library systems over the years, none of them has been effective in providing meaningful services to the enormous rural masses. Furthermore, no integrated

chain of library networks has developed in the country so far. This is largely due to the absence of a legislation providing for a permanent public library system. Although library legislation is almost a prerequisite, not all Indian states have passed it. Out of 28 states and 7 UT administrations, only 13 states have incorporated library legislation, enabling the concerned State Governments to provide a public library system. The enactment of a library act in the remaining states and UTs would give the required momentum to the public library movement in the country. To summarise, the public library movement in our country is far from picking up volume, velocity and vigour.

Special and Scientific Library Sector

The special libraries and the libraries under the Science and Technology (S&T) group are in a much better developmental stage compared to the other four sectors.

S&T has always been an integral part of the Indian culture. Known as Natural Philosophy in ancient times, it was pursued vigorously at institutions of higher learning. The contributions made by the Indian scholar-scientists during the pre-historic period, as well as in the present century have left indelible imprints on the world S&T scene. The innate ability to perform creatively in science was reinforced with an institutional setup and strong state support after the country's independence in 1947. As a result, many new S&T departments and laboratories were set up and the pursuit of scientific research started in an organised manner.

These departments were backed by sound infrastructure in terms of laboratories, libraries and resource centres. The country today has a broad-based and extensive S&T network under the Central



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Government, State Government, as well as public and private sectors. The network encompasses areas as diverse as agriculture and healthcare on one hand and nuclear and space research on the other. Some of the S&T departments functioning under the auspices of the Central Government are: Department of Science and Technology (DST), Department of Scientific & Industrial Research, Department of Atomic Energy, Department of Space etc.

Government libraries in India were developed mainly during the British period to cater to the needs of the decision-makers and the bureaucrats.

The S&T libraries are rated to be in the best position in the country. Most of them are financed by the Central Government. There are about 200 national laboratories and an equal number of Research and Development (R&D) institutes in the Central Sector and about 1300 R&D

units in the industrial sector. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) as a premier national R&D organization, through its 40 laboratories and 100 field centres, provides valuable scientific and industrial R&D for India's sustained development as well as for meeting its strategic needs. Each one of these research establishments has a well equipped Library/Information Centre.

The other major body pursuing S&T activities in India is the country's vast university system. However, there is a wide gap between the facilities available in government-funded research institutes and universities. University Grants Commission (UGC) supports research and development in the universities, but this is very meagre. After independence, India followed a policy of funding newly created research institutions probably to improve her visibility in the world scientific community, but neglected research facilities in universities. After a few decades, the government recognised this drawback and extended support to universities by floating schemes like DSTs – Fund for Improvement of S&T (FIST).

Another initiative taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) was the establishment of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) as an autonomous body to give financial support to institutions, associations, and journals engaged in social science research. The Council currently assists 27 Research Institutes and 6 Regional Centres in different regions in India. ICSSR established National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASS-DOC) in 1969 with the objective of providing library and information support services to researchers in social sciences.

Academic Library Sector

Academic libraries are the nerve centres of academic institutions, and must support teaching, research, and other academic programmes. India has a large higher education system. In the beginning of 2005, there were 342 Universities including 18 Central Universities, 211 State Universities, 95 Deemed Universities and 5 institutions established under State Legislation, and 13 Institutes of national

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importance. There were 17 625 colleges that provide education in all disciplines. Out of these, 5 386 colleges are recognised by the UGC. The Academic library sector comprises school, college and university libraries. Barring some well-known colleges and a few private schools, most schools and colleges in India do not run libraries of any consequence. Most universities have good libraries, but they work in isolation.

UGC established by an Act of Parliament in 1956, coordinates and monitors the higher education system in India and provides grants to the universities and colleges. It frames rules and regulations for overall teaching and research at institutions of higher education. It also looks after the academic libraries by setting various standards for library education, library staff, library services, etc. UGC has also set up three information centres covering different disciplines – the National Centre for Science Information at Indian Institute of Science Bangalore, SNDT Women's University Mumbai, and National Social Science Information Centre at M.S. University, Baroda. UGC finances university and college libraries. School libraries are the most neglected lot, as there is no national agency like UGC to finance them.

India has set up the Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) under the UGC as an autonomous body to cater to the information requirements of universities and their research scholars.



Central State Library Chandigarh, North India
(Foto: Bettina Snyder)

INFLIBNET is involved in modernising university libraries in India and connecting them through a nationwide high-speed data network. Almost all academic libraries, especially university libraries, are members of INFLIBNET.

Government Library Sector

Government libraries in India were developed mainly during the British period to cater to the needs of the decision-makers and the bureaucrats. All these depart-

mental and ministerial libraries mainly collect documents pertaining to their respective department/ministry and restrict their acquisition to the need of the departmental staff alone. The Department of Culture, which is the nodal agency for library development in India, has taken viable steps towards sharing resources, and networking of the libraries under its supervision.

Important Government Initiatives

Library Networks

The library networks in India started due to the initiatives by National Information System for Science and Technology (NISSAT) in the form of Calcutta Library Network (estd. 1986), Developing Libraries Network (estd. 1988) and other networks subsequently. There are also some city-specific or subject-specific networks in existence. It is essential to give networked information to the general public where around 70 percent of the total population resides in rural areas. However, not many efforts have been made in India to network public libraries.

Library Consortia

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has set up the Indian National Digital Library in Science and Technology (INDEST) Consortium. The ministry funds subscriptions to electronic resources for 38 academic institutions, including the Indian Institute of Sciences, Indian Institutes of Technology, Regional Engineering Colleges, Indian Institutes of Management, and about 60 centrally-funded/-aided government institutions through the consortium. The INDEST consortium is the most ambitious initiative so far in the areas of engineering and technology. In India, the consortia concept is still in the nascent stage and requires proper guidelines and methodologies.

DSTs – Fund for Improvement of S&T (FIST)

DST is primarily entrusted with the responsibility of formulation of S&T policies and their implementation, identification and promotion of thrust areas of research in different sectors of S&T in the country. FIST was launched in 2000/2001 to improve infrastructure in universities and higher educational institutions. Under this scheme, financial



View of one of the suburbs of the Indian metropolis New Delhi

(Foto: Renu Seth)



Die Bibliothek des Goethe-Instituts in Neu Delhi erfüllt die Aufgabe eines Regionalen Informationszentrums für alle Goethe-Institute in Indien. Hier ist der Eingangsbereich des Hauptgebäudes in Neu Delhi zu sehen. (Foto: GI Neu Delhi)

Der Lesesaal lockt mit Klassikern und Klimaanlage

Bei annähernd 45 Grad im Schatten ist die Bibliothek des Goethe-Instituts in Neu Delhi dank Klimaanlage immer noch ein angenehmer Ort sich aufzuhalten. Doch nicht nur deshalb – auch weil kurz vor Semesterende die Deutsch-Prüfungen anstehen – sind im Sommer alle Lesetische stets restlos besetzt. Dicht an dicht sitzen die Studenten und lernen für ihre Sprachkurse. Die große Nachfrage nach den hauseigenen Kursen wirkt sich auch auf die Clientel der Bib-

liothek aus, und so ist der Anteil der Studenten trotz eines erweiterten Angebots auch für andere Kundenkreise verhältnismäßig hoch.

Seit Anfang 2004 erfüllt die Bibliothek die Aufgabe eines Regionalen Informationszentrums für alle Goethe-Institute in Indien (die unter dem Namen »Max Mueller Bhavan« firmieren, wegen des hier sehr geschätzten deutschen Indologen). Dazu gehören neben den internen Dienstleistungen, wie zentrale Erwerbung und Einarbeitung, besonders der landesweite Auskunftsservice, die Fernleihe, die Erstellung von

Webangeboten und elektronischen Newslettern zu mehreren Themenbereichen sowie die Koordination von bibliothekarischen Fachveranstaltungen. Fünf Fachkräfte stehen für diese Aufgaben zur Verfügung.

Interessenten wird ein Bestand von rund 10 000 Medieneinheiten angeboten, darunter knapp 2 000 AV-Medien. Schwerpunkte außerhalb des DaF-Bereichs sind moderne Kunst, deutsche Literatur und Philosophie. Die Medien sind etwa je zur Hälfte in englischer und deutscher Sprache vorhanden; ein kleiner Anteil liegt auf Hindi vor. Bücher zu deutschlandbezogenen Themen auf Hindi sind sehr selten auf dem Markt; erhältlich sind am ehesten die Klassiker der deutschen Literatur wie Bertolt Brecht oder auch der in Indien sehr bekannte Günter Grass.

Etwa tausend eingetragene Kunden weist die Mitgliederdatenbank der Bibliothek auf; zusätzlich sind etwa 600 Bibliothekare und Informationswissenschaftler aus ganz Indien als Interessenten an den Fachveranstaltungen registriert. Diese finden häufig in Zusammenarbeit mit deutschen Experten und indischen Partnerinstitutionen statt; Schwerpunkt ist derzeit das Thema Digitale Bibliothek.

Gerne nimmt die Bibliothek des GI Praktikanten aus informationswissenschaftlichen Studiengängen auf; weitere Informationen hierzu und zum GI Neu Delhi finden sich auf der Homepage unter www.goethe.de/newdelhi.

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support has been provided to all university departments and colleges for creating basic infrastructure & enabling facilities for promoting high quality teaching and R&D in new and emerging areas. Since the inception of the scheme, more than 600 departments in two levels spread over 189 academic institutions have been identified and supported.

Rural Digital Initiatives

Many digital library initiatives have been taken to improve the information network in the country. Intranet-based digital libraries (DLs) in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh constitute one such community-based, highly cost-effective and financially self-reliant approach to

bringing the benefits of DL to the doorsteps of tribals.

Gyandoot is a unique form of government-to-citizen DL activity. It connects 21 cyber cafes called *Soochanalayas*, which provide services to about 10 to 15 Gram Panchayats. Each of the Gram Panchayats consists of a group of 20–30 villages with populations ranging from 20 000 to 30 000 people. The public is responsible for operating and managing the network as well as providing content. The Indian Government is replicating the Gyandoot model nationwide with a national project called Drishtree (which means »vision«).

Akshaya the country's largest rural wireless network (using wireless VINE technology) initiated by Government

of Kerala offers e-governance and utility services to citizens of the State. The PRAGATI project of Pravara village of Maharashtra aims to connect a hundred villages covering a population of more than 2.5 million with a wireless MAN solution. This program will help the villages in establishing local IT centers, dissemination of Information regarding Government schemes, health care, education, agro-processing etc. These initiatives show the potential to establish such local centres within public libraries.

Factors Inhibiting the Development of Libraries

Wide-spread illiteracy is the greatest handicap in developing library service. The



The office of the librarian of Vidyapeeth University (Gujrat, West India) where even today he sits on the floor – old indian traditional way – while working. (Foto: Shailendra Kumar)

rural population has no motivation to learn as they feel that reading books does not increase their professional efficiency or productivity. Besides this, there is a dearth of suitable reading materials in regional languages. Over two-thirds of In-

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dian publications in regional languages are fiction, or reading material for pleasure, while for serious studies and professional education, users are dependent on publications in English. Therefore, only 20 percent of the literate population of India can potentially use library services.

Another reason for the public library movement not taking off is the acute shortage of funds. Libraries are still the lowest priority in the decision-making process and there is no relation between the capacity of a state to spend on libraries and its willingness to do so.

In a developing country like India, where the library movement lacks momentum, Library Associations can play an important role. Presently, there are associations and societies representing different types of libraries. There are national level associations like the Indian Library Association, Indian Associati-

on of Special Libraries and Information Centres, and regional associations such as Bengal Library Association and Karnataka Library Association.

However, there is no notable national-level association in India which is contributing substantially to the development of libraries. The reasons for this are paucity of funds, governmental apathy, politics within the associations, and lack of professionalism. India needs an apex body to oversee and monitor the library and information system in India, and to bring together all the scattered associations at the national and the regional level for them to be effective.

Conclusion

Different categories of libraries are financed by different agencies; there is no common norm of financing them. Even the resources and services of different categories of libraries differ widely, and consequently there is no coordination or cooperation among them.

Despite India being a global pioneer in IT, not more than one percent of 60 000 public libraries, which exist in the country today, have been computerised. The challenges which Indian libraries and librarians are encountering are manifold. At the decision-making level, India needs a national policy for libraries and information centres within the changed socio-economic environment. The public library system in the country needs to be

rejuvenated and remodelled to cope with the present situation, and cater to future trends.

India is poised to undergo major socio-economic and political reforms, which will only be effective if a modern information system is set up at the right time, using the right infrastructure, in-

To counter the widening disparity between rural and urban India, a thorough restructuring of our traditional libraries and their mode of working has become inevitable.

formation technology and qualified administrators. To counter the widening disparity between rural and urban India, a thorough restructuring of our traditional libraries and their mode of working has become inevitable.

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