

ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the role of public libraries in promoting non-formal education in Kerala. Describes the importance of non-formal education with reference to Kerala and a brief history of public Library movement in Kerala. The initiatives taken by governmental, non-governmental agencies and various other organizations in propagating non formal education among rural masses are briefly discussed. A study conducted shows the role of public libraries in promoting non-formal education.

1. Introduction

Non-Formal Education (NFE) is a functional option which has immense significance for the emerging knowledge society in general and educationally underdeveloped or developing societies in particular. It is relevant as a revolutionary concept which provides education outside beaucroatic structure of formal education. The aim of both is same except their differences in approach. NFE aims at minimum academic learning and maximum of practical and need based socially useful learning. The present study is intended to set an overview of the role of public libraries in Non-Formal Education with special reference to Kerala.

2. Importance of Non-Formal Education

The importance of Non-Formal Education is evident from the educational experience and activities of the past decades. Rural people suffer from inadequate and weak educational facilities. They are discriminated with respect

to the benefits of social and economic development, due to lack of proper education. Formal education is time bound, rigid and stereotyped which is not related to real life, giving emphasis to syllabi, textbook, time tables and examinations. Non-formal education is organized outside the infrastructure of the institution, which is learner-oriented and life-related. It is rather a supplement for formal education. The approach of Non-formal education is much suitable for rural masses since it is based on their needs and environmental conditions. It reaches the deprived and disadvantaged outside the formal system of education. In the present scenario, the formal education still remains ahead of the catch hold of most of the people in rural areas. Non-formal education hence becomes the way out to the problem of illiteracy, population explosion, poverty and ignorance.

Most of the children in the villages, who form the sixty percent of our population, are dropouts from school education due to different reasons like helping their parents who are

farmers and low paid workers (2). The importance of education has not become a bothering necessity for them. This can be solved to a good extent with the provision of social educational facilities and free serviced public libraries. Hence the education in villages become possible only through non-formal and adult continuing education, where public libraries have a significant role. The democratization of education is the only and justifiable aim of all social groups. The door of information should be kept open for all irrespective of their age, caste or creed. As per UNESCO's declaration, public library is the pulse of democratized education (3).

3. Non-Formal Education and Kerala

A system of non-formal education existed around temples in Kerala even before 18th century. Owing to the matriarchal system in Nair community, the status of women in the families were raised primary and they were given the opportunity to learn in the native local "Kudippallikkudoms" (schools) run by Asans' (Master). Thus women in the Nair community enjoyed equity in many ways traditionally, and education was one among them. In the 19th century, with the arrival of Christian Missionaries, female education received a greater prominence. In 1819, the first girls' school was started by the missionaries in the State of Travancore. This was followed by another school by the government in 1859. By the end of 19th century, several girls' schools were established in the state. The relatively increased literacy rate among women in Kerala is the result of these early efforts. The literacy rate was 31.5 % in Kerala in 1951, as against 7.9% in the whole of India.

Adult and Non-formal education activities in Kerala began in an organized manner in 1945 with the setting up of Kerala Granthasala Sangham (KGS). The programme

is proposed for educating dropouts and older people who missed schooling.

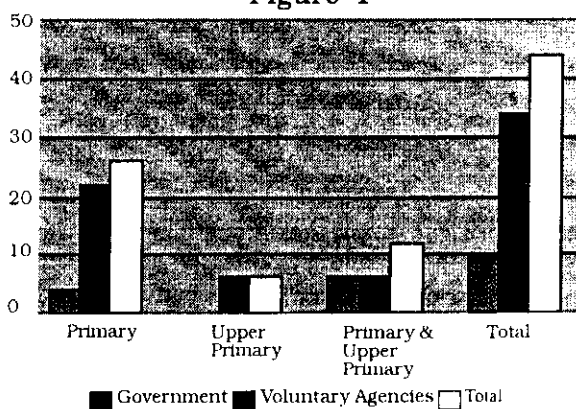
The Sixth All India Educational Survey, 1993 of NCERT, gives the following data regarding the Non-formal educational centres in Kerala (5).

Table 1

Category wise list of Non-Formal Education Centres in Kerala

Level	Government	Voluntary Agencies	Total
Primary	4	22	26
Upper Primary	-	6	6
Primary & Upper Primary	6	6	12
Total	10	34	44

Figure 1



It is found that voluntary agencies (34) are taking the lead in non formal education in Kerala when compared to the Government agencies. A total of 44 NFE centres are working for the spread of non formal education.

4. Public Library Movement from past to present

A public library is a welfare centre which provides useful services to the community by fostering education, promoting culture, providing scope for healthy, recreation and

disseminates information to all sections of the society. The history of Public Libraries in Kerala started in 1829, with the establishment of Trivandrum Public Library (renamed as State Central Library), which is the oldest public library in existence in India. This library was initially used only by the European community in Trivandrum and invitees to the Durbar of the Maharaja. In 1898, a registered society called Trivandrum Public Library Society under the Travancore Joint Stock Companies Regulations decided to hand over the library to the government and H.H the Sreemoolam Thirunal declared that the library would be open to the public.

Ernakulam Public Library (1869), Trichur Public Library (1873), Kottayam Public Library (1881) were the other public libraries established in the later half of the 19th century. In 1910, Jnana Pradayani Library at Neyyattinkara, Trivandrum and Munderkavu Sankaravilasom Library, Chengannoor and in 1913, Sree Chithirathirunal Library at Trivandrum were established. A state level library movement was first made in 1926 at a meeting in Jnana Pradayani Library, Neyyattinkara in Trivandrum. The second meeting at Vanchiyoor, Trivandrum (1933) and third meeting at Neyyoor, a place now in Tamil Nadu (1938) were held.

The library movement geared up in the beginning of 20th century itself in the northern parts of Kerala. In 1931, library movement got a firm footing in Malabar area. "Samastha Kerala Pusthakalaya Samithi" (1931) was started in Trichur in Cochin state which brought a quarterly journal "*Grantha Viharam*". In 1933, "The All-Travancore Library Association" was started, which continued for 3 years without much contribution. In 1937, the "Malabar Vayanasala Sanghom" was formed and this was registered as "Kerala Granthalaya Sanghom" in 1943. This later

merged with the Kerala Granthasala Sanghom in 1957.

Libraries, adult/non-formal education and literacy have long been entangled in Kerala and this continues to be the case. It is found that adult education mainly prioritize illiterates and neo-literates. Public Libraries form the most appropriate centres through which they can be motivated towards achieving literacy. Public Library movements and some of the non-governmental and governmental initiatives towards eliminating illiteracy among various social groups are briefly discussed here.

4.1 Role of Public Libraries

Trivandrum Public Library was the first public library which came into existence in Kerala. It was started in the middle of the 19th century. The portfolio of public libraries in the villages came under DPI and Travancore Government formulated many rules and regulations for supporting them in early quarter of last century. It shows the government's recognition of the role of public libraries in education. Prior to independence in 1945, 47 rural libraries in the Travancore state organized to form "All Travancore Granthasala Sanghom" with nearly 5000 affiliated libraries. The slogan of the Sanghom was "Read and Grow", which later changed to "acquire literacy and get strengthened". It was developed and motivated by Mr. P.N.Panicker the architect of library movement in Kerala, for 32 years, until 1977 when the sanghom was taken over by the State Government. It is now known as Kerala State Library Council. It has a basic democratic structure and financed by the State Government.

These rural libraries organised night schools to fight illiteracy and propagated reading habit. They functioned as good community centres where constructive

discussions, seminars and symposia were held for the common public. There was a library with its own building, a good collection of books, radio, television, sports club, arts club, women's wing, children's section, nursery section, etc in every panchayat ward. The library movement was the foremost organized preamble of adult and non-formal education in Kerala and won acclaim all over India and even abroad.

In 1970, a survey was done by the Sanghom which revealed that up to 80% of the people are illiterate, even in some urban constituencies. A literacy campaign which lasted for six months was conducted in 20 library centres consisting of courses in literacy and numeracy, did not prove to be successful. Subsequent courses were booming and as a part of promoting non-formal education, the Sanghom produced nearly 10 primers, 5 handbooks/guide books, 110 books for neo-literates, "Saksharakeralam" a weekly magazine for neo-literates and a series of pamphlets and posters.

In 1974 Kerala State Literacy Council was established with a view to eradicate illiteracy. Even though this had problems at the initial stage, due to the presence of Chief Minister and other Ministers on the Executive Committee, it managed to produce one book, "Saksharatha" (Literacy), a collection of articles and treatises by eminent educationists and practitioners published by the State Institute of Languages. Later Kerala State Literacy Council faded away without much remarkable impact.

In 1975 Kerala Granthasala Sanghom (KGS) won the "Krupsakaya Award" from UNESCO worth US\$5000 as an approval of its outstanding contribution in the field of literacy and adult education. In 1977, the control of

KGS was taken over by the State Government under the name "Kerala State Library Council" (KSLC). During the period, although there was some decline in its literacy action plan, the KSLC started to revive and there are about 15,000 village branches which was democratically run by State Government funding. In 1979, as per a project submitted by the KGS, Government of India sanctioned 40 literacy centres (20 in each district) in two districts. During 1982-83, Rural Functional Literacy Programme (RFLP) was started in five districts and was extended to eleven districts at a later stage.

Farmers and labourers in our villages who live in poverty and ignorance were the people who actually looked upon public libraries for their educational development and entertainment. Hence the enactment of public Library Bill became a necessity in order to ensure education to all in a democratic way, irrespective of age, caste and creed. Finally the Act came into force in 1989. The Bill strongly proposed rules for establishing and maintaining Public Libraries in various parts of the state and to extend and organize library services to villages and towns in Kerala. The Act in its fulfillment would serve to lay the foundation for the dissemination of library resources for the extension of educational activities in Kerala (3).

5. Non-Governmental Initiatives

5.1 KANFED

In 1977, with the active initiation of Shri. P.N.Panicker, the members of the Literacy Expert Committee of the Kerala State Literacy Council formed the "Kerala Association for Non-Formal Education and Development" (KANFED) which acted as catalyst in bringing a number of voluntary agencies to the field of non-formal and adult education. Numerous publications

for neo-literates, teachers and functionaries were included as part of its activities.

A popular scientist and one-time President of the Sanghom, Mr. P.T.Bhaskara Panicker gave full support and vision to KANFED programmes. It was he who coined the name KANFED. Dr. K.Sivadasan Pillai, has also been deeply involved in KANFED operations, from 1977 to 1995. He was its General Secretary since 1995. Some of the veterans behind KANFED are Dr. N.V.Krishna Warriar, the literary stalwart, UNESCO expert Dr N.P.Pillai, former Central Government Minister Lakshmi N.Menon, social activist Dr.Pushpita John, a walking encyclopedia and lexicon editor Dr Sooranad Kunjan Pillai, the Rev. Dr.Benedict Mar Gregorious, Archbishop of Trivandrum, Dr M.Haridas, NCERT Field Adviser, Dr K.Madhavankutty, Retd. Principal of the Medical College, and K.Ravindranathan Nair, a business magnate from Kollam, to mention a few. KANFED presently has 320 life members, two permanent institutional members, and about 300 associate members (4).

5.2 Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP)

The Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), an important non-governmental organization functioning state-wide, focused from its inception to reach ordinary people by popularizing science. It began as a voluntary movement, consisting of college and university professors, school teachers, scientists in various fields, students and even field workers. P.T.Bhaskara Panicker, Dr. Madhavankutty, Dr K.K.Rahulan, A.G.G Menon, etc were the visionaries behind this organisation. It depended on sales of publications, in the earlier stage. It has approximately 200 scientific titles at different levels. It publishes four scientific periodicals useful for the general public, school and college students, primary school students and others. Science fairs and science quizzes are its accepted features.

P.T.Bhaskara Panicker Memorial award for school students has been established for state-wide science competition.

KSSP played an important role in the Ernakulam Total Literacy Campaign, and later in the state-wide Total Literacy Campaign. In 1998, KSSP won the UNESCO Prize for its effort in the voluntary sector. "Science talent search" schemes are a noteworthy contribution of KSSP. It had extended its activities for finding and applying scientific solutions to the problems of the lives of poor people. Its membership included all adult 3 by mid-1970s.

5.3 Mitraniketan

Mitraniketan situated in Vellanad, 32 kms from Trivandrum, is a rural voluntary organization in the field of non-formal education. It is headed by Mr. K.Viswanathan, trained in Shantiniketan and Denmark and a disciple of Morgan. Mr. Viswanathan and his wife have built up an institution with both formal and non-formal elements, using their family property. They established the Mitraniketan campus in the model of Denmark's folk high school movement. A Krishi Vignan Kendra (KVK) and AVARD (Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development) are located on the campus. Two series of adult education courses, one of the units of the National Open School system of India and a job-oriented programme also runs there. The entire community is involved in the developmental programmes structured by the Mitraniketan.

5.4 Laubach Literacy Trust

Dr A.K.John, a disciple of Laubach was inspired by adult education has launched a Laubach Literacy Trust (LLT) at Karthigappally in Alappuzha District, a trust affiliated to IAEA. It has started many centres in the coastal

areas of the district. The LLT has produced trained personnel and developed separate primers and follow-up books. The main building included a training centre and library. Dr. John, who was the driving force of this movement of the Kerala branch of IAEA worked actively until his death at the hands of an antisocial element.

5.5 Programme for Community Organisation (PCO)

The PCO originated in 1960s with a group of social activists who worked with artisan fishermen. The organization has worked for providing non-formal education to fishermen community in Kerala from Kanyakumari to Kasaragod. It works as an action-oriented NGO seeking empowerment and development of fishermen community in Kerala and functions as a Trivandrum based research service.

5.6 Quilon Social Service Society (QSSS)

QSSS an affiliate of IAEA, located in the coastal areas of Kollam District has adult education as one of its activities. Nearly 50 adult education courses have been organised over the last 10-20 years. The diocese of Quilon plays the leading role in QSSS. Mr. M.Pathrose is the person at the back of this movement.

5.7 University Departments and Centres involved in Non-Formal Education

Some of the Universities in the State, including University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, University of Calicut, Kozhikode and Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam supplement adult education to their functions and between them delivers courses through out Kerala. The Universities, Janasikshan Sansthan (JSS) and the Literacy

forum which were originated in University of Kerala work actively through out the state. Through the activists in the adult education departments and with the assistance of students in literacy campaign universities play a significant role in propagating adult education.

Hence, through the KANFED, KSSP, various other non-governmental organisations and universities, many intellectuals work in the forefront of the literacy movement to raise the educational standards of the people of Kerala.

6. Governmental Initiatives

Initiatives of Government of Kerala towards improving non-formal education through the Kerala State Library Council is listed as follows:

1. It acts as a parallel organization for all the non-formal education centres in the state.
2. All the volunteers for teaching in the 'Saksharata Mission', a literacy movement started during the time of Left Government in 1980, were sent from the State Library Council. The Mission later came to be known as State Literacy Mission (SLM)
3. All the public libraries under the State Library Council act as informal Resource Centres for the SLM.
4. Kottayam town in Kerala gained the credit of fully literate within a period of hundred days through the People's Education and Literacy Campaign, Kottayam (PELCK).
5. Under the guidance of eminent personalities like Dr. P.N.Panikkar, Dr. Sivadasa Menon the State Library Council produced several books and other reading materials for promoting non-formal education through the SLM.

Kerala state was the first among other states in India in starting a Literacy Mission. Eventually the National Literacy Mission (NLM) came into existence in the country. Later the SLM formed part of the NLM and still continues actively in their participation for extending non-formal education in the state.

6. The Akshaya Project by the State Government started at Chamravattom village near Tirur in Malappuram district is working in participation with the public libraries in the state.
7. Public libraries are currently functioning as Academic Study Centres for the degree courses in various universities of the State.
8. In Taluks, public libraries serve it's users with academic potentialities.
9. The ultimate aim of public libraries is to provide service to society tailored according to the needs of the society.
10. Steps have begun to digitize the collection of public libraries for the maximum utilization of resources and the reference collection of Trivandrum Public Library have been digitized.

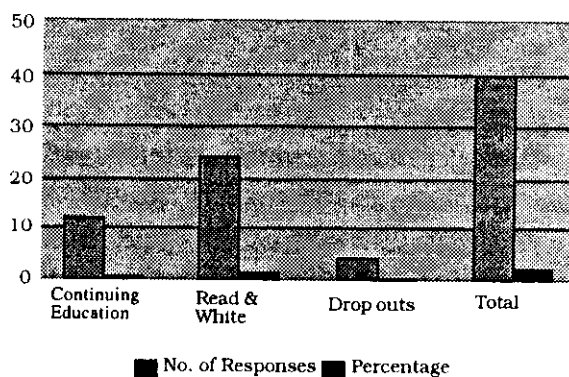
7. A Sample Study Conducted

A study was conducted in Meenadom panchayat of Kottayam district, Kerala to gather an over view of the role of public libraries in promoting non-formal education. Questionnaires were distributed among 20 women labourers to study the role of public libraries in promoting non-formal education. The response was cent percent.

Table 2

Type of Utilization	No. of Responses	Percentage
Continuing Education	6	30%
Read & Write	12	60%
Drop outs	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Figure - 2



7.1. Analysis and Findings

30% of them could continue their education and are attempting to achieve minimum qualification through utilizing rural libraries in their own home area. 60% could read and write for benefiting their livelihood. 10% are drop outs who stopped their education due to various personal reasons.

It is found that about 75% of the panchayat libraries in the state are providing home delivery service of books (mobile libraries) which also serve to promote non-formal education in an effective manner.

8. Suggestions Regarding the Role Public Libraries in Kerala

Public Libraries in the state form the possible centres through which non-formal education can be extended effectively and extensively. Some suggestions for farming an action plan towards promoting non-formal education in the state through public libraries are listed as:

1. Public libraries may be transformed as Community Centres where all types of services the society demands may be provided, since these are the centres where the public can have easy access and where facilities can be made available through government funding.
2. New projects for rural libraries have already been started for carrying out

block developmental activities where public libraries function as community centres. Hence it is suggested that a network of all the public libraries be established in Kerala for enabling the public to have access to all the resources available in various public libraries in the state. Networking of public libraries also will serve to solve the digital divide that exists among different socio-economic groups in the society.

3. Prime importance should be given to appoint professionally qualified librarians in the centre with attractive wages so that the efficiency and status of the public libraries can be improved to a great extent.

9. Conclusion

According to the 1991 census, even though 93.58% was the total literacy rate estimated in Kerala but in April 1991, when declared, the state had only 89.1% literacy. Still the authorities claim an increase of 2%. But it is a fact that many have declined into illiteracy (from among the 1,220,000 made literate in the Total Literacy Campaign) due to school drop-out, although the rate is lowest among the Indian states. Out of the 31.8 million people in Kerala, it must be recognized that at least 2.5 million are unable to read the alphabet. Even though they are knowledgeable in many respects, politically and socially conscious, they are simply devoid of literacy (and numeracy) skills. It is hoped that they too can be made literate and liberated at the earliest chance. The Census report of 2001 states that: "Kerala, which has the highest literacy rate of 90.92 percent, occupies the top slot in both male and female literacy, at 94.20 and 87.86 per cent respectively. Bihar has the lowest literacy rate of 47.53 per cent, along with the lowest literacy rate for males at 60.32 per cent and for females, at 33.57 per cent. The number of literates has more than doubled in Dadra

and Nagar Haveli and Rajasthan during the decade 1991-2001. As per the 2001 Census, all States and Union Territories have now achieved a male literacy rate of over 60 per cent. States Union Territories having less than 50 per cent female literacy rates are Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand and Bihar"(7).

Experiences from different parts of the world reveal that there is no other institution equivalent to public libraries for leading NFE activities with continuous support services that can sustain the literacy achieved as well as make it useful in peoples' day to day life.

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