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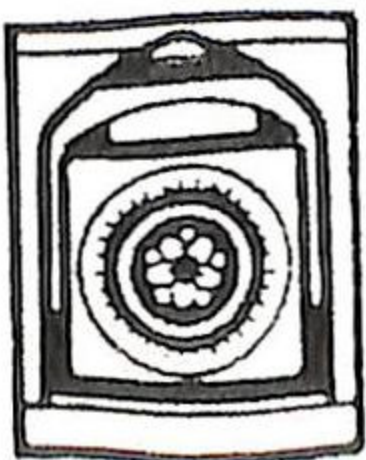
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Guest Editor

Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee



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From the Editor's Desk

The celebration of the New Year is just over, although it was a low-key affair this year, thanks to the global meltdown and economic recession. Even against these odds, after a quiet hibernation for almost two years, *Grantha* again sees the light of the day. One can only assure the readers that this hibernation was more incidental than intentional. A number of factors contributed to this temporary lay-off, not the least being the relocation of work-place of the present editor and concomitant logistical and other problems. We are happy that the zeal of the Foundation has managed to tide over the situation and here we are again at your service with a rich fare of reading material in this issue.

We begin with the Raja Rammohun Roy Memorial Lecture, 2007 delivered by Himani Bannerji which analyses Rammohun's arguments for social reform against the paradigm of tradition and modernity. Foregrounding her lecture on the premise that any social reformer's proposal is motivated by the urge to fashion the dominant consciousness and commonsense of their contemporary society, she concludes that "Rammohun's social activism and writings are a part of the development of a hegemonic consciousness for the emerging middle class of colonial Bengal".

The second part of this issue comprises hard-core library science material. V.K.J. Jeevan traces the advent and rise of Information Technology vis-à-vis library science and suggests methods of improving the range of services and enhancing the reach of public libraries with the help of Information Technology. The other two articles by P.R. Goswami and Kanchan Kamila dwell on the role that public libraries can play in creating science awareness among the masses. All three essays won awards in various essay competitions organized by the Foundation during 2007 and 2008.

We bring in the third section of the present issue two papers presented in a seminar on 'Reader in the World of Books: Literature and the Arts in Dissemination' organized by the Foundation in Bhubaneswar in November, 2007. J.P. Das's paper begins by talking about how the recent critical theories are valorizing the reader, although earlier emphasis was almost entirely

on the author and the text. Then he goes on to analyze the impact of globalization on both our mundane and intellectual life. The next part of his essay deals with the prevalence of hand-written manuscripts in Orissa and the gradual transition to printed books, while the finale makes a fervent plea to the young generation for keeping the glory of our mother tongues alive against the formidable onslaught of English. Jatindra K. Nayak in his brief but interesting paper traces the advent and vogue of such characters in Oriya fiction who were fond of reading.

The last part of this issue contains two invited articles: "Crossing the Borders: Malayalam Literature and Publishing Today" by K. Satchidanandan and "The Creation and Preservation of the Book Tradition in Assam" by Nirupama Bargohain. While Bargohain's article is written more on the historical mode, Satchidanandan's is an analytical focus on the present writing and publishing scenario in Kerala.

We conclude the issue with the regular 'Book News' section where the readers may find valuable information on fourteen interesting titles that have come to our notice during the recent times.



Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee

Raja Rammohun Roy's Argument for Social Reform and the Paradigm of Tradition and Modernity

Himani Bannerji

Human beings are naturally social beings and they are required to live socially. But as society depends upon individuals understanding ideas of each other reciprocally and on existence of some rules by which the property of one is defined and distinguished from that of another, so all the rulers inhabiting different countries, and even the inhabitants of isolated islands and the summits of lofty mountains, have invented special words indicating certain ideas, which form the basis of the invention and upon which the organization of society depends.

Raja Rammohun Roy, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwaddin* (1802)

Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*
(1846)

Introduction

Raja Rammohun Roy lived a long time ago. India has undergone immeasurable changes since then at all levels of polity, economy, society and culture. After all this change and disruption one may wonder if we need to re-read him and how that will help us to understand the present day Indian situation and the international scene. I would claim that Rammohun's works have a great deal to contribute now, and especially now, as the last two centuries have not only seen change, but continuity, intensification and new ramifications of problems that were emerging in early colonial India. Patriarchy or male domination and the condition of women in India are crucial themes that preoccupied him then and ought to deeply concern us now. From the reports produced by various governmental inquiries and commissions regarding the status of Indian women and girls, news stories of male domination, of trafficking of women for sexual and other forms of labour, compounded with women's poverty, have been on centre stage. Not only women's organizations, such as the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) and the National and State Women's Commissions, but also other health, education and poverty related research and writing have disclosed women's deprived, unequal and oppressed condition on all levels. Son preference and sex selection have made India a country where the male-female ratio has become seriously skewed. The media draws our attention everyday to the ongoing violence against women in the streets, other public places and at home. Dowry, long made illegal, continues to haunt the social scene with dire consequences involving life and economic ruination. Neglect of the girl child is a perennial social concern. The much vaunted proclamation of India's economic development, continuing from slogans of 'India rising' or 'shining' and the seeking of increased tourism, runs up against the pervasive patriarchy of eve teasing, rape and even murder of foreign tourists. It is very important for us, then, to return to Rammohun Roy, whose writings on patriarchal social institutions, on violence and cruelty against women, and untiring activism against the custom of *satidaha* (burning alive of women on their husband's pyre) and the practice of *kulinism* (polygamy of the Hindu upper castes) along with his advocacy for women's property rights and claims to reason, make him a great resource for understanding our current society. The requirements of gender justice and the need for social activism are acute now. So reading Rammohun Roy is not a matter of historical curiosity, but of social necessity.

The other important areas on which Rammohun shed light, and which has become a pressing issue for India, are those of secularism

and its contestation between religious fundamentalism or orthodoxy and coexistence and heterodoxy. Rammohun was a trenchant critic of religious dogmatism and of casteist, polytheistic Hinduism. Bigotry, superstition or idolatry, in short, anything that clouds the clear universalism, spirituality and reason or rational thinking, was trenchantly criticized by him. His critical stance led to the creation of the Brahma Samaj as much as to his social activism. The impact of his reform proposals was felt far beyond the walls of the Brahma Samaj. An authority on Hindu scriptures and customary laws, especially of laws of inheritance and succession, a considerable scholar of Sanskrit, Rammohun was well versed in Arabic and Farsi as well. He was an editor of *Miratul-Akhbar*, a Persian Arabic language newspaper, and appellationed 'Jabardast Maulana' or 'Maulavi Rammohun Roy'. He represents for us a stage of Indian history where Hindu-Muslim relations were radically different from what they are now. Rammohun's life and works are urgent for not only Indians, but perhaps for peoples across the world, as we are presently facing a violent politicization of religion, leading to repression of women, riots, massacres, wars and genocides. Uncountable horrors are perpetrated in the name of God and civilization. The example, in India, is the rise and consolidation of a politicized Hinduism or the agenda of Hindutva. If we want to escape from the prison of chauvinistic nationalisms, from claustrophobic communal identity politics, we need to turn again to Raja Rammohun Roy. The field of Rammohun study has been divided. While some have seen him as a modernist, others have deemed him a traditionalist due to his use of Hindu scriptures – the Upanishads and other scriptures with the help of which he argued for social and religious reforms. Those who see him as the 'father of modern India' see in his works and projects a coalescence of modern Indian sensibility and morality. Still others have seen his 'traditionalism' actually as a kind of colonial discourse in reverse tainted by the orientalist governmentality of British colonial rule. For these postcolonialist scholars his concern for women and the social assumptions in which they are grounded, such as belief in individualism, reason and private property, has made him an agent of colonialism. There is no space here to discuss these issues in any detail. I would add that these interpretive squabbles about Rammohun Roy simply muddy the water about what we can learn from him and why we need to do so.

We also need to emphasize that these value-laden sociological categories of modernity and tradition which seem critically useful on the surface prove to be confusing upon scrutiny. Rammohun himself was an eclectic thinker concerned with the society of his time, and turned his attention to contemporary themes and discursive languages, in order to mount a comprehensive attack against prevailing social, moral and

religious oppression and sectarianism. If he returned to the scriptures or the *shastras*, it was also because they were implicated in the law of the land, in matters pertaining to family succession and property rights of women and men. Even today much of what is called 'personal law' in India follows from the old colonial legal system. To use the scriptures, therefore, as a mode of argumentation is neither 'traditional' nor 'modern', but rather the necessary practice of an operative and effective language in social and legal matters. It is important to note that Rammohun systematically uses an anti-oppression and anti-sectarian reading of these scriptural resources and speaks of liberal principles of the individual's, woman's or man's, rights to social and spiritual equality and property.

That these critical ideas are not simply a product of either colonial rule or Hindu religious/traditional discourse becomes evident if we attend to what is available of his pre-English writing, namely to *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin* (A Gift to the Believer). This text, composed both in Arabic and Farsi, belongs to a stage in his life when his interactions with the colonial rulers were probably non-existent. It belongs to a lost cultural period of Bengal, when Perso-Arabic languages, cultures and philosophies were the bases for elite education for both Hindus and Muslims. There were probably works of Rammohun himself and others, including the material of *Mirat-ul-Akbar*, that are no longer available to us. A close look at this text shows how the conceptual groundwork for Rammohun's later critical social and religious reform philosophy was already in place before he became conversant with English and Western writings. This is not to say that Rammohun did not have later interactions with Western languages and socio-political and theological literature, and absorbed their influences. But *Tuhfat* remains an enduring sketch of his life-long ideas for social reform, monotheism/unitarianism, and of his rejection of narrow particularist thinking and sectarianism. The themes of the oneness of god, a universal construct of the human and the creation of a just society of equal individuals mark this first text. The constitutive elements in his projects of social reform – namely, of individual will, of informed choice and rejection of ritualism, superstition and habit are to be found here for the first time. We will now turn to *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin* before we discuss his arguments against *satidaha* and for social reform directed at women.

Part I

I traveled in the remotest parts of the world, in plains as well as in hilly lands, and I found the inhabitants thereof

agreeing generally in believing in the existence of *One Being* who is the source of creation and the governor of it, and disagreeing in giving peculiar attributes to that Being and holding different creeds consisting of doctrines of religion and precepts of *Haram* (forbidden) and *Halal* (legal). From this induction it has been known to me that turning generally towards one Eternal Being is like a tendency in human beings and is common to all individuals of mankind equally. And the inclination of each sect of mankind to a particular God or gods, holding certain special attributes, and to some peculiar forms of worship or devotion is an excrescent quality grown (in mankind) by habit. What a vast difference is there between nature and habit.

Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin

Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin was composed by Rammohun Roy in the early years of his life (1802–03), and it was clearly inspired by the reformist rationalism in the islamic *mutazili* tradition dating back to the 17th century in India. This tradition of Perso-Arabic philosophy relied on a high degree of universalism, abstraction and the use of logical deduction or reasoning. This text in Persian with an Arabic introduction (translated by Maulair Obaidullah) contains a set of philosophical theses covering rational, moral and spiritual grounds for personal improvement and social reform. Lying at the cusp of Rammohun's pre-colonial and colonial life, it gives us an insight into indigeñous rationalism of that time. It contains basic premises for his later arguments against *satidaha* and for women's property rights and education.

Tuhfat is an uncompromisingly monotheistic, universalist and rationalist text. Its staunch unitarianism and resolute refusal to involve God in worldly matters appears close to agnosticism. *Tuhfat* is premised on the notion of individuality – an abstract individuality – of both God and humans. It at once attributes monism or universalism to the realm of the spiritual and philosophy while commenting on the plural nature of the actually existing social institutions, values and practices.

Even at this stage of his life, for Rammohun God is a unity which is indivisible, immutable, without attributes and, thus, unrepresentable. This formulation of God is reminiscent of the Koran, a likely influence given his educational background. Each human being is an individual, socio-moral spiritual unit. How can individuals then enter into relationships with each other if they are such discrete entities? Rammohun sees this mediatory social relationship as being accomplished by certain human mental capacities

or faculties: one, an intuition of the Divine, an inborn sense of the universal as a part of the constitution of human consciousness, and the other, a capacity for creating communication and social relations, thus the capacity for making a society. These elements or attributes of the human consciousness combined with an inherent rational capacity become the source of social and spiritual equality and comparability. Here the idea of the One is necessary for the equality of the many, since the intuition and the apprehension of the One in each person includes the attributes of reason and rationality and can uncover the commonness of the diverse.

The way Rammohun Roy's assertion of the dual attributes of individual human consciousness is reminiscent of the European 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant's notion of two aspects of reason, one intuitional, independent of outside influences, the other socially practical, both combining into the making of ethical judgments. Rammohun also postulates an intuitional reason as an attribute of humanity. As in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section, each human being has an intuition for something incorporeal, universal and indivisible. At the same time the human mind has the capacity of social and practical reason. Rammohun's project of social reform is born in the intersection of these two mental capacities. To elaborate further, the intuitional reason, consisting of an awareness of the universal and the Divine is a source of incorruptible ideas and ideals. It is fundamentally contrary to any particularism, narrowness or chauvinism. This mental capacity is "an innate faculty existing in the nature of mankind [which] makes an enquiry into the nature of principle of things [possible] without partiality [and] with a strong sense of justice." This capacity makes the distinction possible between "attributes" (the phenomenal) and the "essential". It draws out the general principle underlying the phenomenal variations of social particularities. This human capacity is most well expressed at the spiritual level by the idea/sense of the One God and, at a mundane level, it supplies the mode and motivation for social reform by providing the rational/critical ground for making a sound social judgment. It is thanks to this capacity for the essential and the universal that human beings can challenge and throw aside manifestations of narrow particularisms, chauvinism and superstition demonstrated by polytheism, casteism, religious sectarianism and the oppression of women. This universalist, monist and monotheistic reason attributes equality among individuals irrespective of his or her caste, gender or religion.

This capacity for reason and critical thinking is paired with one of making social relations, forms and practices. Together they are implied

in the human capacity for constructing society – its institutions, customs, norms and forms. This socially located and architectonic capacity of the mind is also susceptible to all that it creates individually or collectively. As such it can be the prey or a creature of habits, of corrupting influences of others, as this practical and socially creative capacity of the mind is not in itself rational or critical. But to the extent that this social and creative reason can be drawn closer to the universalist reason with its intuition of oneness and the essential beneath the phenomenal, it can also become the source of social criticism and reform.

In conclusion, the intuitional reason, with its sense of the One and the universal, is not an emotional state, but rather, it is a capacity for rational and logical thought which leads to truth and knowledge. This form of knowledge is not revelatory, but rather the pursuit of a procedure for arriving to knowledge comparatively and deductively. This truth process encompasses logic, grammar and lexicon. It can measure the existing social against notions derived from the universal. Development of knowledge follows the path from the particular to the general and from the intuitional to the critical.

Rammohun projects through his critical argumentation a structure of social reason by establishing a correspondence between the two capacities of the human mind which creates a critical/intellectual space beyond an aggregate of differences. He subjects all empirical things, or phenomenal forms, to laws of logic, such as those of contradiction, obversion and contraposition. This method displays the employment of an Arabic version of Aristotelian deductive logic. Through this rationalist critical mode *Tuhfat* exposes the injustices and absurdities of social life. This critical reasoning advocating the end of superstition, idolatry and falsehood exposes their invalidity by showing how particularist, empiricist and illogical they are. The rationalist universalism he espouses, whose aim is uncompromising logical criticism, manifest what he means by “free thinking”. *Tuhfat*'s critical reflections on caste, polytheism and ritual bound Hinduism provide the staples of Rammohun's future arguments for social reform. Thus his insistence on rational contemplation of universal oneness and his rejection of hierarchic differences among humans indicate the conceptual and critical stance of the later anti-*satidaha* tracts. His anger against ritual sacrifice of animals, which he calls “murder” and an abomination in the eye of God, shows itself in his view of *satidaha* as woman murder. His rejection of Hinduism's penchant for creating surrogates or scapegoats who expiate through their sacrifice the sins of others comes back in his denunciation of those who advocate *satidaha* to redeem the sins of the husband, relatives and ancestors. He also says that the *sati*'s relatives, priests, etc. abet in

the suicide to which they and social superstition have incited the widow, and considers their actions as culpable homicide.

The social vision of *Tuhfat*, which claims that every society is composed of free and equal individuals, not with respect to property but that of mental capacity, further develops through Rammohun's life experience, political participation and learning. But from the very dawn of his critical awakening he endows each individual with a personal agency and moral responsibility for his or her action. A valid social action denotes for him a "free will" and "choice", and is the result of the duty of acting on the presumption of universal equality of the ground of human potential, irrespective of gender. The aim of Rammohun's social reform is, therefore, to create a society of freely willing, socially aware, critical and logical subjects and agents. As he sees it, a superstitious, ritualistic, polytheistic, in short an oppressive and cruel society is the result of a long and historical accretion of errors in forms of thinking and practices. It is sunk in the narrowness of the particular or the local. Unless brought into contact and refuted with the aid of a universalist monotheistic reason, a society continues in its erroneous and blind way. The responsibility for a bad society and bad conditions of individuals is, for Rammohun, of people themselves, particularly of those who hold social power. He does not see in the social injustices, superstitions and oppressions the sign of God's will or design. As Rammohun sees it, social and moral corruption and correction are both within the reach of all individuals endowed with the capacity of a dialectical reason.

Tuhfat also displays the materialist aspect of Rammohun's thought in his advocacy for an economic rationalism. Along with his insistence on the exercise of the critical/spiritual and logical faculty for effective social transformation he emphasizes the necessity of private property ownership for both women and men to make a reforming will effective. *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin*, like the tracts of European enlightenment, is based upon the assumptions of individual will, contractual relations, private property and the legal/social principles of possession. The definition of the individual for both forms of thought is articulated upon the principle of "self possession" which expresses itself into a personal will, reason, freely chosen action. This morality of self-possession, the hallmark of personhood, provides a radical contrast to a collectivity/society based on 'tradition' – that is, on inherited customs, rituals, superstitions and narrowly understood religion. For Rammohun a true morality is only possible for an individual who is self-possessing and is in a material situation to make a choice. To understand what Rammohun means by the idea of 'consent', so central to the scriptural/legal aspect of *satidaha*, we have to refer back

to these principles. Now after discussing *Tuhfat*, we can turn to Rammohun's writings against *satidaha* and for Hindu women's property rights. We can now see how ideas that are put forward in the *Tuhfat* offer the philosophical/moral and legal pedestal for arguments against *satidaha*.

Socio-Economic Reform for Women

With a view to enable the public to form an idea of the state of civilization throughout the greater part of Hindustan in ancient days, and of the subsequent gradual degradation introduced into its social and political constitution by arbitrary authorities, I am induced to give as an instance, the interest and care which our ancient legislators took in the promotion of the comfort of the female part of the community; and to compare the laws of female inheritance which they enacted, and which afforded that sex the opportunity of enjoyment of life, with that which moderns and our contemporaries have gradually introduced and established, to their complete privation, directly or indirectly, of most of those objects that render life agreeable.

“Brief Remarks regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance.” (1822)¹

Other than *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin*, “The Modern Encroachment on the Ancient Rights of Females...” sets up the theoretical space for Rammohun's arguments for social reform concerning the situation of Bengali Hindu women. He begins by speaking of the pre-colonial practice of relatively free land ownership of individuals in society which also benefited women as they also could be property owners. The text outlines a gradual “degradation”, a shrinking, in women's property rights in favour of men through legal changes in inheritance and ownership introduced by the British colonial government. This was manifested through attempts to introduce a more undifferentiated, collective family ownership of property enjoined by the laws of *Mitakshara*. The existing *Dayabhaga* system of inheritance in Bengal, propounded by Jimutavahana, which allowed for private property in land and, thus, a land market, made it possible for

1. All quotes from Rammohun Roy on women and property are from *The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy*, Parts I-VII in one volume, edited by Dr. Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman, reprinted 1995 by Sadharan Brahma Samaj. First published 1945-1952 in seven volumes.

women to own, buy and sell landed property. The entailed nature of property under the joint family system which characterized *Mitakshara* was rejected by Rammohun, who favoured the continuation of *Dayabhaga*. He saw this proposed economic measure as a step backward since it worked as a constriction on the economic and social space of Bengal. He considered an agreement with this change as expressive of an entire generations' subservience to a colonial economic mandate spelling stagnation for the propertied classes of Bengal. The reforming idea in "The Modern Encroachment..." is thus not to innovation of property rights and enabling laws for women by using the colonial legal system, but renovating of pre-existing ones. The results of introducing *Mitakshara*, he claimed, would be particularly disastrous for women. Here is the picture he offers:

To these women are left only three modes of conduct to pursue after the death of their husbands. First. To live a miserable life as entire slaves to others, without indulging any hope of support from another husband. Secondly. To walk in the path of unrighteousness, for their maintenance and independence. Thirdly. To die on the funeral pile of their husbands, loaded with the applause and honour of their neighbours. It cannot pass unnoticed by those who are acquainted with the state of society in India, that the number of female suicides in the single province of Bengal, when compared with any other British provinces, is almost ten to one: we may safely attribute this disproportion chiefly to the greater frequency of a plurality of wives among the natives of Bengal, and to their total neglect in providing for the maintenance of their females.

"Brief Remarks regarding Modern Encroachments..."

It is significant that Rammohun presents a view of Bengal's economic, especially landed property relations which is quite out of keeping with our present day common sense about pre-British and colonial India. Contrary to this commonsense, what we call 'modernism', indicative of the right to private property, of rights to buy and sell land and enter contractual relations, and greater economic rights of women, turn out to be features of pre-British Bengal's laws of inheritance and land economy. With the introduction of *Mitakshara* by the colonial government, Hindu Bengali women of the propertied classes would lose grounds for equal or substantial inheritance and also be curtailed in their rights of disposal. Thus a stringent female dependency upon male kin would result among the women of the better-off sections of Bengal. In this text Rammohun

outlined the extreme socio-moral degradation as well as survival consequences that Bengali women were already experiencing with the introduction of the new inheritance and land market laws.

Rammohun is not only outraged by the social and economic degradation and dangers facing women, but he connects these to an overall retardation of the development of the Bengali society at different levels. Through this text and others he challenged the new legal dispensation of the colonizers, and engaged in debates with colonial administrative authorities such as C.T. Colebrook, the translator of the *Mitakshara*. As stated above, Rammohun saw women's economic deprivation and dependence as creating a social environment which fosters violence and brutalities against women.

Rammohun's rationalism, as shown in *Tuhfat*, has profound critical social consequences, providing his theorization with a materialist dimension. Thus his concern for spirituality, individuality and economic development are of a piece, and his tracts on *satidaha* are to be read not only in relation to "Modern Encroachment..." on Hindu women's property rights, but also to texts such as *Rights of Hindus over their Ancestral Property*, *Revenue System in India*, *Questions and Answers*, and *Judicial System in India*. His vision of Indian development was one of a liberal economic thinker of his time. Even as early as in the last decade of the 18th century and first quarter of the 19th century he saw the retarding consequences of the East India Company's economic policies for India, which prompted him to support free trade. The idea of the introduction of the *Mitakshara* system with its suppression of individual ownership and contractual rights thoroughly alarmed him. The de-industrialization of India that came to be spoken of later was detected very early by Rammohun.

Against *satidaha*

At marriage the wife is recognized as half of her husband, but in after-conduct they are treated worse than inferior animals. For the woman is employed to do the work of a slave in the house, such as, in her turn to clean the place very early in the morning, whether cold or wet, to scour the dishes, to wash the floor, to cook night and day, to prepare and serve food, for her husband, father, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and friends and connections...If in the preparation or serving up of the victuals they commit the smallest fault, what insult do they not receive from their husband, their mother-in-law, and the younger brothers of their husband? After all the

male part of the family have satisfied themselves, the women content themselves with what may be left, whether sufficient in quantity or not. Where Brahmanas or Kayasthas are not wealthy, their women are obliged to attend their cows, and to prepare the cow-dung for firing. In the afternoon they fetch water from the river or tank, and at night perform the office of menial servants in making the beds. In case of any fault or omission in the performance of those labours they receive injurious treatment. Should the husband acquire wealth, he indulges in criminal amours to her perfect knowledge and almost under her eyes, and does not see her perhaps once a month. As long as the husband is poor, she suffers every kind of trouble, and when he becomes rich, she is altogether heartbroken.

...If unable to bear such cruel usage, a wife leaves her husband's house to live separately from him, then the influence of the husband with the magisterial authority is generally sufficient to place her again in his hands; when, in revenge for her quitting him, he seizes every pretext to torment her in various ways, and sometimes even puts her privately to death. These are facts occurring every day, and not to be denied. What I lament is, that, seeing the women thus dependent and exposed to every misery, you feel for them no compassion, that might exempt them from being tied down and burnt to death. "Translation of A Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive from the original Bangla" (1818)

Rammohun's concern for Hindu women rests on two grounds. One is the need for vindication of women's property rights in the perspective of their growing degradation through colonial rule that introduced deeply patriarchal succession laws, and the other is his advocacy for the fullest development of women as possessive individuals and reasonable subjects with strong economic rights.

Without these two propositions which advocate a general homogeneous socio-moral space necessary for the theorizing and exercising of justice, no reform proposal for women would be tenable. The way Rammohun saw it, the ideological legitimacy for a rational reform of society had to get rid of all particularisms or boundaries in conceiving the necessary level field for a rational social reform. The same basic logic of *Tuhfat* insisting on universality, rational thought, free will, choice and real consent are at work here. Insisting on reforming Hindu Bengali women's socio-economic condition and the mode of argumentation that he adopted for

that, he showed that the social empowerment of all could only happen when the very least in society were empowered. For him, women were that figure of the least empowered.

Tracts or pamphlets published in 1818, 1820 and 1830 contain Rammohun's unqualified refutation of both legal and shastric practices of *satidaha* and his unambiguous denunciation of the condition of Hindu (especially upper/middle caste) women. A co-signed petition to Lord Bentinck in 1830 reveals the same. In this context, question one in the first section of *The First Argument* needs to be scrutinized, where Rammohun reveals a humane, just and universal worldview which considers an entire society wretched and condemnable if any part of it exists in misery and servitude. These texts on *satidaha* concretize *Tuhfat's* defense of the individual in the face of traditional collectivity and project women's capacity to be fully individual reasonable social subjects. In keeping with his universalist humanism, which reads the individual in a larger framework, Rammohun portrays women as reasonable moral and spiritual agents since reason exists in humans irrespective of their sex. His representation of women breaks through the bars of casteist Hindu patriarchal or misogynist and particularist construction, and they become self-owning individuals endowed with full mental capacities.

Through sequential rational logical arguments Rammohun breaks down the masculinist construction of 'women' or the 'feminine'. As in *Tuhfat*, he challenges masculine and anti-humanist arguments based on 'feminine' nature and tries to demystify this 'nature' as a product of history, of patriarchal social organization, relations and institutions. The corrupting needs and habits of socialization and indoctrination he speaks of in the *Tuhfat* are concretized here. Exemplifying the practical and malleable social aspect of reason earlier discussed in *Tuhfat*, Rammohun shows how people are influenced by their social habitats. Patriarchy or misogyny turn out to be born out of the corruption of the will and society which is sunk in parochial, sectarian, superstitious and ritualistic self interest which spells out in the inhuman practice of *satidaha*. Acts of cruelty against women become inseparable from power hungry and irrational, prejudicial social mores. The situation of women as presented by Rammohun in his anti-*satidaha* tracts, with its double-edged presentation of what it is and what it should be, confront us with both the abysmal depth of social degradation and possibilities of redemption by being susceptible to humanist, critical and universalist reason. The category of 'nature' in Rammohun's thought is curious in its reconciliation with culture, because it is claimed that critical discerning reason, which allows access to the universal and the human, is itself the bedrock of human 'nature'.

All of Rammohun's texts on *satidaha* fully deploy the above critical epistemology. The custom's illegitimacy and social destructiveness are judged by his established principles of self ownership of the individual, including of the will, and its exertion through the refusal or the consent to being burnt on the husband's pyre. In relation to this concept of consent Rammohun breaks the flat and nominalist or formalist legal notion of the widow's consent and shows how 'consent' means nothing substantial under circumstances that will not allow the widow any valid form of refusal. To come to any truly moral decision, he contends, one must be in a secure position. One must be in a material and historically enabling situation to realize refusals or consent into meaningful acts. Neither a real choice can be made nor a real consent given in an established situation of extreme patriarchy and degradation. His argument against *satidaha* rests on this premise of a systemic critique of patriarchy and only relatedly on arguments appealing to humane sentiments and against violence against women. As such Rammohun does not challenge the act of suicide if it is indeed a free and voluntary act of an individual, but the very social fact that women's situation historically and materially prevents them from making a "free" decision makes their consent to self-immolation hollow and invalid. He does not dispute the legal stipulation of the necessary consent of the *sati* in conducting the ritual, but claims instead that no Hindu Bengali woman can give her consent, as she is not a full and free self-owning individual with material and social wherewithal to survive her refusal to give consent to what the patriarchal society demands of her. He outlines a social and familial world, replete with misogyny, where women, circumstantially and through socialization and religious moral regulations, commensurate with the mores of propertied classes, can say "no" to this life-ending ritual injunction. Women, according to him, within norms and forms of this world are routinely, implicitly and explicitly, coerced to say "yes" and to grow up considering *satidaha* as a fact of life.

Given their circumstances even when women "consent" to cremation, even without physical abuse (of which there is plenty), their so-called ritual suicide amounts to murder for Rammohun. The family structures of Brahminical Hinduism, male relatives eager for their inheritance and the social status conferred on the family through *sati*, all combine to deny women, widows or otherwise, their individuality, property, dignity and humanity. Rammohun, therefore, considered the East India Company's legal intervention in *satidaha* by designing legal criteria of legitimacy of the act as the colonial state's consent to ritualized "woman murder". Though he supported the prohibitive legislation of 1829 of Lord William Bentinck making *satidaha* a criminal act, he saw this as only a minimal gain. The

change he sought was that of a foundational social transformation, not just a legal deterrent. The same liberal principles of voluntary exchange that he sought in the economic sphere he sought in the arena of social life through a genuine empowerment of women. Neither the notion of mercantile monopoly which fettered freedom of trade or contract, nor Brahminical authoritarianism, with the submission of an individual's will to the mores of the community or religious tradition, found any favour with him. He saw the entire Hindu society and the colonial state implicated in *satidaha* or "woman murder" brought about with brute patriarchal force and manipulation. Both the perpetrators and the passive bystanders were to be accused of this heinous crime. Men in particular are culpable because *they have social power to stop this crime, and instead perpetuate it.*

Rammohun's excoriations of *satidaha* extend *Tuhfat's* criticisms of scapegoating and ritual sacrifice. He is not surprised by the brutality and misogyny of *satidaha*, as hypocrisy, immorality, superstition and prejudices mark the sectarian avaricious groups among which casteist Hindus can be named. As for the excuse of inducing women into morality through *satidaha*, Rammohun shows the fallacy of *forcing* someone into virtue, particularly by tempting them with the lure of pleasure in afterlife or the threat of death. After all, the very essence of virtue lies in an actually free choice to be virtuous, which would mean living a virtuous life. It is also important to note that he does not identify the notion of force exclusively with physical violence, but more generally and circumstantially with Hindu women's economic dispossession and social degradation. He portrays these women as prisoners of their society, families and idolatrous religion. The complexity of Rammohun's social criticism is evident in the way he captures different modes of manipulation employed in coercing women to consent to become *sati*. He points to three types of manipulation for forcing women's so-called 'consent'. First, the temptation or seduction put in the path of women, promising pleasures with their husbands after their co-cremation. This has a great effect, he points out, after most women have lived a life of degradation and brutality in their in-laws' home and their fears of a worse future. Needless to say the horror of neglect, torture, and drudgery that would unfold after refusal is an effective incentive. The temptation is further enhanced by the prospect of deification that follows the co-cremation. Second, use of combined moral blackmail and violence by giving her false power and agency, by insisting that through this suicide she alone can save or redeem her entire *kula* (kin network), and especially her husband, from untold number of sins. Third, the sheer terror – of physical, social, psychological brutality – that could be unleashed unless she agreed.

Rammohun also speaks to the stereotype and treatment of women as soulless, reasonless creatures who are excluded from spirituality and condemned to a life of rituals and superstition. He denounces the perverted practice of excluding women from the definition of the human and points to their innate and equal share of reason. He sees widowhood as a stage of pursuit of reason and of practice of true spirituality as enjoined by the *Geeta*, which entitles us to the deed but not its fruits or results. Against patriarchal arguments of natural inferiority of women in matters of spirituality and knowledge, he advances claims about women's knowledge potentials:

I reply. I am surprised at your assertion, that austerities practiced by widows can not be considered as performed without desire, and leading to absorption; for whether austerities or any other kind of act be with desire or without desire, must depend on the mind of the agent. Some may follow asceticism or other practices for the sake of heavenly enjoyments, while others, forsaking desire or fruition, may perform them, and at length acquire final beatitude. Therefore, if a widow practice austerities without the desire of fruition, yet her acts are asserted to be with desire of fruition, this amounts to setting at defiance both experience and the shastras, in a manner unworthy of a man of learning like yourself.

"A Second Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive"
(1820)

He also advances claims about their moral qualities of patience, endurance, loyalty, compassion and the capacity for sexual restraint. The ideal of spiritual asceticism and knowledge which he holds forth to all, but especially to the widow, he feels, can only be aspired to with adequate material provision and social prestige, security and power. For Rammohun, women could only achieve the material and mental circumstances of truly consenting to co-cremation if their material needs were met and their spiritual life lay in their own control.

Conclusion

Any social reformer's proposal is motivated by the urge to fashion the dominant consciousness and commonsense of their contemporary society, and thus becoming hegemonic in the battle ground of class formation and ideology. Rammohun's social activism and writings are a

part of the development of a hegemonic consciousness for the emerging middle classes of colonial Bengal. He is a major figure in providing a model for the intellectual, moral and social ambience and leadership in modernizing India. This involves proposals for a liberal and property oriented society and individualized moral consciousness without rejecting every aspect of (pre)existing sexual division of labour and moral regulation. The condition of women and the family form are integral parts of this liberal ethico-social scheme for him. Rammohun's social reform far exceeds the masculine chivalric and romantic code of kindness to women and the impulse of rescuing the 'weaker sex'. Rammohun in particular had a non-gendered 'human' and 'reasonable' perception of people in general.

Rammohun Roy cannot be read through the simple binary paradigm of 'tradition versus modernity', or his 'modernity' seen as a simple exercise of colonial discourse. *Tuhfat ul-Muwahiddin* provides us with solid evidence that it was otherwise. The same critical universalist and humanist principles are at work from a very early stage of his intellectual and moral development. To say this is not to deny his familiarity with Hindu Brahminical traditions or with European or Western thought. Rammohun's advocacy for an ascetic widowhood as an alternative to *satidaha* bears witness to both traditionality and modernity. The 'traditionality' consists of a Brahminical rejection of the body – including that of sexuality and sensual pleasures. This, of course, is in contradiction with his own life involvement with non-monogamy and implicitly positive sanction of male sexuality. Women appear as sexed beings in his writings only when he speaks of the impoverished widows who become prostitutes for survival. But this disembodied position could equally derive from his abstract and logical universalism, whose cerebral quality cannot accommodate the body in its sensual manifestations. This ascendancy of the mind and rationalism is a kind of modernism which combines with his legal economic materialism in support of individual property and free trade. But are not this mind-body dualism and interest in individual will and bourgeois property relations everywhere the markers of early bourgeois thought and society?

Rammohun interacted easily with modes of colonial rule, European languages and cultures. He used critical Western as well as colonial Western discourse as he became familiar with them. The orientalist discourse of 'civilization' and the orientalist historiography of William Jones, H.H. Wilson and C.T. Colebrook appear in his later writings. But upon scrutiny it also becomes evident that these elements interact with or surround his earlier main arguments, such as those in *Tuhfat*, rather than re-constitute them foundationally. His works display convergence of social, economic and spiritual mores of a pre-British Bengali or Indian society with those

of European variety. This was possible because Rammohun Roy came at the infancy of British colonization in India, at a time when English modern/industrial capitalism and state formation were still in their early stages. What we now call 'the past' and 'tradition' were socially contemporary moments for him. As such, positioned right in the middle of socio-economic and cultural encounter with English colonialism and the West, he did not engage in the invention of tradition or a project of 'recovery' of the past. In fact he was perfectly aware that the East India Company's proposed legal and economic measures would take Bengal many steps back in economic and social progress. His use of the *shastras*, *Dayabhaga* and *Mitakshara* were no traditionalist gestures, but rather a use of contemporary laws of the land.

At the time of Rammohun women's voices were wholly absent from public discourse. In that situation they could not represent themselves, but needed to be represented. This did make them social 'objects' of reform for him. On the contrary, Rammohun's mode of representation of women did open up the space for social criticism at his own time and a future space for women's self-representation and their own eventual claim on reason, education and enlightenment.

Improving the Range of Services and Enhancing the Reach of Public Libraries through Information Technology

V K J Jeevan

1 Introduction

The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto defines the public library as “the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups” [1]. It also emphasized that the public library services should be formulated with certain objectives that relate to information, literacy, education and culture in mind [1]:

- ☆ creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age;
- ☆ supporting both individual and self conducted education as well as formal education at all levels;
- ☆ providing opportunities for personal creative development;
- ☆ stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people;
- ☆ promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations;
- ☆ providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts;
- ☆ fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity;
- ☆ supporting the oral tradition;
- ☆ ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information;
- ☆ providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups;

- ☆ facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills;
- ☆ supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age groups, and initialing such activities if necessary.

Ranganathan formulated an integrated five-tier public library system comprising primary service library, secondary service library (city central and district central libraries), tertiary service library (state central library), national library and the futuristic world grid of public libraries [6]. This largely acted as the guiding principle in evolving public library system in the country. Depending on whether the Public Library Act is in vogue and based on the interests of the State Government or the level of public movement behind this cause, there may be variations between different states on the penetration and services of public library network. Some of the predominant services offered by our public libraries to the community are lending out collection of light reading and fiction, reading room facility of newspapers and popular magazines, as a distribution network for government information like gazettes, manuals etc. Some of them also hold reference collection and engage in reference services. The problems and constraints faced by the public library system to effectively disseminate information are manifold in the country, essentially as a result of:

- ☆ A considerable percentage of the population is illiterate or functionally literate forcing library to be of minimal use to them.
- ☆ Poor allocation for the infrastructure improvement and collection development for public libraries.
- ☆ Lack of enough sanctioned posts, forcing most of the services to be operated by voluntary non-professional staff, causing steady deterioration on information organisation and servicing.
- ☆ There is also a problem of educated professionals preferring to work in special and academic libraries than public libraries.
- ☆ Little emphasis on adoption of Information Technology for public library systems and services.

Being a State responsibility as per the Constitution, states are vested with the mandate to set up public libraries at different levels. The state governments have departments/directorates/councils of public libraries to start, maintain and operate public libraries under its jurisdiction. But due to the difference in the level of state-wise development, the Department

of Culture, Government of India has set up Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) to act as a nodal agency for development of public libraries in India. Since all the States have not passed the requisite library legislation, RRRLF is working towards a model Public Library Bill. The RRRLF has also been given the responsibility of resource mobilization for modernisation of the state and district central libraries, the development of infrastructure and training of personnel [9]. Public libraries are considered more as entertaining institutions and the collection predominantly in book form meant for light reading, caused the absence of any concrete mechanisms for either automating them or networking them. 'Reach' refers to the physical or geographic areas to which service is provided that is a function of the communications components of an information system and 'range' stands for the types of services available once connectivity is provided [5]. This paper will explore the possibility of considering IT as a valuable cost-effective tool for spreading, improving and enlarging public library systems and services.

1.1 How big is our Public Library System?

It has been difficult to collect authorised statistics on public libraries in the country, as the same happens to be under the purview of different agencies that never disclose such information on a national scale for various reasons. So we are forced to depend on published ones which are unfortunately quite dated. Sen put the number of libraries in the country to 5400 in 1951 [11]. IASLIC's old directory mentioned the number of special and research libraries as 173 [12] whereas BLA estimated around 3980 libraries in the state of West Bengal only [13]. The country presently comprises 28 states, 6 union territories and the national capital region, which together account for approximately 550 districts. The number of inhabited villages in the country is around 568558 [14]. These figures force us to estimate the number of public libraries to be more than a lakh and it is mind-boggling to imagine the difficulties of facilitating information and library support to the mass of over a billion population, spread over 32 lakhs sq. km.

1.2 Constraints for Public Library Services

Gardner estimated the use patterns of the Central Library of Delhi Public Library and found that 28.89% of the users are less than 16 years of age, 26.67% in between 17-20 years, 30.35% around 21-29 years, 9.65% about 30-45 years and only 2.47% have above 45 years. The educational attributes of users are 21.27% primary, 18.36% middle school, 28.59% matriculation, 10.54% intermediate, 10.14% graduate, 1.81% post graduate

and 2.05% professionals. Out of these only 31.28% of the users reside farther than 1.5 miles from the library [15]. The constraints that are significant are the ones suggested by the World Information Report, 1997-98, quoted by Dasgupta [10]:

- ☆ The bulk of the population is not information-dependent in day-to-day work and living
- ☆ A large proportion of the population cannot consume information in written form
- ☆ The vast majority of the population does not have the means to access information
- ☆ People in general are not accustomed to pay, cannot pay or are unwilling to pay for information as it does not figure in their list of wants
- ☆ The existing pattern of economic activities does not favour a growth in information consumption
- ☆ The countries do not have sufficient capacity to invest in infrastructure development

The second point raises enough justification for the necessity of information in non-written forms like audio, video, and multimedia. The advent of computer and information technology has yielded the availability of all these forms into one computer-amenable form. Perhaps that is the reason why we should explore the adoption of these new technologies for delivering public library services to a large mass of illiterate and semiliterate populace, apart from improving the services presently provided to the reading public.

2 IT Applications in Libraries: National Status

The special research and academic libraries attached to premier institutions were the forerunners of adopting computer and communication technology (IT) for revamping library administration and services in the country. It is almost a decade since the spread of such activities on a large scale, concentrating essentially on three counts. The primary interest is in computerising the routine house keeping aspects of library work like acquisition and processing of reading materials, and their lending to clients. Similarly the specialised journals generally bought at an exorbitant price are properly managed with the help of programs termed as library automation packages. Such packages are now available not only from private firms (e.g. TLMS, LibSys, Librarian, PALMS, etc.) but also from

not-for-profit institutions (e.g. SOUL, Sanjay, CDS/ISIS, etc.) at affordable prices with pick and choose options. The Electronic Delivery of Information promoted the arrival of online information hosts (which unfortunately have not made the desired impact as they are expensive due to telecommunication problems and charges) and CD-ROM databases. Secondary databases and reference books were disseminated predominantly in CD-ROM which forced a large number of libraries to subscribe to and service them. Some libraries made their frequently used CD-ROM databases available on the local network with the help of CD Towers, juke boxes or software tailor made to copy CD data into high capacity hard disc servers. The last five years has been significant for IT services in the country as a result of the spread of Internet and web culture for all areas of human endeavour and librarians were next to none in exploiting the virtues of net for information processing and servicing. The net with its enormous information contents provided the first landing point for reference librarians whenever they have a query not answerable with the local resources. Primary publishers force libraries to receive web editions of journals and other information sources, as an alternative or supplement of print subscriptions. Creating web sites and keeping Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) accessible through the site facilitated efficient networking of libraries and resource sharing among them. Though the networking of libraries like CALIBNET (Kolkata), DELNET (Delhi), networks in few other cities, INFLIBNET (national and educational) and other means of resource sharing like Inter Library Loan (ILL) started before the spread of Internet, the net fastened meeting most of the objectives with its vital tools and techniques. The special research and academic libraries were forced to migrate to new technology initiatives for the following reasons:

- ☆ Retrieval of subject based information has become very crucial and the manual means of handling the constantly growing collection found more demanding on time and other resources
- ☆ Cost versus allocation gap forced many libraries to cut subscriptions and acquisitions demanding them to network and collaborate
- ☆ Electronic information preferred over print due to the widely competing work environment and ease of use

3 IT intrinsic Public Library Services

Hennen's American Public Library Ratings (HAPLR) consider the following 15 attributes with different weighted measures: expenditure per

capita - 3, percent budget to materials - 2, materials expenditure per capita - 2, full time employed (FTE) staff per 1,000 population - 2, periodicals per 1000 residents - 1, volumes per capita - 1, cost per circulation (low to high) - 3, visits per capita - 3, collection turnover - 2, circulation per FTE Staff Hour - 2, circulation per capita - 2, reference per capita - 2, circulation per hour - 2, visits per hour - 1, circulation per visit - 1. Internet, electronic services and audiovisual services are excluded because there is simply not enough data from enough libraries for meaningful comparison [17]. By May 1998, approximately 86% of public libraries in U.S. will have an Internet connection (of varying speeds from 28.8 kbps to 1.54 mbps), which serve approximately 97% of the population with an average annual expenditure of \$32,104 [16]. In April-June 1991, John Smith conducted a survey on the state of networking in UK Public Libraries, and 99 out of 167 replied of which 92 used computers or some form of information technology and 51 used CD-ROMs. Of the 70 that used a mini or mainframe computer used it for cataloguing (67) or issue systems (64) and (37) used it for OP AC. 24 claimed to use a Local Area Network (LAN) and three respondents claimed use of a private Wide Area Network (WAN). Of the 50 where the local authority had a WAN only 37 made use of it for access to financial information (18), mainframe access (12), and general intersite communication (11). Although there were a wide range of modem speeds indicated two preferred ones were 1200/2400 and 9600. A very high fraction (81) had access to a Fax machine, 53 were using electronic mail, and over half (49) of the respondents indicated, they had definite plans for introducing new telecommunications or networking in the next few years [18].

Internet connectivity can be achieved in three ways viz., low-speed (2400 bps - 28.8 kbps) dial-up access using a modem through an ordinary phone line, Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) high-speed dial access with 128 kbps data transfer rates, and leased access with leased point-to-point circuits connecting the user with the Internet provider's network. Three services associated with dial-up access are [5]:

- ☆ Terminal Access (VT-100 shell account): Accesses a vendor-provided host computer connected to the Internet. As the protocol TCP/IP stops at the host, the terminal will not be able to use graphical browsers such as Netscape or Explorer but can use the Web through text-based browsers like Lynx and can also use electronic mail, telnet, and ftp.
- ☆ Workstation SLIP (Serial Line Internet Protocol) or PPP (Point to Point Protocol) Access: Allows to use graphical Internet tools

such as packet video teleconferencing and multimedia access to the World Wide Web.

- ☆ Internet Gateway Access: Some commercial on-line services like America Online offer users a graphical interface in front of a terminal connection to the Internet. Thus packet video and other applications requiring TCP/IP will not work in this configuration.

In contrast to dial-up access, leased line connectivity will always include TCP/IP, facilitating library to run sophisticated software, access packet video, and execute Web enabled services [5]. Depending on the resources and infrastructure of library, there can be two levels of Internet involvement [5]:

- ☆ Internet Access: How the library will be connected to/can access the Internet? Costs include the purchase of workstations/terminals, modems/cabling/e-mail accounts, monthly access fees, and telecommunications charges.
- ☆ Internet Service: Internet services like setting up Web servers, preparing and making available library-specific resources such as local databases and images on the Internet. Costs include that for research and development, staff, and technology in support of such services.

3.1 Saga of American Center and British Council

Though on a limited scale, the country can boast of the presence of a few libraries practising state-of-the-art public library work, two such institutions that are operating on the national level being the American Center and British Council. The American Information Resource Centers (AIRCs) provide information about the United States, its people, and its policies to promote mutual understanding, culture and information exchange with India. These libraries (located in Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai, and New Delhi) are open to people from all walks of life for reference, research and borrowing facilities. Generally, four types of memberships: individual, temporary, distance (for people residing in adjoining areas where the library is located), and institutional are offered. The collections consist of multidisciplinary American books, journals and reference materials, U.S. government publications, and think-tank reports. The four libraries together have a collection of about 82,721 books, 586 print periodicals with over a 1,000 journals in electronic format, 2,425 videocassettes, and subscriptions to leading American newspapers. Apart from print, information is available

in several electronic formats like, CD-ROMs, online databases and Internet-based databases; and reference queries are answered through telephone, fax, mail, or e-mail. The OP AC allows sharing resources amongst the four libraries. Several commercial and government online services such as, Dialog (over 500 databases), OCLC First Search (more than 55 databases), ProQuest Direct (over 400 full-text periodicals and bibliographic data for about 1600 periodicals and newspapers) etc., are being used for value-added information access [7].

The British Council is Britain's international network for education, science and technology, culture and development services by harnessing information and knowledge initiatives, industries and networks for mutual benefit. It also aims to promote information about the UK to other countries on the core subject areas of education, English language teaching, arts, science, governance and civil society. The British Council operates in the country a network of thirteen libraries (in Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Bhopal, Chandigarh, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, New Delhi, Patna, Pune, and Thiruvananthapuram), which is the Council's largest operation in the world and run jointly with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). These libraries provide access to British information and culture to a large body of professionals and students. Besides books, journals and training videos, most of the libraries also stock children's books, home videos and electronic information resources like CD-ROMs, multimedia and on-line subscriptions. Some of the important services offered include, lending books/journals/videos, reference, information about Britain, internet access, indev (Development Network for NGOs), BLDSC International Book Loan, educational counselling, information about British examinations, book promotion, business Information Centre, proactive information to opinion formers and decision makers, photocopying, library orientations, video screenings, interlibrary loans, renewal of items over the telephone/e-mail, programmes for members and children, sale of withdrawn books, electronic 'Current Awareness Service', and Internet awareness programme for members. Most of these libraries work from 11 AM to 7 PM and possess variable number of collection (only one has over 60000, five of them with about 30000, three with approximately 25000, and the remaining in between 6000-15000) [8].

The American Center and British Council libraries falling in the genre of public libraries in the country would be able to provide such distinctive services as a result of:

- ☆ Assimilation of the state-of-the-art practices and technology for information work

- ☆ Result-oriented and service-driven management
- ☆ Their clientele, being the upper crust of the Indian society who are able to pay slightly higher service charges and who more responsive to access the sophisticated facilities
- ☆ Continuous weeding out of collection (though the total collection being small) ensures relevance and higher use rate
- ☆ Better pay and service conditions lure the best professionals in India to work for them

4 Pragmatic Application of IT for Public Library Work

The Department of Culture through the Central Secretariat Library (CSL) has laid down standards for library development software and networking as well as for bibliographic description to ensure standardization both in infrastructural development as well as retro-conversion of library catalogue in machine-readable format [9]. Similar exercises were also conducted by several library networks mentioned earlier, and perhaps the public library movement can seriously think of accepting one or many such systems for their in-house data management. The onus of creating and maintaining databases can be assigned first to the vast spectrum of public libraries, maybe first up to taluka level and later on can be passed on to all the individual libraries depending on the penetration of technology and staff expertise available to them. Since the collection and other resources are duplicating, data management at any level will not be a problem, if efforts will be put on formulating guidelines on authority control and data validation. Maybe all libraries in one taluka can host the same union catalogue with proper identification of the individual holdings guiding even the user of a title demanded in the near proximity. CD-ROM titles in Indian languages have not picked up the desired number, barring few attempts on tourist and business information [2], but there exists chances for such procurement for international reference sources like dictionaries, encyclopaedias, etc. During the television boom, there was a programme to provide public libraries with TV sets to disseminate government information with entertainment. It can be thought of in this computer crazy time, to provide public libraries with multimedia PCs. Significant attempts are underway to improve the telephone density in the country and it is a good move to provide telephones in public libraries. Not only these phones act as community telephones where such provisions lack; they can also be used for dial-up Internet connection. There are also certain untapped networks, which can be explored for public library networking like the satellite based network of National Informatics Centre

(NIC) which connects all the districts, network of Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL), and those of private Internet Service Providers (ISPs) like Satyam. RRRLF is having matching grant schemes for "assistance to state, central and district libraries to acquire TV-cum-VCR sets and cassettes for educational purposes, and assistance to libraries below the district level for increasing accommodation" [3]. Some of these schemes could be extended or modified to frame similar schemes for computer and communications infrastructure in public libraries. In 1998-99, our country exported \$2.6 billion or Rs. 10940 crores of IT software and services to 91 countries.... IT industry has a potential of providing 2 million jobs and \$50 billion in the next 10 years [4]. There is no doubt about the constructive work, assistance and support this industry can offer in wiring our public libraries to systematically upgrade the literacy, information consumption of a large chunk of the population, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Some of the state governments like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, etc. are pursuing an enthusiastic agenda towards migrating to e-governance and making the administration and welfare measures more open, deep and transparent. Public libraries restructured as network kiosks to deliver and access a whole lot of information facilities and support services can go a long way in reassuring such initiatives.

The approximate cost elements incurred to set up some of the IT based facilities in the public library system include:

A Local Library

A1 Non-Recurring

- ☆ Hardware: Multimedia PCs @ Rs. 35000 (The number of PCs to be bought required must be based on the population served by the library. But it should be nothing less than at least one for 10 users visiting the library at one point of time. 2-3 for the village library, 10 for the Taluk library, 20-30 or a mini server with enough terminals for the district and state libraries is a safe bet to begin with) @ Rs 105000
- ☆ Communications Hardware: Telephone connection and Modem @ Rs. 10000
- ☆ Training and Education for library staff/volunteers @ Rs. 10000

A2 Recurring

- ☆ Communication and Internet Access Fees @ Rs. 25000 per annum
- ☆ Facilities Upgrades and Maintenance @ Rs. 25000 per annum

Total for one Local Library for both recurring and non-recurring:
Rs. 175000

Total for approximately one lakh Local Library for both recurring
and non-recurring: Rs. 1750crores

B Taluka Library

B1 Non-Recurring

- ☆ Hardware: Mutimedia PCs @ Rs. 35000 (The number of PCs to be bought required must be based on the population served by the library. But it should be nothing less than at least one for 10 users visiting the library at one point of time, 2-3 for the village library, 10 for the Taluk library, 20-30 or a mini server with enough terminals for the district and state libraries is a safe bet to begin with) @ Rs 350000
- ☆ Library Automation and other Software @ Rs. 50000 (this may be required only up to District/Taluk level)
- ☆ Communications Hardware: Telephone connection and Modem @ Rs. 20000
- ☆ Training and Education for library staff/volunteers @ Rs. 20000

B2 Recurring

- ☆ Communication and Internet Access Fees @ Rs. 40000 per annum
- ☆ Facilities Upgrades and Maintenance @ Rs. 40000 per annum

Total for Taluka Library for both recurring and non-recurring: Rs. 420000
Total for approximately 5000 Taluk Library for both recurring and non-recurring: Rs. 210 crores

C District Library

Similarly by considering 2-3 times increase for the District Library, total for both recurring and non-recurring: Rs. 840000 to Rs. 1260000

Total for approximately 550 District Library for both recurring and non-recurring: Rs. 70 crores

D State Library

Similarly by considering 2-3 times increase for the State Library, total for both recurring and non-recurring: Rs. 2-4 crores

Total for the state libraries: Rs. $(29 \times 4 + 6 \times 2) =$ Rs. 123 crores

D1 Special Expenses needed at the State level:

- ☆ Content and Resource Development: State level digital information facilities can be formulated in phases as derived from copyright free/copyright paid contents reflecting the literature, culture, educational and government information pertaining to the state. Since this will be a continuous process, considerable resources need to be spent and earmarking a few crores of rupees at the state level from government's concerned departments might be a good beginning (@Rs. 10 crores by each state, Rs. 2 crores by each union territory, Total @ Rs. 302 crores).
 - ☆ Program Planning, Management, and Staffing: Recruitment of specialists well versed in information and communication is required to efficiently administer and ably pursue IT enabled public library system and services. Such personnel can be recruited at the entry level officer grade of state @ Rs. 1.5 -2 lakhs, up to district level forcing them to supervise the operations to certain viable decentralised mode (Total @ Rs. 11 Crores).
- Total for all in A, B, C & D: Rs. 2466 Crores

Since the exact number of libraries in different levels is not known, the amount assessed may be arbitrary, as it has been difficult to cumulate the expenses for the required number. Considering the bulk of resources the central, state and local governments used to spend for social welfare, education, health and family welfare, resources can be easily mobilised to spend on these lines.

5 Conclusion

Information, Communication and Entertainment (ICE), and convergence are the buzzwords in computer, communications and information technology nowadays. Since public libraries being the nerve centres for spreading socio-cultural information that can be used for improving the quality of life, much needs to be done in restructuring the programmes and plans for upgrading the public library system in the country. Our public libraries can be turned to better public libraries if they examine the management, staffing, and performance of special libraries in the country and libraries run by the British council and American Center. Some of these objectives can be better realised if bodies like RRRLF can commission some software development firms and network providers to evolve an action plan to improve the range of public library services and reach of public library system using such a cost effective tool as IT to enable the information age in the country.

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Public Libraries for Science Awareness: Towards an Action Plan

P.R. Goswami

Introduction

India is a pluralist and a hierarchical society. There are many religions, languages, castes as well as many customs, rituals and traditions. This pluralism makes room for a wide diversity which enriches our lives. And it also poses a challenge for us to build social institutions that suit a community's environment. Public libraries are a form of social institution that take part in a severe contest between intelligence which presses forward and timid ignorance obstructing our progress.

Public libraries are probably one of the very few government institutions that state has funded and provided free to the members of the public wholly for their enjoyment without expecting accountability for the benefit of being able to access information. And the government has done this in the belief that an informed citizenry is essential for the functioning of democracy. It is an essential component of the marketplace of ideas. [Galhegi 2005:1] This statement is perhaps true in case of socially advanced western countries like USA and UK where there is an elaborate provision for public library service. In India, public library service is not fully state owned. Only 16 states have so far enacted library legislation and quality of library services in many of the states are rather unsatisfactory. It is basically due to inadequate and incomplete social policy of the government of a low income country. In fact, low income countries get caught in a 'taxation trap' wherein low levels of taxation, redistribution and low level social services are locked into a vicious circle; and as a consequence, political legitimacy is entirely delinked from social policy. [UNRISD 2007:8]

However, libraries, in general, are treated as a merit good;¹ and they are deemed as a social capital.² In socially advanced states like Kerala and West Bengal, there are public libraries attached to clubs and Informal Local Governance Institutions (ILGI) which are prevalent in most of rural India in some form or other. ILGI's are highly institutionalized and they embody stable, recurring and valued behaviour patterns. In varying degrees, ILGI's in India resolve disputes, keep peace, assist the unfortunate, finance and support temples, organize religious and social festivals, help develop social infrastructure and resources; and also influence how the village is represented at higher political level. [Ananthpur 2007:402]

Public libraries in India have a limited function. Most of them own printed material in the form of books, periodicals, newspapers etc. mainly for recreational reading. They also support both individual and self conducted education as well as formal education at various levels. Members of the public libraries are allowed to borrow books and use reading rooms. *The Public Library Manifesto* released by the IFLA and UNESCO says 'The Public Library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups'. [UNESCO 1994] Another publication *The Public Library Service: IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development* says 'The primary purposes of the public library are to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure. They have an important role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge ideas and opinion'. [IFLA 2001] Public libraries also have an important social role. A library is a public space and a meeting place; bringing people into contact with other members of the community.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the public libraries that are spread all over the country can promote people's understanding of science; inculcate scientific temper among the citizens, particularly those living in the countryside, and sensitise them with benefits of scientific approach. India, which is now celebrating 60 years of its independence, has perhaps an impressive growth story with its vibrant economy, a large

1 Economists apply the term merit goods to those goods and services that society considers to have special merit but that might be produced in insufficient quantity if left to private hands.

2 Social capital is all about the way citizens cooperate, form groups and begin to trust each other. Democracy flourishes in those societies where citizens are active in volunteer associations – schools, hospitals, clubs, business groups etc.

pool of scientific manpower and successes in the arena of science. They are often marked with subtle references to backwardness in villages, starvation death, continuing water and power shortages etc. Large parts of population are in the 'bliss of ignorance' living with irrational beliefs. An eminent scientist Professor C.N.R. Rao has rightly said that scientists have to deliver the message of science to everyone in India and try to help inculcate scientific temper everywhere. While it is partly a management problem, there is also need for good scientists and educators to be involved in this social revolution. [Rao:2007:13]

1. Science and Society

In India, there are several science based voluntary organizations that have taken lead in matters of science and technology communication. The science policy Resolution of 1958 and the introduction of Article 51(h) in the Indian Constitution reveals the importance of scientific temper in Indian society. The Rashtriya Vigyan Evam Prodyogiki Sanchar Parishad (RVPSP) in the Department of Science and Technology has been engaged in all facets of science communication for the past 25 years. A cross cultural study conducted under the aegis of RVPSP every six years has revealed that there is an increase in the level of people's understanding of science. This organization also encourages research and impact studies, development of communication material for different media. To encourage science education and research, RVPSP is also organizing Children's Science Congress for the past 15 years. The students in the 10-18 years age group form teams and work on real problems from their locality and suggest solutions using experimental skills, data collection and analysis of their work etc. The results are presented at local, state and national level meets in the language of their choice. This programme is presently operating in over 590 districts. The organization also has a mass contact programme i.e. 'Jatha' designed to sensitise people on the issues of science and development. And in order to sustain the euphoria generated during such programme, science libraries have been started as resource centers for the communicators who lead the Jathas. The states of Kerala and Rajasthan have started such resource centers. [Sinha 2007:45-46]

In addition there are Regional Science Councils in different states to promote the spread and utilization of scientific knowledge and research. Their main objectives are to identify, generate, utilize and promote new technologies relevant to the developmental needs of the state. Popularisation of science and spread of scientific temper and attitude among the people of the state; and to promote utilization of homegrown technologies is

also on the agenda of these state owned agencies. However, the most important contribution of these Councils has remained in the area of popularizing science among the people.

As regards the impact of such programmes, one can say that the increase in level of understanding of science needs to be much higher. Low level of literacy and pre-occupation with meeting the basic needs by a majority of population are hindering the increase in understanding of science. Though print and electronic media have access to a major chunk of rural population, commercial interests has reduced time slot or space for science communication. On the contrary, private TV channels are now showing programmes on magic healing, blind religious beliefs and abnormal religious practices that normally defy all scientific reasoning. In recent years many popular science magazines have folded up leaving the field for only public funded initiatives. However, Radio Broadcasting has so far been successful in transmitting science related programmes particularly to farmer community. But, in a bid to attract more viewers, state owned TV channels have also reduced their time for science-based programmes. [Sinha 2007:48]

Though there has been sustained effort on the part of the government to popularize science, some hardline scientists believe that it is a meaningless programme and wastage of valuable time. This may not be true if we consider that interface of science communicators with social scientists, journalists, policy makers etc. is important to understand transdisciplinary subjects like science and ethics; or stimulate discussion on alternative science. Social scientists advocating alternative science are deeply concerned with violence perpetuated through modern western science. They have strongly criticized modern western science for its extreme use of reason directed towards extreme use of violence. Some scholars have vehemently argued for alternative sciences that are non-dualists (i.e. not meant for dual use) and without the above mentioned characteristics of modern science. They have also explored possibilities of alternative sciences that exemplify a non-violent and non-vivisectionist politics. Shiv Viswanathan, one of the prolific writers on alternative science says:

“These movements (i.e. ecological or civil rights movements) inaugurate one of the finest challenges to the specific regime. They pinpoint that rationalist science is a repressive regime, that tribal cultures and peasant agriculturist are often ecologically more sound than the modern scientist”. [Viswanathan 1977:47]

There is certainly a cause for propagation of alternative science particularly in rural areas. As observed by Shiv Viswanathan:

“Our science should have begun in the forest or in our fields Botany is a gentle science. It may be a better model for government than Plato or Machiavelli”. [Viswanathan 1997:211]

In village India, some have interest in science but no access to knowledge. Public libraries can help to provide access to scientific knowledge and create an environment to sustain such knowledge.

2. Information Campaigns to Raise Awareness

For the purpose of this paper, one has to explore how public libraries can intervene and play a leading role in promoting scientific temper or awareness among the citizens. Civil society groups are now actively involved in various ‘awareness’ or information dissemination campaigns all over the country. Following is a definition of civil society:

Organisations – including movements, networks, and other entities – which are autonomous from the State, are not intergovernmental, or do not represent the private sector, and which, in principle, are non-profit-making, act locally, nationally, and internationally, in defence and promotion of social, economic, and cultural interests, defence of human rights, promotion of development objectives, and for mutual benefit. (http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/3551.html) [Quoted in Chakraborty 2006:252]

The social activists and policy makers have stressed information, advocacy and awareness campaigns at the community level, as a way of encouraging people’s participation. One of the examples is Right to Information campaign in India which primarily focused on the role of accessible information in improving civic services. Many of these initiatives have been transformed into information dissemination programmes in a computer and communication mediated environment. A sample list of some of these programmes is given below: [Mukhopadhyay 2006:301-02]

No	Title	Provider	Types of Information
1.	Tarahaat is a commercially viable Internet based information service	www.tarahaat.com, is a private sector initiative with 31 TARA kendras in different districts of UP, MP and Punjab	Health, Livelihood, Finance, Agriculture, Employment, Natural Resources, Education, Message Service, Rural Market Information, Food & Dairy, etc.
2.	E-choupal-ITC launched this project in the year 2000 for rural masses	It is an initiative of ITC with 4,100 choupals started in six States (MP, Karnataka, AP, UP, Rajasthan and Maharastra)	Emphasis of ITC e-choupals is on Rural Marketing Information Services. It offers such Services through 4 Portals
3.	Gyandoot is an intranet based service connecting rural cyber cafes for catering to the everyday needs	NIC provides this service for the rural masses of Dhar district in MP with support from District Administration	Services of Gyandoot includes Email Service in Hindi, Govt. Scheme Information, Rural Employment, Govt. Forms, Rural Marketing Information, Education and Training, Local News and Newspaper Clipping Services, Agriculture and Forestry, and Matrimonial, etc.
4.	Information Village Project of MS Swamainathan Research Foundation (MSSRF)	MSSRF connected ten villages near Pondicherry by a hybrid wired and wireless network to deliver knowledge to poor in electronic form	It is well organized database driven Community Information Service of MSSRF arranged under following major groups- Current Information, Govt. Programmes, Citizen Charters, Agri. & Animal Husbandry,

5. Bhoomi is an e-gov-ernance project of special type. Bhoomi is designed to serve land records to people
- It is a joint project of Karnataka Government and Government of India.
- Bhoomi project covers databases of 20 million Land Records of 6.7 million landowners in 176 Taluks of Karnataka. It provides access to Land Records as and when required, facilities of Online Updating and Printing of Land Records at the time of demand

A close scrutiny of the services provided under these schemes would reveal that these are mostly need based information services. A few of them do provide bits of 'science' information to the rural masses. However, public libraries are largely left out of these programmes. A limited view of public library as a storehouse of books and journals and as a place for reading, coupled with unwillingness on the part of librarians to participate in community activities have made them 'institutions working in isolation'.

A strategic intervention of Public libraries in 'awareness' or particularly in 'science awareness' programmes can be envisaged on the basis of the following ground realities: [Gurstein 2006]

- ☆ The technology-based initiatives often bring a wave of optimistic social expectations. For a long time, we were of the view that the information revolution would change every aspect of social life.
- ☆ ICT is only a tool and it is the society that has to decide where and how to use them. It has been said that dust settles over the hype of ICT.
- ☆ Physical communities continue to provide the context in which people raise their families, educate their children, ensure their health and well-being and influence the management of their civic affairs.
- ☆ A virtual community is an 'abstract information – theoretical construct' generated by the use of ICT whereas a physical community is a web of social relations and potentialities.

A public library is a social space; a community run organisation; and in many socially advanced states, it is a part of ILGIs. Networking ability of such an institution goes a long way in promoting participation in its activities. Science awareness programmes based on local aspirations and needs and backed by a strategic action plan can be organized. A brief outline of contents of such programmes is given below:

- (a) Devising new ways of generating, sharing and managing scientific information relating to forest, wildlife and biodiversity resources; involving local educational institutions, NGO's, and civil society activists regardless of the level of their formal education. Public libraries can institute such a 'share and inform', 'promote and facilitate' approach which is somewhat contrary to 'control and command approach' of the forestry establishments of the country. [Gadgil 2007:2067]
- (b) Since there is an absence of curative and preventive therapy, creating public awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS has been found to be the most cost effective strategy of primary prevention. Public libraries can take a lead role in awareness campaign and provide accurate knowledge about it. This can reduce the risk of individuals contracting or spreading this deadly disease.
- (c) A public library can provide opportunities to innovative citizens to develop new products, equipments/tools, remedies to disease etc. based on their skills or traditional knowledge. The National Innovation Foundation (NIF), established in 2000 with its head quarters at IIM, Ahmedabad has created a database of over 60,000 grass root innovations and indigenous knowledge practices. Out of these, about 150 are being looked at on a priority basis for product development, patenting and commercialization. NIF believes that there is a need to transform the mindset that limits the mental potential of an underprivileged to merely working in a 'food for work' programme. Even common man can do creative work. They can map knowledge, they can be used to create contents for folk songs that can be downloaded from the Internet for a fee, and also can create ethnic food, herbal medicine etc. which can be sold to the world. [Times of India Feb.19, 2007:13]
- (d) Public libraries can also aid to the conservation of ecological balance and protection of environment by promoting 'ecologically sustainable development' among the members of the

community. They can organize discussions, competitions (quiz programmes) and film shows to increase awareness for environmental protection among students and the general public. Moreover the libraries can disseminate the results of the various research projects done under the aegis of Regional Science Councils. For example, Punjab State Council of Science and Technology (PSCST) has done projects like (a) impact of sunflower cultivation on environment; (b) air, water and soil borne pollution in Amritsar etc. [Chadha 2000:3474] Major findings of these projects can be widely disseminated through wall posters, leaflets and discussion/seminars by the Public libraries.

(e) Public libraries can organize awareness programme for families and farmers who rely on agriculture for their livelihood. Major advances in Indian agricultural science can be presented before them in a discussion mode. Advances in hybrid seed varieties, plant protection, developing plant types to suit various agro-ecological and management conditions, (e.g. dry land farming), development of triple gene dwarfs in wheat, composite varieties of maize etc. [Rao 1985:131] can be discussed for increase in total productivity of crops. However, science is not only a matter of systematic procedure. Rather, one can say that it is a system of continuous open scrutiny of the procedures being employed towards a given set of objectives.

(f) Public libraries can also provide a space for or participate in capacity building projects particularly in rural areas where science and technology competence is at low level due to flawed educational system. Capacity building is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, abilities and processes that one (individuals, communities and organizations) needs to survive, adapt and thrive in the fast changing world. As a policy, higher education in India is designed to impart knowledge, but there appears to be little emphasis on critical thinking, problem solving or technical skills. Public libraries can organize competence-building programmes particularly in the area of ICT application. Such programmes have a market in the era of e-governance. Today, e-governance is not merely a phrase as governments now use ICT as a means to achieve a more effective delivery of government service and good governance to citizens.

Apart from these, public libraries can take up the cause of science promotion by a conventional method; by distributing science primers; and advocating the use of scientific knowledge in one's daily lives such as

use of ORS for the treatment of diarrhoea and use of simple methods for getting safe drinking water, etc. While taking up promotional activities, the public libraries are required to adopt main principles of scientific enterprises. They are (i) open access to all facts and inferences (ii) rejection of all authority other than that of empirical facts and (iii) welcoming all interested parties to question all assertions as to facts as well as logic.

3. Public Libraries: An Action Plan for Science Awareness

A suitable 'strategic action plan' has to be devised by public libraries in order to propagate popular science among masses. At present visibility of public libraries as a social hub or community organisation is low. Libraries mostly work in isolation; and there is hardly any coordination among rural NGO's, activist groups, extension workers and libraries. As the official machinery in unwieldy, dealing with a much more unwieldy population, official programme (e.g. science awareness campaign) on a particular issue may appear to be a case of one hand not knowing what the other hand does. To avoid this, it is essential to have proper issue-based integration or coordination of departments.

Official data on public libraries are normally not published by the statistical agencies. *Statistical Abstract*, published by the states having public library legislation does not contain library statistics of any substance. A recent NSSO Report has a table on the number of rural and urban households (per thousand) paying library fees in different states of India. [NSSO 2007] Similarly, data on number of village, tehsil or town libraries in certain states are occasionally published in periodical articles. [Vashishth 2007:96-97] In fact, there is hardly any reliable data on libraries that can be used by the states, concerned individuals, or social groups for public library development. In one of the volumes of the official publication, India, 2004: A Reference Annual, a brief write-up on libraries was included with a statement that there were 60,000 libraries in the country. Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), established in 1972, is the apex body of the Government of India to support public library services and systems; and promote public library movement in the country. RRRLF has so far provided assistance to 31,563 public libraries that are spread all over the country. [www.rrrlf.nic.in]

An action plan for public libraries contemplating active participation in science awareness programme can be drawn involving various groups; such as school teachers, volunteers, students and NGO's supported by Regional Science Councils and state resource centers. A brief outline of the plan is given below in a tabular form:

Table: Outline of An Action Plan for Public Libraries Promoting Science Awareness

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
a. Creating a platform for science awareness programme.	a. Content development in public library for science awareness.	a. Demonstration and training to local volunteers/school students who want to join the advocacy campaign.
b. Increasing visibility of public libraries by involving leaders/heads of ILGI's, school teachers, parents of students etc. in the programme.	b. Collection of science primers, leaflets etc. from different agencies; i.e. regional science centers, state resource centers, agriculture extension workers.	b. Invitation to volunteers/extension workers and others to make the locality/village as a science village/town with small enterprises using indigenous technology.
c. Urging people to participate in small groups to discuss day to day agriculture, health and other related problems that require science and technology based solutions	c. Developing a collection of 8" X 5" cards recording traditional scientific knowledge of the local people on the basis of results of group discussion.	
d. Volunteer based campaign to sensitise people about the benefits of scientific knowledge and evils of superstition, magic healing and other abnormal religious practices.	d. Recording the major findings of science related local research projects e.g. soil survey reports, reports on locally available medicinal plants etc.	
	e. Developing a small collection of laboratory /demonstration equipments and scientific instruments that are needed to do experiments.	

A Joint Use library (JUL) can certainly prove to be more effective in a science awareness programme. In western countries, this type of library (usually combining a public library on the site of an educational institution) has existed for nearly a century; and the most common type of JUL is the school housed public library. Following are the advantages of the JUL: [Bundy and Amey 2006:502-03]

- ☆ Allows efficient use of public money; staff costs may be shared between two authorities; building and other physical facilities may be provided more cost effectively.
- ☆ Provides a greater quantity and higher quality of collections, services and facilities than is possible with separate services and small budgets.
- ☆ Promotes greater community interaction by providing a community focal point and enhanced social capital through increased community engagement.
- ☆ Provides more avenues for promotion of library services by involving school teachers and students.
- ☆ Allows more flexibility in providing and obtaining resources like leaflets, primers, manuals for practice etc. and making innovations.
- ☆ Increases the community's awareness and understanding of current educational practices.
- ☆ Promotes information literacy development and lifelong learning.

In fact, one of the main strengths of JUL is their strong community emphasis. They can function as sites for intergenerational activities; actively demonstrate the concept of lifelong learning; provide information, educational and cultural opportunities; facilitate closer ties between parents and librarian. Perhaps the only way to bring public library services to rural masses would be to provide adequate financial assistance to school libraries.

In a rural community, teachers of the local school have an important role in the society and their involvement in science awareness programme is likely to have a positive result. Dwaipayan Bhattacharya writes:

“They come to resolve family disputes, take knowledge about strange crop sickness, write official applications, receive emergency credit, consult legal matters, share gossips or crack jokes. It is for this familiarity as well as ability to handle technical details that the teachers are routinely employed by the

government to collect data during the population census operations so the teachers reached out to the people with their specialized knowledge and village work The people developed reciprocal trust in the teachers” [Bhattacharya 2001:678]

The concept ‘science’ might appear meaningless or irrelevant to a villager or a farmer; but the topics like nutrition, seed conservation, climatic change are highly relevant for him. The awareness campaign has to be designed by a public library keeping in view the level of social intelligence³ of the village. It has been found that communication of even simple information requires careful thought and design, if there is to be any reasonable hope of such information actually being retained and used by people when deciding what actions are to be taken. [Banerjee 2007:1370]

4. Concluding Remarks

There is a strong belief among policy makers and development planners that the participation of local communities in public services is instrumental in achieving desired goals. Public library service which is basically a support service is normally assigned low priority by the stakeholders. In recent years, there is a spurt in information advocacy and awareness campaigns at the village level. The Right to Information Act (2005) has also provided an opportunity to public libraries. Now they can acquire, organize and disseminate relevant information pertaining to public agencies to the local community. Needless to say, useful bits of scientific knowledge can be disseminated to the community by the public libraries; and a strategic action plan based on participation of members can be drawn. The success of such a programme would largely depend on the mode of delivery as well as literacy level of the villagers. A joint use library (JUL); i.e. a public library attached to a primary or secondary school can successfully launch a science awareness campaign as schools can attract students, parents and members of the community. Librarians are required to develop the ability to synthesise the scientific knowledge and present this synthesise in a format that can be absorbed by the people.

3 Social intelligence is defined as the organized capability of a nation or a community to identify and solve their internal and external problems in a rapidly changing world by effectively exploiting information sources.

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Table: Public Library Service Users (Paid) in Urban and Rural India (NSSO 2007)

Name of the State

Numbers of Households Reporting Expenditure on Library charges (Per thousand)

Major States	Rural	Urban
Andhra Pradesh	0	0
Assam	3	3
Bihar	3	3
Chhattisgarh	2	3
Gujarat	1	3
Haryana	2	2
Jharkhand	1	2
Karnataka	0	3
Kerala	6	2
Madhya Pradesh	0	2
Orissa	1	1
Punjab	2	4
Rajasthan	3	1
Tamil Nadu	0	4
Uttar Pradesh	3	1
West Bengal	3	4
All India	2	3

Minor States and Union Territories

Arunachal Pradesh	--	--
Delhi	--	--
Goa	--	--
Himachal Pradesh	24	13
Jammu & Kashmir	4	4
Manipur	3	28
Meghalaya	8	--
Mizoram	2	32
Nagaland	9	2
Sikkim	2	--
Tripura	--	10
	4	

Uttaranchal	5	15
Andaman and Nicobar Island	--	0
Chandigarh	--	--
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	--	41
Daman and Diu	--	11
Lakshadweep	--	--
Pondicherry	--	4

Table: Number of Village Libraries in Different States of India (Vashist 2007 : 95-96)

Name of the State	Total number of inhabited villages	Number of Libraries in Villages
Andhra Pradesh	26613	355 Village Libraries 1238 Gram Panchayat Libraries 576 Book Deposit 3 Mobile Libraries Station
Goa	347	64
Gujarat	10866	6908
Karnataka	27481	10510
Maharashtra	41095	2189- 'C' Category Libraries* 3690- 'D' Category Libraries
Mizoram	707	341
Orissa	47529	1090
Tamil Nadu	15400	589 Village Libraries 649 Part time Libraries 12 Mobile Libraries
West Bengal	37955	2174

* Some of these libraries are not located in villages; Data for other states are not available.

Role of Public Libraries for Science Awareness

Kanchan Kamila

1 Public Library: Concept and New Shapes

1.1 Concept and Necessity

There are various types of libraries existing in the library system e.g. Academic Library, Special Library, Public Library, etc.

UNESCO Public Library manifesto, 1994 [8], proclaims: "the public library should be established under the clear mandate of law, so framed as to ensure nation-wide provision of public library service". Unesco belief considers public library as living force for education, culture, and information and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.

The public library is the local centre of information making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users.

The attributes of the public library may be stated thus:

- a) It is financed for most part out of public funds.
- b) It charges no fees from readers and yet is open for full use by the public without distinction of caste, creed or sex, age, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example, linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison.

It would seem that the place of library as a storehouse of the historical records is secure. Provided that the library recognizes that such records come in many formats and collects them all, information seekers will still come to the library to use the material. It would seem to be reasonable too that people will still use libraries to seek material for 'diversion' in the widest sense.

Those who are most likely to reduce their use of libraries are the professional and skilled classes who require factual information to assist them in their work and especially if that work can be either in the home, or in the office, or in the factory.

The library system grew because the individual could not afford to buy and store all the books he might need. With a change from print to electronic media the question again arises who will hold a key to such information and the answer again should be libraries, amongst others [9].

1-2 New Shapes and its related issues

Capturing the hearts of library users is what public libraries aim to do in the 21st century, but it doesn't stop there. Developing new services and reaching out to local communities is not enough - libraries must be able to demonstrate this. Libraries have to prove that they can change lives, that they are relevant to 21st century society, and that they do listen and respond to the people they serve [6].

It is the hearts and minds of local authority chiefs and national politicians that need to be 'nurtured' when it comes to securing vital funds. With computers and web sites to maintain and electronic services to deliver, libraries need budgets to cover replacement costs, upgrades, software licenses, subscription fees, etc. Special funding may provide the necessary kick-start, but sustaining new equipments and systems requires forward planning and flexible budgets.

Library ministry and library officers must act to raise the profile of public libraries; Library minister must convince the Legislative Assembly that libraries play a key role to educate the mass as well as to enhance societal development. Library funding is low because libraries have a low profile, and politicians and minister do not acknowledge the contribution libraries make; libraries are not recognized for what they do because librarians do not shout loudly enough and politicians are unaware of the contribution libraries make.

The new shapes of public libraries are discussed below.

1.2.1 Idea Stores

The library as a quiet place full of books is, in many cases, giving way to the multi-purpose community centre featuring multimedia resources, cyber cafes, ranks of computers, and even creches. However, this trend, as exemplified in Idea Stores [7] and Discovery Centres [3] is not welcomed by everyone. The new centres tend to be busier, noisier places, and there are those who cherish the quiet space, books on shelves and solemn dignity of the traditional library.

The 'Idea Store' brand was launched in 1999, and has been hailed as 'a ground breaking concept' and 'the future of urban libraries'. The flagship store is in Whitechapel, East London, and is conveniently placed for shoppers in front of a Sainsbury's food store. The 'Idea Store' in Bow has been a success; it averages around 1000 visitors a day, compared to 250-300 in the old library building. In 'Idea Store' the visitors will not encounter stern librarians or 'shelves of books', but a cafe. Books do exist, but they are located around the corner, en route to the children's play area.

1.2.2 Discovery Centres

'Discovery Centres' are Hampshire County Council's version of the London 'Idea Store'. The 'Discovery Centre' concept is described as follows:

"Young, people-friendly, with an entertainment zone - a thriving environment to meet friends and choose from the latest collections of DVDs and CDs and a study area for those who want to read or do their homework in peace. Wherever possible, cafes and creches will be introduced encouraging customers to take a leisurely approach to using the array of facilities. Technology will play a big part in making services accessible. Where limited space prevents the physical presence of some facilities, virtual access will be provided via the computers of the People's Network".

As for books, there are claims that they are being marginalized in these new community centres; bookshelves are being removed to make space for cafes and rows of computers and book budgets are being cut to pay for electronic resources. These arguments tend to go round and round. But public libraries have to modernize; because libraries should not be defined by the equipment they provide or the stock of materials on their shelves; libraries should be measured by the services they deliver, the experiences they enable and the environment they create [1].

2 Science and Scientific Era

2.1 What is Science?

Science is a spirit of enquiry based on the process of logical reasoning. It is a way of training and developing the mind and whole life functioning according to the ways and methods of observation and experimentation. Science normally means the main branches of knowledge and study of Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology, Medicines, Geology, Geography, and Astronomy etc. with objective consideration of facts, observation, and validation of hypothesis to arrive at a conclusion of law of science.

2.2 Science Era

Science era began from ancient period. There was little scientific knowledge and awareness in Stone Age. Renaissance in 15th century ushered in a new horizon in science through the work of Galileo and Copernicus by establishing the Heliocentric system that earth moved round the sun and vice-versa.

Then came industrial, modern, nuclear and the present era of knowledge explosion. Scientific awareness, innovation, invention, discoveries have touched every activities of our lives without which present way of life would have been impossible.

Now knowledge empowered person has the capability to know the unknown.

3 Science Communication and Components

Science communication is the process by which the scientific culture and its knowledge become incorporated into the common culture.

There is a hierarchy of science communication. Science education is the teaching of science in formal settings; in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. We are generally familiar with this sort of teaching and I won't expand on it. The teaching of science in informal settings, however, is very different. It has two components. The first is the public understanding of science. It means the comprehension of scientific facts, ideas and policies, combined with a knowledge of the impact such facts, ideas and policies have on the personal, social and economic well-being of the community.

The public understanding of science most usually concerns those members of the public who are already committed to the philosophies of science, having been trained by formal means. It is most often pursued by the membership of non-professional science-based societies, by attendees at public lectures and adult education courses and in the enhancement of learning opportunities, by professional scientists, for those pursuing formal education in science.

The second is the public awareness of science and it is very different from the first one. Public awareness of science and technology is a set of attitudes, a predisposition towards science and technology, which are based on beliefs and feelings and which are manifest in a series of skills and behavioural intentions. The skills of accessing scientific and technological knowledge and a sense of ownership of that knowledge will impart a confidence to explore its ramifications. This will lead, at some

time, to an evaluation of the status of scientific and technological knowledge and its significance for personal, social and economic life.

In real life, these convenient categories of understanding and awareness blur into one another. They are useful, however, in helping to make decisions about allocation of resources. Increasing the public understanding of science creates an intelligent, informed and skilled group of people who will act as an extremely valuable resource for society. Increasing public awareness of science is a much longer term project, but one that, if successful, can contribute enormously to social well-being as it creates a community that is confident in its possession of scientific ideas and is happy to transmit that confidence to its children [2,4,5].

4 Why Science Awareness?

Reasons why science should be communicated to the public generally fall into five categories - economic, utilitarian, democratic, cultural, and social. As far as the community is concerned, science is often invisible until such time as people perceive a need to use it. It is the task of the science communicator to demonstrate to the community that it has such a need.

The reasons for science awareness are mentioned below.

- ☆ Scientific awareness gives us knowledge and knowledge results in socio-economic transformation for welfare of people at large.
- ☆ It encourages research scientists and creative mind for benefits of mankind.
- ☆ It makes us to question dogmas, superstition, etc. broadening our outlook and nurturing progressive minds.
- ☆ Science awareness establishes scientific temper.
- ☆ It enables us to become self reliant.

5 Major Areas of Concern

The major areas of concern for science awareness are:

5.1 Water and Sanitation

No fresh water—no future. Now 31 countries of the world accounting for 8% of world's population face a chronic water problem. About 1.5 billion people globally do not have access to improved water supply source whereas 2.5 billion people do not have access to any type of improved sanitation facility. About 2.5 million people die every year due to diarrhoeal diseases; most of them are children below 5 years of age.

Minimization and elimination of population and contamination of water is necessary to arrest water-borne diseases which are more during summer and rainy seasons.

Fluoride, Arsenic, Salinity, Nitrite in excess of quantities cause dangerous diseases. Norms, regulation, and testing methods are necessary for safe drinking water. Water re-cycling methods, waste water treatment are some steps we must adopt. Good sewage system, garbage disposal are helpful to establish clean micro environment.

Some of the important actions in this direction are:

- ☆ Replenishment of ground water and reduction of water wastages,
- ☆ Desalination technique of water, as done in Rajasthan, for supply of potable water,
- ☆ Reverse Osmosis process for drinking water, *Swajal dhara* programme for drinking water and sanitation in rural areas,
- ☆ Locating tube wells and dug/open wells at least 30 to 40 meters away from sources of contamination and pollution.

5.2 Health and Nutrition

Health is wealth. Physical, social, and mental well being is our goal to establish health for all. Dual disease burden of communicable and life style diseases; malnutrition and pollution and contamination of food are the challenges today.

We must overcome big four nutritional deficiency of protein energy, vitamin 'A', iron, and iodine among children and women to reduce mortality rates. Health of the child depends on health of the mother. Our health care targets are lactating mother, infant, and young breast-milk-oriented child feeding to reduce mortality rates.

Health security steps are online medical services, tele-medicine consultation, mobile health clinic, health education, and health insurance schemes. Integration of traditional strength of Unani, Sidha with modern medicine can provide affordable health care for the needy.

5.3 Environment and Bio-Diversity

The world is facing a serious dilemma on the choice between economic growth, sustainable growth and environmental conservation. The conservation of all biological diversity is a common concern of humankind and it is vital to anticipate, preserve and tackle the causes of losses or reduction of biological resources. Biological diversity has impact on our every day life. The food, fibre, shelter, health and other needs of growing world population are dependent on bio-diversity. Sustainable use of bio-diversity at the national and international level is of critical importance.

Preservation of GREEN GOLD, prevention of environmental degradation, and maintenance of ecological balance is necessary. To promote clean and green environment and biological diversity, Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) is an innovative approach for benefit of all.

5.4 Disaster Management

Natural and man made disaster causes loss to life and property. There are four ways to face disasters:

- I. Simple, accurate advance warning system
- II. Pre disaster preparation
- III. Activities during disaster
- IV. Post disaster management to save life and property.

For **Floods**, quick warning system, information on likely flood points and evacuation of likely flood affected area vital.

In case of **Cyclone**, 48 to 72 hrs advance warning system, quick dissemination of information, evacuation of likely affected areas and alternate shelter are very important.

Similarly for **Earthquake**, early signal on seismic activity, time and place, warning stations and spread of information will be helpful.

We can fight **Drought** by maintaining water table and avoiding excessive withdrawal of ground water. Cloud seeding, an innovative approach, as done in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh, can be adopted in other states. Soil management, we can maintain fertility of soil by supply of nutrients, crop rotation and soil conservation by terrace farming. Post disaster management saves life and property through rescue operation, relief provision and rehabilitation of affected lives.

5.5 Empowerment through IT

We can empower ourselves through IT (Information Technology) in many ways:

- ☆ We get real time data for quick and correct decision making
- ☆ Digitizing land records, tele-medicine, tele-education, e-governance can help every one including rural mass
- ☆ IT enables the print disabled
- ☆ IT abolishes illiteracy

6 Information Literacy and Public Librarians

Without information literacy the mass scientific awareness for the populace of any country is not possible. Then, what is information literacy?

The term 'information literacy' is composed of two rather common words which most people claim to understand. Information to most people means something associated with the ability to read and sometimes more specifically associated with the ability to understand or interpret certain phenomena. For example, visual literacy enables people to understand wordless no smoking signs. There are also computer literacy, numerical literacy (numeracy), media literacy and cultural literacy.

In combination, however, the two words have a very special meaning to the advocates of Information Literacy. These people have views of the information age and the role information now plays in our lives which prompt them to use the term 'Information Literacy' to describe the assortment of abilities which they assert are essential for survival and thrival abilities. If we are to flourish in an age where information is the new commodity - the new medium of exchange, and where good information empowers and bad information or no information disenfranchises, we must be information literate.

Information literacy is the ability to use information, but the term has a much broader meaning. Information literacy is a holistic concept that includes knowing that information matters, knowing where and how to get information, knowing how to interpret information, and knowing how to use and communicate information.

In its November - December 1990 issue, *Public Libraries* offered a definition of Information Literacy for public librarians to consider.

Information Literacy consists of an assortment of interconnected abilities having to do with the use of information:

1. The ability to know what information would help
2. The ability to know where to go to get information
3. The ability to retrieve information
4. The ability to interpret, evaluate, and organize information
5. The ability to use and communicate information.

Considered individually, none of these is a new skill, but *information literacy is important because of*

☆ the role information now plays and the fact that most Americans, the mass of other developed countries and some of the populace of developing countries will earn their living creating, processing and transferring information.

☆ the several related abilities which in combination and in concern empower the information literate person.

☆ the new responsibilities librarians must undertake if they are to play a meaningful part in the promotion and spread of information literacy.

- ☆ the fact that regardless of the advances in information technology and information transfer, people embrace new concepts only if those new concepts achieve a fit with their own value systems.

Public librarian should involve in the information literacy movement. Information literacy enables the mass to be aware about science.

7 Public Librarians as Science Communicators

The best science communicators impart knowledge gently and with skill, so that their audience have a pleasing and satisfying experience and are motivated to repeat it. They do not thrust facts down a gaping and receptive maw like a parent bird feeding its young. They aim to nourish imperceptibly, so that people are able to incorporate new ideas into their own world views, make hitherto unnoticed associations and arrive at a new, personal revelation 'Ah.... So that's how it works!' This is sometimes called the 'Wow! factor' and it comes from within. Science communicators cannot guarantee their audience these moments of insight. They can only help to create the mental landscape in which such moments occur.

The best science communicators include writers, journalists, TV and radio presenters and personalities, workers in science centres and museums, and communication officers for scientific, environmental and industrial establishments, professional associations and exhibition designers. Public librarians should act as the best science communicators to make the masses aware about science and its right use which will educate, motivate and empower the masses, thereby helping the societal development.

There are some recommendations for Public Librarians (and State Government) regarding imparting science awareness to the masses:

- ☆ Public librarians should take science to the people and people to science. In this respect, public librarians should motivate the masses to increase the reading habits as well as to use the library on regular basis thus spending their leisure time in a better way;
- ☆ Make as many people scientifically aware as possible. Responsibility of public librarians in this respect is very important. Arrangement of story telling sessions for imparting science awareness to the masses will be very much fruitful;
- ☆ Make proper utilization of scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of mankind. Public librarians must disseminate knowledge to the masses regarding effective utilization of science for water and sanitation, health and nutrition, environ-

ment and biodiversity, disaster management, empowerment through IT etc.;

- ☆ Provision of formal and non-formal education. In this respect, successful of *Sarvas Siksha Abhiyan* project is very important and the State Government (and public librarians) should play important role in this project;
- ☆ Availability of necessary print and electronic media on science awareness in the public library. State Government's should allocate necessary funds for the collection of both print and electronic resources;
- ☆ Arrangement of folk dance and puppetry regarding science awareness among masses and children;
- ☆ Provision of science model, science parks, science exhibition, seminars, etc. for life long learning process;
- ☆ To make necessary arrangement to train the public librarians for better science communication to the masses;
- ☆ Public libraries linkage with different NGOs to make the masses sensitive regarding use of science.
- ☆ Creation of necessary database in the public library regarding water and sanitation, health and nutrition, environment and biodiversity, disaster management etc. Central and State Government projects and other related matters to make the masses aware of the possibility of healthy and better life.

8 Conclusions

To conclude, science awareness is a basic necessity in all aspects of our life, be it social, economic, political, educational and strategic matters to make our country prosperous and proud and to make India as developed country by 2020. But Central and State Government officials/NGOs/High Level Executive Committees' direct supervision is very necessary for the provision of necessary inputs as well as to execute all projects regarding public library based science awareness in a right way.

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Reader in the World of Books: Literature and the Arts in Dissemination

J.P. Das

It had been decided by the Foundation earlier this year that a series of National Seminars would be held in different centres of the country on subjects relating to the world of writing and reading, composition and reception in the broadest sense. The seminars were to be largely academic occasions with distinguished intellectuals and learned people taking part in the proceedings.

The focal theme for seminars in the year 2007-2008 is **The Reader in the World of Books**, and the first such Seminar is the one being held here in Bhubaneswar on the sub-theme **Literature and the Arts in Dissemination**. The papers to be presented deal with aspects of globalization, colonialism, literature, reading and the media. To introduce such a broad spectrum of subjects will be formidable, and so I will briefly touch upon some of them.

Let me start with the Reader which is the theme of the Seminar. In the past, literary criticism did not take the reader into consideration. Formalistic criticism focussed on the text, biographical criticism focussed on the author, and historical or sociological criticism focussed on the text's relationship to the world. Even New Critics promoted the view of the literary work as an objective entity, as something existing outside and apart from any individual reader's realisation of it. All these forms of criticism ignored the reader, who remained in the shadows, was taken for granted and, was to all intents and purposes, invisible.

In the recent years, however, the reader has been receiving a great deal of attention, and the book is being treated as a picnic to which the author brings the text and the reader brings the meaning. While the author constructs the text, it is now being argued, the reader reconstructs

it, and so there is always a process of negotiation with the text, resulting in varied and multiple versions of the authorial construction.

The question which follows is: though a literary work can admit countless readings, are some readings better than others? When one reader finds a book dull and another considers it brilliant, whose view do we accept as more appropriate? Since there is no standard interpretation or judgement, and since Art is not a Democracy, most will submit to the notion of expert opinion. But unfortunately, experts, or in this case critics, are also as likely to hold diametrically opposite views. It is therefore perhaps best to leave it to each individual's best judgement!

Of the many subjects to be discussed in this Seminar, Globalization is the most talked about subject today. A definition of Globalization which is doing the rounds of the internet goes like this: An English princess with an Egyptian boyfriend riding in a German car with a Dutch engine driven by a Belgian who was high on Scotch whiskey closely followed by Italian paparazzi on Japanese motorcycles crashes in a French tunnel, is treated by an American doctor using Brazilian medicines, dies! That is Globalization.

In this formulation, globalization stands for all that is vulgar, tasteless, crass and coarse, smacking of sex, drunkenness, filthy money, yellow journalism and overall decadence. If the definition sought to project a collaboration of different nations in a single event, let me read out another quotation, wisely signifying a global phenomenon:

'What other man on earth has been loved, respected and admired at the same time by French intellectuals, isolated eskimos, Iowa Babbits, jazz-minded New Yorkers, Bulgarian peasants, Scotch Presbyterians, New Guinea cannibals, German scientists, English statesmen, real estate brokers, dentists, Kindergarten teachers and the entire race of artists?'

This definition is free from the banality of the earlier one, for we are here talking, not about a wayward royalty, but about Charlie Chaplin!

Globalization is no longer a subject being debated upon by scholars in the academia, it is happening in our backyards. Multinational companies are invading Singur, Kalinganagar and Nandigram; international patents are being taken on Neem and Basmati rice, and the neighbourhood vegetable vendor and the street corner chatwala are being pushed out by Walmart and McDonald.

Globalization has its detractors as also its advocates. It is said that globalization is as old as the Silk Road. Economists, whose credentials as spokesmen of the poor and the downtrodden cannot be questioned, have supported the industrialisation in Bengal, and despite protests that the Orissa steel project is anti-people, ecologically degrading and destructive

of the livelihood of farmers and fisherfolks, Posco is going ahead with Government support.

Globalization has taken such giant strides that in today's globalised society it is difficult to distinguish the 'local' and the 'global'. Market-driven globalisation abhors diversity; its enemies are national habits, local brands and distinctive local tastes. It believes in standardization. When we watch a movie in a multiplex cinema hall, or enter a fivestar hotel, or visit a shopping mall anywhere in the world, we cease to be space or culture specifics; we live everywhere and nowhere! We are in the cyberspace of McWorld.

Despite different cultures, middle class youth all over the world seem to live their lives as if in a parallel universe. They get up in the morning, put on their Levis and Nikes, grab their backpacks and Sony CD players and head for school. MTV is the most compelling global catalogue for the modern branded life.

Globalization and consumerism thus go hand in hand and in this scenario, the commodity is dead, the brand is alive. When we buy a commodity, we do not use or consume the commodity, we use or consume the advertising. When we buy cosmetics, we are buying hope; when we buy oranges, we buy vitality, when we buy a car we buy prestige. When we buy the monthly best-seller, we "acquire culture, the envy of our less literate neighbours and the respect of the sophisticated" (Aldous Huxley).

Even conceding that a certain globalization in trade always existed, we must accept that today's globalization is "farther, faster, cheaper and deeper". It not only means the integration of economic, political and cultural systems across the globe, it also means Americanization and US dominance of world affairs. If it is sold as a force for economic growth, prosperity and democratic freedom, it also implies at the same time environmental devastation, exploitation of the developing world and suppression of human rights as numerous multinational projects have shown in our own country. The issue today, therefore, is not so much as whether we can stop globalization—globalization, it is said, cannot, be turned off; it is the economic equivalent of a force of nature like wind or water. The issue is how to protect the weak of the third world from this new form of colonisation.

Most of the third world has suffered the bane of colonisation and still bears its debilitating consequences. The classic example of British colonialism will make this obvious. In the heydays of the British empire, ships left England with cheap goods for the African coast, where these were bartered for slaves. The ships carried the slaves across the Atlantic to the Carribean or American ports and sold the slaves and bought cotton

and sugar and sailed back to England. In the cotton mills of North England the raw cotton was turned into finished articles. Ships made their eastward journey with this textile cargo which was sold in India for opium and then across the Indian ocean to the coastal ports of China where they traded opium for tea, silk and other Chinese goods then in demand in Europe. British trade and colonisation thus brought together four continents!

Enough has been written about the exploitation by the British and the ruinous effects of colonisation on the Indian economy. One example will suffice: Around 1780, Dacca was a prosperous textile manufacturing hub with a population of 1.5 to 2 lakh people. At this time, Manchester had no cotton mills and had a population of 27,000. By 1802, Manchester had 52 cotton mills and its population had grown to 95,000. By 1840, Dacca population had come down to 30,000—40,000.

When the British finally left India after two hundred years of colonial rule, they are supposed to have bequeathed to us cricket, railways, hill stations, cantonments, landscaped gardens, baton charges, famines, and an elaborately mandarinal administrative system. And they have also left us the English language. When they first came to India, the British managed with interpreters and did not try to learn any Indian languages. Later they started learning Persian and Sanskrit to help in their revenue, civil, and criminal governance. It is only in the 19th century that they thought of introducing English in India with the specific object of producing a babu class to serve them. Later, of course the Indians became interested in learning English not only to get better jobs but also to have access to Western literature, knowledge and sciences. In times to come, English was to occupy a privileged position.

The British also introduced the printing of books. Before Gutenberg invented the moveable type in the 1450s, books were handwritten and costly to produce and so were the preserve of only the rich. Pre-Gutenberg, there were only 30,000 or so books in Europe, which were a luxury and a tool of the elite. By 1500 Europe had more than 9 million books which stimulated the intellectual ferment which paved the way for the renaissance.

The situation in India was different. In the Hindu tradition, writing was not given importance; the sanctity of the Vedic mantra depended on recital. As a matter of fact, writing down mantra was sometimes explicitly forbidden. That is how the Vedas became the exclusive preserve of the Brahmins, and the lower classes and women were debarred from reciting them. It is only in the 14th century that Max Mueller transcribed the Vedas into a written text.

Before that, however, books got hand-written in different languages

and used by the elite in India, much like that in the West. In Orissa, writing of palm-leaf books started at least as early as the first literary works in the 15th century. Scribes would painstakingly labour over a long period to produce a single palm-leaf pothi. As a matter of fact, in most of the pothis the scribe made a pathetic plea to the reader, in the colophon: My back is broken, so are my waist and neck. My eyes are impaired and my head is bent low. I wrote this book with much suffering. Do look after it as you would a son.

Palm-leaf books had a short life, and added to it was a strange custom of consigning the pothis to the river after a hundred years. Thus the number of pothis and their ownership and readership was rather limited. A single Oriya book, however, brought about an unprecedented increase in copying of the text and consequent readership. It was the Oriya Bhagavat written in the 16th century by Jagannath Das. It became almost a religious act to possess a copy of the Bhagavat pothi and to read passages from it daily. Written in Oriya in simple language, it did not need Brahmin teachers to explain the text and an illiterate villager could easily understand it. Community Bhagavat halls came up in villages where villagers would gather in the evenings to listen to a reading of the sacred book. Villagers who would not normally have gone to a village school started learning the alphabets to be able to read the Bhagavat.

And what is more significant, even women in purdah learnt the alphabet and started reading the Bhagavat. In this they were ahead of their more modern Bengali sisters. A Joint Inspector of schools reported in 1864: If by female education we mean a little reading and writing, there are more educated women in Orissa than perhaps in any other part of Bengal.

The British occupied Orissa in 1803 and Baptist missionaries at Serampore printed the first Oriya book—a bible—in 1807. However, Oriyas did not take to using paper because of religious taboo, and even though printing presses were set up in Orissa by 1860s, writing on palm-leaf continued for another fifty years, well into the beginning of the last century. Though printed Bhagavat was available, the palm-leaf book was still in demand during this time, and scribes wrote them to earn religious merit.

The Missionaries also took the first steps for female education in Orissa by establishing 'native' schools for girls. The only girls these schools attracted were the daughters of Christian converts. The missionaries made efforts to get non-Christian girls to these schools, but later discovered that the girls joining the school were "either real or adopted children of prostitutes, or such as had been purchased by them and were being trained up for a life of abomination. Their object in attending the schools was

that they might be able to read the abominable songs with which the country abounds". The missionaries, therefore, discontinued these schools. Later, however, Government schools were opened for girls, and girls were encouraged to attend boys' schools. Most of the girls in these schools were, however, Bengalis and Oriya girls were few.

This is the story of efforts made in the early years of British colonisation of Orissa to print religious books and educate girls. If they failed in their attempt to bring girls to school, their efforts at conversion was equally disastrous—they could get only one convert after five years and a dozen more in another five years.

When the British finally left India, perhaps the most harmful legacy they left behind us the English language. If it was hoped that English would lose its importance after independence, it did not happen that way; if at all, English has been growing from strength to strength. It is even being sometimes suggested that our country is held together by English as it enables us to communicate across linguistic barriers. As only about 3% of our people know English, it is preposterous to suggest that the basis of our unity is so narrow and fragile. English divides us more sharply than any other cleavage. Equally baneful is its cultural impact; even after sixty years of the departure of our colonial masters, the British continue to rule over our minds.

English is the single most influential factor which determines access to elite educational institutions, and hence to important avenues of economic and social advancement. English is the magic wand that opens the doors to the social and economic elite world. By operating the modern economy in India only through the English language, the ruling elite that emerged during the British rule have ensured their own perpetuation and continuing dominance over the rest of the society. English continues to be the preserve of the elite and separates the rulers from the people of India.

With globalization, English has achieved the linguistic superpower status. It is the working language of scientists all over the world. World's ships and aeroplanes use some form of English for communication. When Pope Paul went to the Middle East in 2001, he addressed Christians, Jews and Muslims not in Latin, nor Arabic, nor Hebrew, nor his native Polish; he spoke in English. With the IT revolution, English has become the lingua franca for business and science and most business and scientific meetings and transactions are conducted in English. It is also language of the internet which millions of computer-users use.

English had always been the whipping boy of Indian politicians, and in the seventies some of the states had done way with English medium

of instruction in schools and colleges. With globalisation it was realised that subtracting English would be as absurd as boycotting the railways, and those states welcomed English back. Indian parents have come to feel that English is the passport of their children to the future.

Even conceding that English has come to stay, it must be understood that it can never replace Indian languages or be the language of the heart as our own languages are. We must resist all attempts of English to have a superior and hegemonic power over our own languages. English should be confined to its role as a means of communication in trade and commerce, in information technology and international exchanges. In other words, it should be used as a tool, and as a technology and its utility limited to that extent.

Our languages are not going to die out because more Indians are learning English today. We may neglect our languages only at our own peril. English may give us a competitive advantage in the global society, but losing our mother tongue will impoverish our personality. Language is not merely a means of communication, it is also a source of new ideas and emotions.

We should not allow the unity of our languages and the unity of our country to be torn apart by English. Let our children be told that while English might get them better jobs, neglecting their own language will make them lose their own individuality and their Indianness.

The challenge should be met by producing quality books in our own languages, and a committed readership, which is really the theme of the Seminar.

Reading Characters: A Perspective on Early Oriya Fiction

Jatindra K Nayak

Modernity in the colonial context, it has been convincingly argued, was mediated through print culture. More than any other factor, the printed word has been responsible for a radical shift in colonial India. Exposure to the printed word had far-reaching consequences in a society dominated by orality and scribal production of texts. Print culture threatened to undermine existing hierarchies based on caste and religious prescriptions and the monopoly of knowledge that rested on the association of writing with certain forms of sanctity. Early responses to the arrival of print culture therefore help us understand in significant ways the nature of colonial modernity.

In my paper I shall focus on early responses to the printed word in the context of Orissa under colonial rule. I will pay particular attention to the role of what I would like to call "Reading Characters", characters who engage in the act of reading the printed word in early Oriya fiction and the ways in which narrators respond to them. Before I do so I will dwell for a time on ways in which the printed word was received in Orissa in order to establish the context in which the printed book emerged in Orissa.

Autobiographies in Oriya are replete with hilarious accounts of early responses to the arrival of the printed book. Fakir Mohan tells us how Hindu children in Balasore would not go to study in schools run by Christian missionaries for fear of losing their caste by touching printed books. Barristar Biswanath Mishra had to go to a school which lay ten kilometers away from his village near Puri to conceal the fact that he was reading printed text-books. Brahmin students would not attend schools set up by Pandit Harihar Das for fear of losing caste. A school set up by Radhanath

Ray in a village near Puri was closed down for this reason. The reason for all this was that earliest printed books in Orissa happened to be Oriya translations of the Bible. The resistance to the printed book can therefore be easily understood. I shall refer to an interesting anecdote recounted by Nilakanth Das in his autobiography. When he was a high-school student, a friend of his dissuaded him from using paper and urged him to write on palm leaves instead. He asked him to undertake a simple experiment: Weigh a palm leaf, note its weight, write a few words on the palm leaf and weigh it again. You'd find that, Nilakanth's friend asserted, the palm leaf has grown heavier. The reason is that goddess Saraswati now sits on the palm leaf and adds her weight to it.

Instances of early resistance to printing can be multiplied. This resistance followed not only from a terror of conversion, or contact with Christianity but also from a fear of influence of unacceptable western ideas which printed books all too often conveyed in the early nineteenth century. There was another fear associated with the dissemination of the printed word: wrong kinds of writing reaching the masses and corrupting their taste. In other words, a growing suspicion of popular culture, forms of culture associated with lower orders of society, getting strengthened through the print culture. I'll return to the last two points later in the course of my discussion. I shall now discuss shifts in the attitudes towards print culture which came to be discernible in the second half of the 19th century in Orissa.

As time passed, a western-educated middle class in Orissa gradually overcame its resistance to the printed word and began discovering its many possibilities. A sense of menace associated with the printed book now gave way to a willingness to surrender to its magic. Particularly after the 1866 famine, printing ceased to be an activity dominated almost entirely by the missionaries and became an enterprise enthusiastically embraced by the native Oriya elite. This dramatic shift in attitudes to print culture has been presented vividly in Fakir Mohan's autobiography. The day printing began in Balasore all the shops in the bazaar were closed. Zamindars came riding bullock carts to watch this magical event unfold. When the machine failed to produce a legible printed sheet, Fakir Mohan explained to the waiting crowd that they should not feel disappointed as the blotches of ink on the sheet of paper would in a day or two turn into words.

Very broadly speaking, early Oriya fiction embodies varying, conflicting and contradictory responses to modernity. Since this modernity is mediated through print culture it would be interesting to

see how early Oriya fiction dramatized complex negotiations with this modernity. It is here that 'reading characters' prove particularly helpful. Now the question suggests itself: when did the first reading character make his or her appearance in Oriya fiction? I think it is in *Padmamali* published in 1888 that we first come across an attempt to define a character in terms of what she has read. The learned, garrulous narrator, feeling conscious that discerning readers might find the sixteen year old heroine unpleasantly precocious explains her precocity by referring to the texts she has read:

Readers may feel surprised at such a reply from a sixteen-year old girl. In order to remove their doubts, I must therefore say a few things about Padmamali. She was the only child of Jagabandhu Pattnaik, who was quite well to do. ... Before she was ten, Padmamali had read a good number of books such as *Koyili*, *Gopibhasha*, *Rahasha*, and the *Bhagabata*. At the special request of Purushottama Vidyaratna, the family priest of Jagabandhu Pattnaik, who had noticed the intelligence of Padmamali, her father had made her read many lyrics and plays and books such as *Kaumudi* and *Amara*. Besides these, she had also gone through classics like *Labanyabati*, *Rasa Kallola*, *Prema Sudhanidhi*, and *Vidagdha Chintamani*. Jagabandhu Pattnaik used to take pride in Padmamali's ability to understand and appreciate these literary texts. (Umesh Chandra Sarkar, *Padmamali*, 27)

The other instance of a character reading a printed book we come across in *Chha Mana Athagunth* (Six Acres and a Third), where in the trial scene, the British Judge spreads an English newspaper and reads it deliberately ignoring the natives assembled in the court. However, it is in his story 'Rebati' that Fakir Mohan dramatizes the resistance to reading and articulates fears associated with literacy. The reference to a printed Oriya primer occurs in this story. Possibly this may be the first time one comes across an explicit reference to the printed book in Oriya fiction. Rebati's grandmother holds Rebati's learning to read responsible for all the misfortunes that overwhelm her son's family. This association of literacy with death has never been fully or satisfactorily explained. Bipin Chandra Pal seeks to provide an explanation for this: child widows in zamindar families had to teach themselves reading, writing and how to keep accounts so that they could order the affairs of their estates. This led many to associate death and widowhood with literacy.

In Fakir Mohan's *Mamu* there is an interesting reference to the printed book and the reference conceals the anxieties of the new educated middle classes about the consequences of the exposure to print culture. While describing the quarrel between a maidservant and a destitute old woman, Fakir Mohan desists from repeating the obscenities they mouthed while engaging in a bitter fight. Suddenly the narrator turns to the readers and mentions printed books like *Natu Chori* and the deleterious effect it might have on public taste:

It is a pity that the author feels totally unable to record the expressions used at the time of this quarrel. Some of these expressions may be found in books such as *Natu Chori* (The Theft of a Top), *Bhuta Keli* (Play of Ghosts), *Aai Natuni Rahasya* (Conversation between a Grandmother and Her Granddaughter), books which our printers have brought out to improve the condition of the Oriya language. But these books will not give us all the expressions. We hope other books will supply this deficiency. Our attempts to look these words up in dictionaries such as *Amara Kosha*, Madhusudan Rao's *Dictionary* have proved wholly unsuccessful. We had at last to discontinue our search under these circumstances. (Fakir Mohan, *The Maternal Uncle*, 79)

However, it would be wrong to suppose that Fakir Mohan's response to print culture is always negative. In the same novel, an enlightened young zamindar reads books in English and collects information on the productivity of soil in other countries in an attempt to improve the economic condition of his tenants. The point I would like to make here is that the emergent middle-class in Orissa was not only scared of losing caste through contact with the printed word, it was equally worried about the democratization of culture that printing technology had brought about.

These anxieties lead the narrators in Fakir Mohan's fiction to distinguish between good reading material and the bad, between the influence of what they considered good books and that of destabilizing, corrupting texts. It is in this context Fakir Mohan's last novel *Prayaschitta* assumes special significance. The central character in this novel marries the daughter of his father's enemy under the corrupting influence of his college friends, who quote Darwin's theory of natural selection to persuade him to marry an educated woman. In the course of the narrative the

young man pays a terrible price for this act of defiance and rashness. But when he reflects upon his past deeds he blames the influence of western philosophical texts for the fate that overtakes him. He regrets his neglect of Hindu scriptures. In a letter to his doctor the hero of the novel writes:

True, although I had a lot of friends in Cuttack, only you gave me advice on the principles of religion. On occasions you got fed up with me and told me that atheists think they are omniscient and listen to no one's good advice. I used to laugh your words away at that time but now I have realized how right you were. I lost faith in god by reading a few philosophical texts in English.
(Fakir Mohan, *Prayaschitta*, 342)

Here one can see a fictional character evaluating himself through his acts of reading, and his choice of texts. It is almost as if a character can be read in terms of what he chooses to read.

Characters as readers or reading characters make their appearances in Fakir Mohan's celebrated short story 'Patent Medicine'. In a way it presents in a synoptic form the plot of *Prayaschitta*, but, unlike the novel, it has a happy ending. One of the chief characters in the story has been led astray by his exposure to English education. Modernity in this instance is equated with an amoral hedonism, an abdication of social responsibilities and an unbridled, irresponsible individualism. In the end, the errant husband is brought to his senses after receiving a thorough beating with a broomstick from his wife. The welcome changes in his character are now presented by the narrator in terms of the choice of the reading material he now goes through. The printed works quoted with approval by the narrator are the *Utkal Sahitya*, a magazine edited by a Brahmo and other journals associated intimately with the project of Oriya nationalism.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that responses to print culture embodied in early Oriya fiction enable us to glimpse the contours of an indigenous modernity negotiating a difficult path between the destabilizing influence of the west and the threats presented by a popular culture democratized to some extent by access to printed books. Early Oriya novelists, especially Fakir Mohan, sought to dramatize this negotiation by reading characters in terms of what they read.

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Crossing the Borders: Malayalam Literature and Publishing Today

K. Satchidanandan

Malayalam though spoken only by a mere four percent of India's population has one of the most advanced and vibrant literatures on the subcontinent. Kerala's high literacy, progressive social reform movements, general political awareness, vigorous publishing industry, large number of journals, active library network, eager and alert readership and the links between social movements and literature across periods have all contributed to this literary advancement. Malayalam language has been receptive to foreign vocabulary and has words and usages from tongues as diverse as Dutch, Portuguese, French, English Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit besides many modern Indian languages. Its literature has been impacted by different movements and trends in world literature especially during its Romantic, Progressive, Modern and post-Modern phases. It has drawn from both the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions while also being stimulated by other literary traditions across continents. At the same time, Malayalam literature has zealously guarded its identity, shaped by its special linguistic genius and informed by Kerala's social life, accepting only those influences that will go with its vernacular instinct and can rejuvenate it during phases of stagnation. It has also produced, during its seven centuries of active existence, its own metrics, its special genres of writing and even a poetics that cannot entirely be explained by Sanskrit, Dravidian or Western aesthetic concepts.

Critics have qualified the present phase as Modernist and post-Modernist, depending on how they conceptualize Modernism and post-Modernism. With some risk of generalization, it can be said that this phase is characterized by a loss of faith in macro-ideologies, suspicion of the Modernist project and its linear idea of progress, break-down of barriers between the popular and the avant-garde so zealously maintained

by Modernists, rejection of the solipsism of early Modernism, employment, often ironic parodying, of the styles and modes of earlier phases, interrogation of the standard Malayalam by the use of community speech patterns and provincial dialects, emphasis on differences of various kinds like those of gender, caste and sexual preference, self-reflexivity resulting in meta-fiction and meta-poetry and experiments with form, especially a mixing of forms and genres, say, like short story and essay.

It was in the Nineteen Sixties that Malayalam literature entered its 'high Modernist' phase that was partly prompted by the fast urbanization of Kerala and the consequent loss of rural life, the feeling of solitude, alienation and angst shared by the writers who had left Kerala in search of livelihood to end up in the big metropolises of India and at times abroad, disenchantment with the traditional Left that had become part of the establishment, the loss of Gandhian values in political life, the schism caused by the colonial education, the despair of unemployment staring at the youth and a general feeling of the loss of direction and the consequent feeling of the absurdity of existence itself. Partly it was also the product of the impact of post-War European thinking and writing, especially of the Existentialist kind. Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Franz Kafka were the iconic trinity of the day. Beckett, Salinger and Borges followed. The angry young men bent on avenging their generation and provoked by an impotent indignation found in the stories of M. T. Vasudevan Nair had already foreshadowed the anti-heroes of O. V. Vijayan, M. Mukundan, Sethu, Kakkanadan, Anand, V. K. N, M. P. Narayana Pillai and Paul Zacharia in their early phase. Ontological questions now replaced the social questions of the earlier, Progressive phase. Loss of identity, alienation, the angst of choice and Death were the major preoccupations. Naturalism came to be discredited; fantasy, surrealism, irony and black humour were the chief tools of expression. Short story no more told tales, it was now a metaphor that captured the essence of the agonized human condition.

The morbidity and pessimism of the Modernists did not go unchallenged: the 1970 s produced its own variety of political Modernism inspired by the Maoist peasant and tribal uprisings in the country. M. Sukumaran wrote allegories and monologues that obliquely criticised the status-quo as also the authoritarian tendencies of the existing Left: Pattathuvila Karunakaran's stories were pungent political satires on the rulers or intense political debates held with extreme sensitivity to the textures of language. U. P. Jayaraj, P. K. Nanu and C. R. Parameswaran also wrote stories that sharply critiqued the establishment from an egalitarian point of view. There was also a whole section of writers who were indifferent to the new

developments and still wrote some powerful stories, like C. V. Sreeraman, Vaisakhan, Mundur Krishnankutty, S. V. Venugopan Nair, V. P. Sivakumar, E. Harikumar and Satrughnan who continued to enrich the realistic tradition or drew their lessons from earlier writers like Vaikom Mohammed Basheer with his ultimate faith in man and a quaint sense of humour. They dealt mostly with the material and moral dilemmas of the lower middle-class in Kerala. N. S. Madhavan is easily one of the finest fiction writers in Malayalam today who combines the political sensitivity of the Nineteen Seventies with acute sensitivity to form and idiom. Many of his stories are around real incidents of profound significance like the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the massacre of the Sikhs following the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the arrest and trial of Saddam Husain. But he transcends the topical turning these episodes into deeply human stories that reveal the state of ethics and politics today.

The emergence of strong women writers was another development that challenged Modernism that had clear patriarchal prejudices while dealing with women. The tradition of earlier writers like K. Saraswati Amma and Lalitambika Antarjanam was now renewed and reinforced by the new writers like Kamala Das (Madhavikkutty), Sara Joseph, Chandramati, Manasi, P. Vatsala., K. B. Sreedevi, Gracy, Ashita, A. S. Priya, Sitara, Indu Menon, Rekha and others who while not belonging to the same generation share common concerns. Kamala Das's stories are uninhibited forays into the woman's psyche with its suppressed desires and unexpressed agonies while Sara Joseph is a committed feminist opposed to all patriarchal institutions including the current language and grammar. She exposes the phallocentrism of the Indian myths and legends as in her subversive stories around the women characters of the *Ramayana*. Gracy is a narrator of desire, challenging the hegemonic values with a robust assertion of female sexuality. Sitara and Indu Menon are two of the most dynamic writers of the new generation dealing with relationships with rare artistic sensitivity.

The new generation men writers like K.P.Ramanunni, V. R. Sudheesh, N. Prabhakaran, C.V. Balakrishnan, P. Surendran, Babu Bharadwaj, T. V. Kochubava, U. K. Kumaran, Shihabuddeen Poythumkadavu, Akbar Kakkattil, M. Sudhakaran, N. P. Hafiz Muhammed, M. A. Rahman, Ashokan Cheruvil, Thomas Joseph, George Joseph. K, B. Murali and Santhosh Echikanam are also critical of early modernism though they have learnt a lot from the formal experiments of this period. Most of them do not subscribe to any fixed ideology, political or aesthetic and draw from different traditions as the occasion demands. They have brought fiction closer to the everyday while also transmuting the humdrum into exciting verbal experiences.

The revolution in the novel was first marked by O. V. Vijayan's

Khasakkinte Itihasam (The Legends of Khasak, now a Penguin book) followed by his novels like *Dharmapuram* (The saga of Dharmapuri), *Gurusagaram* (The Ocean of Grace) and *Thalamurakal* (Generations). He brought a novel idiom noted for its high lyricism, black humour and fantasy. M. Mukundan's *Mayyazhippuzhayude Theerangalil* (On the Banks of River Mayyazhi) was another early modernist novel that turned the local history of Mahe or Mayyazhi, an erstwhile French colony in Kerala where the author was born, into a half-real, half-surreal tale of agony and struggle. His later novels like *Daivathinte Vikrutikal* (God's Mischief) both the first and the second novels won the Crossword Award—, *Delhi, Kesavante Vilapangal* (Kesavan's Laments), *Adityanum Radhayum* (Adityan and Radha) and *Pulayappattu* (The Dalit Song) also are half-historical narratives where he often plays with space and time. Kakkanadan's *Sakshi* (The Witness) and *Vasoori* (Smallpox) have a touch of Camus's *Outsider* and *Plague* in them though written in the Kerala setting. Punathil Kunhabdullai's *Smarakasilakal* (Tomb stones), Sethu's *Pandavapuram*, N.P. Mohammed's *Daivathinte Kannu* (The Eye of God), K.P. Ramanunni's *Sufi Paranja Katha* (The Tale told by the Sufi), T.V. Kochubava's *Vridhdhasadanam* (The Old-age Home), C.R. Parameswaran's *Prakriti Niyamam* (The Law of Nature), C. V. Balakrishnan's *Ayussinte Pusthakam* (The Book of Life) and Madhavikkutty's *Chandanamarangalkkidayil* (Sandalwood Trees) are some other contemporary novels of note. N.S. Madhavan's *Lunden Batheriyile Luthiniyakal* (The Litanies of the Dutch Battery) is an exciting new work that was long-listed for the Man Asia prize. Anand is a meditative writer who emerged on the scene with the novel, *Aalkkoottam* (The Crowd) set in Bombay and then had a series of outstanding, experimental, works like *Abhayarthikal* (Refugees), *Marubhoomikal Undakunnathu* (Desert Shadows, now a Penguin book) and *Govardhante Yatrakal*. (The Travels of Govardhan, now a Penguin book that won the Cross Word award this year.)

Drama has been comparatively weak as a genre in Malayalam. Malayalam drama began to be modernized with C. J. Thomas's play, *Crime* and others like *Avan Veendum Varunnu* (He Comes Again!) mostly based on the Bible. C.N. Sreekantan Nair's *Kali* was a play of fantasy, a dark commentary on the rituals of contemporary politics. He also wrote a trilogy based on Ramayana, an interrogation and reinterpretation of the epic in the context of modern values. G.Sankara Pillai modernized the theatre by his plays that had an element of the absurd in them and Kavalam Narayana Paniker brought back the folk element to theatre in his texts like *Daivathar* (The Godhead) and *Avanavankadamba* (Crossing the Self) as well as his productions. N. N. Pillai with his fantasies and satires, K.T. Mohammed with his trilogy, *Srishti, Sthiti* and *Samharam* and Vasu Pradeep

with his plays of social significance helped revive the professional theatre while a radical theatre was formed in the Nineteen Seventies by Ramachandran Mokeri with his adaptations of Gorky and Brecht, Madhu with his plays like *Padayani*, Satchidanandan with his *Saktan Tampuran* and *Gandhi* and Baby with his play *Nadugeddika*, where the tribals enact their own story. Younger writers like Satheesh K. Satheesh, and JoyMathew have also contributed to the innovation of drama.

Malayalam poetry too entered the Modernist phase in the Sixties of the last century when Ayyappa Paniker, N. N. Kakkad, Madhavan Ayyappath, Attoor Ravivarma, Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, K. Satchidanandan, M. N. Paloor, Cheriyan. K. Cheriyan and others began to write a new kind of poetry characterised by non-adherence to strict metrical patterns, employment of fresh and even startling images, transgressions of the established norms of propriety, mixing of the indigenous and the exotic, the real and the surreal, remappings of mythology, use of archetypes to comment on the present, leaps of thought and fancy, black humour, novel patterns, syncopated rhythms and a general apathy towards the romantic poetry and progressive poetry of the earlier periods written by Vallathol Narayana Menon, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, Vayalar Ramavarma, O. N. V. Kurup and others. They were chiefly employed in documenting the dehumanisation of the society around them and were worried like the fiction writers of the time about the loss of identity and the existential and philosophical despair of the modern times. From the Seventies, poetry too began to be concerned more with collective destinies, especially as found in the poems of K. Satchidanandan, Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, K. G. Sankara Pillai, Attoor Ravivarma, D. Vinayachandran, Balachandran Chullikad and a host of other more overtly political writers of the time. The Emergency declared by the Indira Gandhi regime was almost a watershed that suddenly alerted the sensitive writers to the dangers of the loss of democratic freedoms and of censorship. The Eighties and Nineties were shaped by a national-popular consciousness when poets became aware of the erosion of regional identity in a cultural regime that was becoming more and more centralised and tried to promote a kind of standardisation that suited the interests of the State, the market as also the neo-Hindu revivalists. A conscious de-Sanskritisation of language, deployment of local myths and legends, and references to local flora, fauna, festivals and rituals are some of the features of the poetry of this period. Malayalam poetry is now polyphonic and multidirectional with a variety of voices and as many concerns that are linked to the

new politics emerging in Kerala, a politics of microstruggles on diverse fronts. For example there are *dalit* and tribal voices like those of Raghavan Atholi, M. B. Manoj, M. R. Renukumar and S. Joseph, voices concerned with nature, rural life and ecology like those of P. P. Ramachandran, P. N. Gopikrishnan, Rafeek Ahmed, Mohanakrishnan Kalady and Veerankutty, experimentalists like P. Raman, women poets sensitive to women's issues and perceptions like Savitri Rajeevan, Vijayalakshmi, Geeta Hiranyan, Anita Tampi, V. M. Girija, Rose Mary, Prameela Devi, Lakshmeedevi and Kanimol who draw from and also depart from significant predecessors like Balamani Amma and Sugatakumari and alternative voices like Anwar Ali, and K. R. Tony to name only a few of the poets who have emerged mostly after the Nineties of the last century.

Literary criticism underwent a major change with the emergence of modernists like K. P. Appan and post-Modernist, post-Structuralist and Marxist critics like E. V. Ramakrishnan, B. Rajeevan, K. Satchidanandan, P. P. Raveendran, A. V. Pavitran, P. K. Pokker, K. E. N. Kunhahammed, E. P. Rajagopalan, and Sunil Elayidom and feminists like Saradakkutty, P. Geeta and others. New readings of older texts, re-readings of creative and critical writing and deconstructions of earlier approaches and status-quoist world views have made contemporary criticism in Malayalam quite vibrant though still Euro-centric to a great extent.

The publishing scene in Malayalam is equally vibrant, perhaps more active than in any other Indian language. The reasons are not far to seek: the high rate of literacy, the presence of a literary culture in everyday life that dates back to the Kerala Renaissance in the Thirties and Forties of the last century, openness to knowledge and creativity from all parts of the world, a large mobile middle class that loves books and can afford to buy them, the large number of libraries most of which came up as part of a great popular movement in the Nineteen Fifties. Vital creative works by eminent writers find several editions in the same year (for example, M. T. Vasudevan Nair's *Nalukettu* has gone into 50 editions and O. V. Vijayan's *Khasakkinte Itihasam* into more than 30 editions. Even books of poetry and of literary criticism sell well, though fiction, especially novels, dominate as everywhere else. D. C. Books, with two imprints, is the leading publisher in Malayalam who keep innovating their strategies of production as well as distribution. They have published several prestigious volumes and series of books with scholarly editors, like the complete works of Shakespeare, various dictionaries, a series of world classics in abridged translations, many series of short stories based on themes as well as authors and another series of selections from poetry etc. D. C. Books have also celebrated The Year of the Novel, The Year of Short Story, The Year of Poetry

etc. and introduced pre-publication schemes for many significant publications. The production standards in Malayalam are also very high. Most of the Malayalam books are brought out as paper backs, that reduces their cost a and makes them affordable for the large reading public in Kerala. There are other publishers too like Mathrubhumi who have recently emerged as a major publisher besides Current, Poorna, Chinta, Haritam. Green Books and a host of little publishing houses who are also contributing to the landscape of publishing in the state in their own way. One outstanding feature of publication in Kerala is the large number of translations brought out every year, especially of fiction from Europe and Latin America. D.C. for example brings out contemporary novels like Paulo Coelho, Orhan Pamuk, Mario Vargas Llosa, Milan Kundera, J. M. Coetzee, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and several others. The popularity of these translations is so large that the writer N.S. Madhavan once quipped: Marquez is the most popular Malayalam writer today! He would have corrected it now as Paulo Coelho is even more popular. Even my translation of Pablo Neruda's selected poems has gone into seven editions and is still in demand. Popular writers are in great demand and publishers vie with each other to get their newest books. Even young and emerging writers are able to find good publishers. It is heartening to note that, at least so far, the book scene and the reading habit in Kerala have not been negatively affected by trends like globalization, the increasing popularity of English as the medium of education, the spread of mass media like television and the careerism of the young generation.

The Creation and Preservation of the Book Tradition in Assam

Nirupama Bargohain

The tradition of writing has an antique heritage in Assam, and writing is regarded as the hallmark of a civilized race. Pondering on the fact that writings of various kinds in the Assamese language commenced as early as the fifth century, I feel proud as a writer. The first written document from the fifth century that is available to us is an ayurvedic work .

Kumar Bhaskar Barman (594-647 or 650) was a very famous king of ancient Assam or Kamrup. His great-grandfather was Mahabhuti Barman. Bhaskar Barman had granted immense tracts of land to the Brahmins and a catalogue of such beneficiaries are recorded in the bronze plate of Nidhanpur. This bronze plate is even now preserved in the Historical and Antiquarian department of Assam.

Assam's fame and glory had spread through the rest of India during the reign of King Bhaskar Barman. The greatest proof that the pursuit of writing was conducted with great vigour in his reign can be seen in the friendship package of gifts he had sent to the Emperor Harshavardhan through the hands of the courier named Hangsabeg. In that package apart from other things there was some writings on parchment. Here it may also be mentioned that the custom of giving books as gifts to friends and relatives has a very old legacy. The presence of a book or some manuscripts on parchment is an ineradicable part of some gift exchange packages.

These parchments had compensated for the absence of books in the past. Many plates had been created in Assam in the reign of the Shalstambha dynasty during the period 7th century to 11th century. Sublime poetry was composed in the Sanskrit language on these plates. References to Kalidas can also be found. There are so many descriptions of the

beauty of women that even their postures of defecation have also been engraved. Such instruments had made it possible to preserve writings even in the absence of libraries—a preservation which had enabled everyone to read at that time.

Apart from such plates there exist very few instances of written literature in Assamese before the fourteenth century. The humid climate of our state, the excess rainfalls, floods, mice and rats and insects, political unrest, and the lack of awareness and consciousness on the part of the people—all contributed to the destruction or obliteration of many kinds of writings. The Vaishnavite movement which followed increased the thirst for knowledge on the part of the populace and despite the lack of composition of original works certainly contributed to the translation of Vedic works and enhanced efforts at preservation of writings of various kinds. Not just Sanskrit works, the movement also increased the ardour for the works in the mother tongue and augmented processes and the propensity for conserving such works.

However, to assess the literary samples of writings during the period 10th century to 13th century, we have only the *Charjacharjabinischay* by the the Sahajiya Buddha Sidhacharyas. However, this name has been given by Haraprasad Shastri. He had retrieved the *Charjapada* or Buddhist hymns from the Raj durbars of Nepal and after conferring the tags *Bouddhagan* and *Doha* from old Bangla published them in 1926. On the other hand, these are claimed to be Assamese songs in Assam. Without entering that controversy let us proceed to the relevant issues. In the old Tibetan book called *Pag Sam Jon Zan* it is mentioned that the composer Sarahaapad was an inhabitant of the Rani region in Assam (or what was known as Kamrup in those days). Therefore there is nothing to be surprised about if the *Bouddhagan* and the *Dohas* are regarded as representing the most ancient samplings of the Assamese language and literature. Since the grammar and syntax of these compositions approximate very close to the rules of the Assamese language, they can be regarded as well-preserved representations of Assamese literature.

Many other forms of writings are also preserved in Assam which are regarded as folk literature. Even now people mouth the utterances of Dak, which can be regarded as a treasure house of common sense and practical wisdom. These utterances are not available in a written form, although a life of Dak has been recovered. In the pre-Sankardev era of Assam another kind of writing is found, which has to do with the occult practices. There is evidence of widespread occult practices from around 10th to 11th century.

Although the writings of some Vaishnav writers from a pre-Sankardev

era have been conserved, there are no archives of substantial writings apart from the writings of Sarahaapad in the three hundred years before that. However, the compositions of many poets of the fourteenth century have been well preserved. Some of them are: Hem Saraswati, Rudra Kandali, Harihar Bipra, Kabi Ratna Saraswati and Madhab Kandali. In their writings alone the distinctiveness and maturity of the Assamese language can be discerned and appreciated. Hem Saraswati is a forerunner of Assamese dramatic literature. However, the finest poet of the pre-Sankar era is Madhab Kandali. Like the others his subject matter is also the ancient scriptural tales of India. His greatest achievement is the *Ramayana* which was composed in the 14th century. The memory of the greatest and most revered geniuses of Assam, the pioneers of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, Sankardev and Madhabdev who appeared in the 15th century, is preserved and renewed through a celebration of their birth and death anniversaries and various other forms of worship and rituals. Distinguished litterateur, musician, translator, dramatist, poet, painter, and social reformer—the talent of Sankardev in particular stands without parallel. He brought the races of Assam together by establishing *namghars* (a place of worship) and making the people sing *namkirtan* (a form of hymn), and thus established unity and harmony among the various races. His *Kirtanputhi* is still a 'bestseller.' Going through the voluminous translations he has done from the Sanskrit language it can be appreciated that he and his disciple Madhabdev must have sprawling libraries of their own. Sankardev's *Kirtan Bhagabat* and Madhabdev's *Namghosa* are placed in the altars of the houses of worship of most people in Assam with great care and reverence. These are also placed in the public places of worship such as the *namghars* and the *sattras* and community prayers held, a tradition which continues till date. The works created by Sankardev and Madhabdev displays an astonishing range: drama, poetry and songs and other genres were touched by their elegant and profound imaginations and made glorious. Some of them were translations but bore the stamp of their own creative genius at the same time. The works are not only numerous but also of a very high order.

Another famous writer of the Vaishnav era, Ram Saraswati was the royal poet in the court of Narnarayan, although he spent his later days in the court of the Darangi king. When he had gone to the kingdom of Narnarayan at the invitation of the latter he had carried his entire library on a bullock cart. Such a library is a signal contribution to our saga of libraries at that time. His father, the poet Bhimsen Churamani was a professor in the Sanskrit institution called *tol*. In those days such *tol*s were repositories of Vedic or other classic works. The students were imparted lessons in Sanskrit in them. Apart from helping in other works

of development, David Scott had granted a lot of land to these institutions. They were great libraries for us.

Apart from the Aryan-based book-preservation of Vedic literature, there was a different kind of library in the Ahom period spanning six hundred years which the Ahoms called Gandhiya library. In that library many official documents were also preserved. In Assam the first history was compiled under the aegis of the Ahom kings and these were stored in this Gandhiya library. While the custodians of the Sanskrit *tois* guarded over Vedic scriptures and texts in Sanskrit, the Ahom priestly community called *Bailung* conserved books written in the Tai language. Thus the libraries of Assam have harmoniously celebrated and preserved the heritage of the western and the eastern India.

Another kind of writing or book is preserved in the Buddhist temples of Assam. These works are composed in the Pali language. The tradition of affluent Buddhist families contributing books every year to these temples has been continuing for a long time.

Yet another great treasure house of books that is testimony to the glorious tradition of libraries in Assam is the efforts of the Darang kings.

It is not as if only the Vedic Sanskrit literature has been enriching the world of books. The influence of the Islamic Parsi literature has also touched these parts. Such literature has been archived in the twelfth century.

After a long ancestry of poetic literature, prose literature came on its own in the sixteenth century. Bhattadev (1558-1638) who was born around this time is the father of Assamese prose literature. In no other frontier literature of northern India can we find prose literature of such hoary vintage. The three prose works of his which have been preserved are *Katha Gita*, *Katha Bhagabat*, and *Katha Katnabali*.

In the eighteenth century the radiance of Assamese poetry had dimmed. The samples of literature which have been preserved from this period are the *charit puthis* (biographies of *Vaisnab* saints), other works about great men, the humorous and mundane works, the chronicles written in the Tai language, and the occult books and works of *Shakta* literature. At the same time there was pursuit of Sufi literature as well. The *jikiris* composed by Ajan Fakir in the Assamese language to propagate the Islamic faith were a kind of religious ditties in a lucid and uncomplicated style.

The invasion by the Maan from neighboring Burma in the 19th century plunged this state of a rich literary heritage into utter darkness and chaos. The barbarous atrocities of the Maan soldiers transformed Assam into a graveyard and finally it took the British to quell the Maan and annex the state through the Yandaboo pact of 1826. The token or nominally ruling king Purandar Singh was dethroned and the British started their

administration of Upper Assam from the year 1836. It is needless to say that as a result of the Maan invasion the Assamese people lost all ties with language, culture and literature for about 20-25 years. Things took a worse turn when the British made Bengali the language of the court and the educational institutions from 1836-1873, as this would facilitate the administration of the state with all the Bengali clerks and other officials of the lower bureaucracy imported into the state. The Assamese language was almost obliterated as a result. But good fortune smiled on Assam when the Baptist Mission of America set foot in Assam in the year 1836 to propagate Christianity. The missionaries soon discovered that whatever language might prevail in the courts and schools, the people spoke the Assamese language. Thus they composed Assamese-English dictionaries and grammars and even translated the Bible into Assamese. Apart from this they published several other books in the Assamese language. Finally they also brought out a monthly magazine named *Arunodoi* which ran from 1846 to 1870. This magazine gradually freed the Assamese language from the thralldom of Bengali and can be regarded as the path-breaking forerunner of many other Assamese magazines. Indeed, these missionaries can be hailed as the redeemers and champions of the Assamese language. Finally, in 1873 Assamese was once again introduced in the court.

After this the Assamese language became imbued with glory once again. Now many works of a high order are being created in the Assamese language. At least in the realm of poetry and short story the Assamese can compete with any other literature of India. In this small state two writers have already won the Gnanpith Award and since 1955 Assamese writers, including five women writers, have been winning the Sahitya Akademi award as well.

Some Personal Reminiscence on The Subject: Libraries and Book Fairs in our Childhood

I was born in Guwahati, the capital city of Assam, although at the time of my birth the capital was not in Guwahati, but was in Shillong in what was then undivided Assam. Afterwards Assam was chopped up into seven states, and Shillong remained the capital of one of those seven states, namely Meghalaya. Before the division of Assam, Meghalaya was known as Khasi and Jayantiya Hills. NEFA (North East Frontier Area) was another district which broke away from Assam and became a separate state. Likewise, Lushai Hills became Mizoram, and Naga Hills became Nagaland. Two other districts Tripura and Manipur also became auto-

mous states although they retained their original names. Together all these are now referred to as the North-east.

The central library for all these states was situated in Shillong. For the books in Assamese also this central library was the place to go to. But despite not being the state capital Guwahati was the gateway to the north-east and a very important town from the past. Wouldn't there be a library in this centre of education, literature and culture? Especially wouldn't the British set up a library in this vital town in their dominion? Indeed they did. They in fact selected one of the most scenic spots in Guwahati to establish the library in. The location was the west bank of the huge lake named Dighali Pukhuri, situated right at the heart of the city. After establishing the library in 1912 the British government named it Curzon Hall in honour of the then viceroy Lord Curzon. There were various books in different languages such as English, Assamese, Bengali etc. However, there were hardly any books in Hindi because Hindi did not enjoy the status of the *Rashtrabasha* or the national language then.

In the library there was a reading room apart from the regular lending sections. This was open from five until eight in the evening. Moreover, in this library which faced the lake there was a spacious hall at the back, and a lofty stage. In that hall meetings and cultural functions were organized, and plays enacted.

The compound of the Curzon Hall was also vast and had a grassy carpet and various plants and flowers. Thus the great lake fronting the library and the groves of trees on the nearby Judges' Field (on the edge of the main road to the north) created a serene and quiet ambience which was ideal for deep and intense studies.

During those childhood days in the forties it was natural that books were not published as numerous as they are today. Assamese books were particularly scant, bookstores and book-buyers were few, and people who cultivated literature were also not numerous. Newspapers and magazines—whether for adults or children—were also rarities. For book-loving children like us there was virtually a famine. In our family there was a penchant for books and my father and my elder brother bought some books and magazines which met my cravings for books to an extent. However, my yearning for books was not entire satiated and so I walked about half a mile to the Curzon Hall library and read books. In our days children were encouraged to concentrate on school texts rather than read other books, because of which I did not enjoy the facility of borrowing books with a card from the library. However, there was nothing to prevent me from going to the reading room once a week and indulging myself in my favorite pastime. The reading room was open from five until eight,

but for females it was open only on Wednesdays. I am talking about the period 1942-43 which was not such an emancipated time that men and women would sit together and read. Even when we were admitted to Cotton College a few years afterwards under a 'co-education' regime we entered class only after the professor entered.

Thus I looked forward to Wednesdays with great eagerness and longing. However, even that rare privilege was snatched away from me as the second world war descended on us and white and black soldiers swarmed all over the city. In the afternoon these soldiers would bathe in the Dighali Pukhuri almost naked because of which the government banned women from going to the library which was situated on the bank of this lake. I felt sick at this development. Here I should mention that since I developed the habit of reading Bengali books with which the Curzon Hall was crammed that I learned the Bengali language.

However, the Curzon Hall is not what it used to be. Of course, the house of gracious old architecture stands as it is, but its name has been changed to Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Hall after a well-known Gandhian and freedom fighter of Assam. However, most of the books were shifted to the District Library newly constructed on the south bank of this same Dighali Pukhuri. Only a few books remained in the Nabin Chandra Bordoloi hall, and so it became a skeleton of its old self. The director of this central library under the District Library now looks after the district libraries situated in all the districts of Assam as well as 207 rural libraries. The state government and the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation give many newly published books and other grants under various heads to this Directorate.

Apart from this, many social organizations have established libraries everywhere on their own initiative an endeavor to which the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation contributes governmental aid using its discretion.

Thus a tradition of preservation of books has been prevailing in Assam from the distant past. Apart from bookstalls the various annual book fairs organized in the towns of Assam have done their bit in facilitating the purchase and reading of books by the people of Assam. A particularly notable endeavor in this regard has been made by a private organization named Anwasha which has spread out to remote corners of Assam to propagate the habit of reading books through the organization of book fairs. This effort initiated by a bunch of enthusiastic and visionary young men is a significant sliver lining in the landscape of Assam darkened by the problems of insurgency.

The Booker and The White Tiger

K.K. Banerjee

Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2008) has won the Booker Prize this year. He is the fourth Indian English writer to win the coveted prize, after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. Adiga is a Kannadiga born in Madras in 1974 and has subsequently lived in India, Australia, the USA and the UK. He currently lives in Mumbai.

The White Tiger is the story of Balram Halwai alias Munna, son of a rickshawpuller of a small village called Laxmangarh in the district of Gaya in Bihar. Because of sheer poverty, Balram is taken out of school by his family and put to work in a tea-stall. As he crushes coal and wipes tables, he nurses a dream of escape from this drudgery. With single-minded effort he manages to learn driving with a Sardarji taxi-driver. His big chance comes when a rich landlord hires him as a chauffeur for his son, daughter-in-law, and their two Pomeranian dogs. From behind the wheel of a Honda City, Balram first sees the capital city of Delhi. His new education begins here. On the one side, there are call-centers, shopping malls and the crippling traffic jams. On the other, there is the underbelly of slums, rickety naked children, fat rats and cocroaches. And above all, there are 36,000,004 gods and goddesses. Caught between his instinct to be a loyal son and servant, and his desire to improve himself and escape from darkness to light, Balram gradually learns that morality does not pay in the long run. Turning utterly amoral he murders his employer Ashok and runs away with the huge cash he was carrying. He goes to Bangalore, changes his identity and with the help of the money, sets up an entrepreneurship which flourishes like anything in a few years.

While the book has been hailed abroad, the critics in India generally panned it. It was felt that the novel painted too grim and cheerless a picture of India. The words like 'dark', 'angry' etc, have been frequently used by critics even while praising the book. Let us quote the couple

of instances used in the back-over of the novel:

“Unlike almost any other Indian novel you might have read in recent years, this page-turner offers a completely bald, angry, unadorned portrait of the country as seen from the bottom of the heap; there’s not a sniff of saffron or a swirl of sari anywhere...The Indian tourist board won’t be pleased, but you’ll read it in a trice and find yourself gripped.”

Andrew Holgate, *Sunday Times*

“Compelling, angry and darkly humorous, *The White Tiger* is an unexpected journey into a new India. Arvind Adiga is a talent to watch.”

Mohsin Hamid, author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The name of the novel is derived from an interesting episode that took place when Balram was in school in Laxmangarh. The school inspector, in one of his visits to the school, asked a few questions which none of the students could answer except Balram. Acknowledging Balram’s brilliance, the inspector said, “You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animal—the creature that comes along only once in a generation?” Balram thought about it and said: “The White tiger”. “That’s what you are, in this jungle.” So, that is how Balram got a new name and in turn Adiga got the name of his novel.

The format of the novel’s plot also shows a lot of novelty. The Chinese Prime Minister is on an official trip to India and is scheduled to visit Bangalore, our own silicon valley. Seeing the news on television, Balram embarks on writing a long letter to the Chinese premier by way of introducing him to the city of Bangalore as well as India. The letter tells the tale of Balram Halwai’s checkered life-story which unfolds along with the tale of India that is Bharat.

The book is a poignant social and political satire. In a thinly veiled reference to Lalu Prasad Yadav, a photograph is described as that of “a plump man with spiky white hair and chubby cheeks, wearing thick earrings of gold; the face glowed with intelligence and kindness.” An interesting conversation follows about him in a Bihar village:

“Who is this man? Who is the most important man in all our lives?”

“He is the Great Socialist.”

“Good. And what is the Great socialist’s message for little children?”

“Any boy in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of India. That is his message to little children all over this land.”

Than again, in one paragraph in his letters to the Chinese Prime

Minister, Balram writes: Remember, Mr. Premier, the first time, perhaps as a boy, when you opened the bonnet of a car and looked into its entrails? Remember the coloured wires twisting from one part of the engine to the other, the black box full of yellow caps, enigmatic tubes hissing out steam and oil and grease everywhere —remember how mysterious and magical everything seemed? When I peer into the portion of my story that unfolds in New Delhi, I feel the same way.

According to Balram, the four greatest poets of the world are all Muslims—Rumi, Iqbal, Ghalib and the fourth name he could never remember throughout the novel. He chanced upon a Urdu couplet in a Dariyaganj book-shop which remained his life-long mantra:

“I was looking for the key for years
But the door was always open.”

Thus *The White Tiger* is also a tale of two Indias—one of darkness and the other of light. It narrates Balram Halwai's journey from darkness to light and his search for the key until he finds the door open.

Book News

A Town called Dehra
Ruskin Bond

Penguin Books, Rs. 220

Ruskin Bond is arguably the best exponent of children's literature in English published from India, although his books are equally enjoyed by the adults. In this delightful collection, he introduces us to the town of Dehradun he knows intimately and loves unreservedly. Bond spent many years of his childhood in this town when there used to be pony-drawn *tongas* and rickshaws. Classic stories and poems like *Masterji*, *Growing up with Trees* and *A song for Lost Friends* apart, the anthology is replete with journal entries and extracts from the author's memoirs. Wistful and wily as only Ruskin Bond can be, the book can be regarded as an elegy for a way of life gone extinct.

Eco-tourism Development in
India: Communities, Capital and
Conservation

Seema Bhatt and Syed Liyakhat

Cambridge University Press, Price
Rs. 250

Ecotourism is a term debated upon by practitioners all over the world. The initiatives carried out in the name of ecotourism have adversely affected people and the environment. The indigenous and local communities have raised voices against such steps at local, national and international levels. However, sustainable ecotourism, i.e. tourism carried out within certain defined norms, can lead to the development of the people.

Ecotourism Development of India attempts to present a comprehensive and analytical perspective on the development of ecotourism in India. This book showcases the key policies and legal framework linked to ecotourism development at national and international levels. The consequences of large scale models of ecotourism in terms of responses and impacts, both negative and positive, are represented through select case studies. It is intended to facilitate effective formulation and implementation of conservation and development of policies and practices.

The Age of Shiva

Manil Suri

Bloomsbury, Rs. 495

Mani Suri sprang into prominence in the literary field with his debut novel, *Death of Vishnu*. This is his third novel. Here the linear storyline follows the life narrative of seventeen year old Meera Sawhney from 1955 to the early 1980's. Meera defies her father to marry the aspiring, but untalented singer Dev Arora, not out of true love, but a combination of erotic longing, and defiance. Meera and Dev move from Delhi to Mumbai to try to fulfill Dev's ambition to enter the film industry as a playback singer. The narrative is set against predictable markers of nationalist history—the partition, Indo-China and Indo-Pakistan wars, Nehru's death, Shastri's short tenure, the state of Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi, her subsequent defeat in the general elections and eventual return to power. Unlike Suri's first novel wherein the writer ably blends Hindu myth with philosophy, there is a disconnect in this novel between the narrative and the title. However, Suri sustains the reader's interest because of his dramatic treatment of the theme of possessive maternal instincts.

Learning From Children What To Teach Them

Malavika Kapoor

Sage Publications, Rs. 395

This title brings together the author's rich theoretical understanding and the direct experience she acquired while working with disadvantaged children in schools located at rural settings. Based on her empirical work, the author evolves and presents in this book ways of teaching children such that they become confident individuals with creative minds. The main contents of the book consist of a series of case studies of schools in rural Karnataka. These are built around the conviction of the author that, children even in these under-provided schools, given an opportunity and stimulating environment, have the creative potential to acquire the learning skills imparted in the schools. The book is divided into two parts and nine chapters.

Tibet: The Lost Frontier

Claude Arpi

Lancer Publishers, Price not stated

In this book the author tells the sad story of how Tibet came to lose its independence. Beginning as a formidable Central Asian power in the seventh and eighth centuries, Tibet had a clearly demarcated boundary, as seen in her treaty with China signed in 823 AD. The advent

of Buddhism, especial after the visit of the Indian monk Atish Dipankar, united and pacified the country which had in between broken up into petty and continuously warring principalities, but also made it inward-looking and unable to protect herself. Tibet sealed its own fate further in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when it called for Chinese troops to come and defend it against the Mongols and Gurkhas. In 1793, the Chinese promulgated a document that was called Regulations for Governance in which Tibet was described in terms that could only fit a vassal of the Manchus. After the British expedition, the British India Government called a conference in Shimla which was attended by the representatives of Tibet, China and India. The British clearly wanted a free Tibet to act as a buffer between its own empire in India and China. In the treaty of 1914, the Government of China committed itself to not making Tibet a province of China. Tibet became free, but not for long though. The author particularly decries the role that independent India played in abdicating her position as the heir to British India's relationship with Tibet. Instead of taking a proactive stance, Nehru succumbed to a pessimistic fatalism which foresaw the inevitability of Chinese annexation of Tibet.

20th Century Sanskrit Literature: A Glimpse into Tradition and Innovation

Rita Chattopadhyay

Sanskrit Sahitya Parishad, Price
Rs. 300

An acclaimed Sanskrit scholar, the author tries to demonstrate in this book that Sanskrit was never a dead language and even after more than 2,000 years its literary productivity has hardly ceased. She has shown that Sanskrit dramas can be written on contemporary themes like political enmity, cultural decadence and religion, education and human values. She seeks to inspire us to read modern Sanskrit dramas staged in various parts of the country. She has critically analysed the works of a galaxy of contemporary Sanskrit dramatists and, in short, has performed a pious academic duty scholars so far have not seriously attempted.

Sri Aurobindo

A Contemporary Reader

Ed. Sachidananda Mohanty

Routledge, Price Rs. 695

This anthology compiles some of the finest writings of Sri Aurobindo, the nationalist, visionary, poet-philosopher. It aims at providing access to the key concepts, tenets and the spirit of the extraordinary range of texts authored by him. In particular, the compilation brings forth Sri

Aurobindo's social vision and his role as a cultural critic: his views on ethnicity, his exposition of the key role language plays in the formation of communitarian identities and his crucial understanding of self-determination which has incidentally become an important aspect of human rights discourse today.

Olympics: The Indian Story
Boria Majumdar and Nalin Mehta

Harpercollins Publishers India and the India Today Group, Price Rs. 695

What emerges from this book is the idea of 'Sport', in its organizational form, as an important social resource to be bargained, traded, deployed and manipulated in order to gain advantage. Anyone with a smattering acquaintance of the Olympic Movement, its attendant federations, and sports organizations recognize the significance of that observation. Majumdar and Mehta focus more at the meta-level and, tellingly, begin and end with early and post-modern versions of the struggle for control over Indian sport. In between those chapters they range through India's hockey success and failures; trace the complex rise of other sports; see sport at the centre of Non-aligned Movement strategy for both Nehru and Indira Gandhi; slot the rise of

the media via radio and television as key components in the story; and see modern Indian Olympism struggling against media-savvy sports, especially cricket. The spread of the book is excellent, the information marvelous, the interpretation satisfying.

The Classic Popular
Amar Chitrakatha, 1967-2007
Yoda Press, Price Rs. 395

The volume seeks to examine Amar Chitra Katha's rewriting of the nineteenth century nationalist orientalist historiography within the context of the culture industry in a post-colonial scenario. It attempts to read closely the different strategies through which the various myths, legends and historical episodes are narrativised into a comic book format. In so far as Amar Chitra Katha was mainly rendered through a dominant bazaar realism, a derivative of the Raja Ravi Varma lithographs, the project also reveals the curious fit between the seemingly sensuous and real, and the apprehension of the 'real'. A provocative and cleverly argued monograph, this is a must-read not only for scholars and students of modern Indian history, contemporary culture and politics, but also for every informed lay reader who enjoyed reading Amar Chitra Katha comics as a child.

The Immigrant

Manju Kapur

Random House, Price Rs. 395

The Immigrant is a novel with a straight, broad, seemingly-placid narrative flow, under whose surface lurk the currents of significant and, at times, disturbing issues. It tells the saga of Ananda, an Indian immigrant in Halifax, Canada, who has saved and studied his way up to a career as a dentist, and Nina, a thirty-year old lecturer in Delhi. It tells us, with quietness and conviction, about Nina's mother, worried about her daughter's marriage-prospects, and Ananda's married-in-Canada uncle. It narrates, sometimes directly and sometimes tangentially, Nina's past infatuation with a man who abandoned her, Ananda's failed attempts at sex with women, the meeting and correspondence of Nina and Ananda, and their marriage. With Neena finally joining Ananda in Canada, the novel not only covers some older landmarks of "immigration narratives" but also engages with the less often narrated matter of infertility and sexual dysfunction among men.

Escape

Manjula Padmanabhan

Picador India Pp. 418, Price Rs.295

Manjula Padmanabhan is one of the few Indian writers in English who has never bothered to toe conservative social lines on the sanctity

of childhood. Her new book *Escape* features an adult and a child on a trek through a blasted landscape, cut off from the rest of the world. They are fleeing a country—never named but indubitably India—where women are extinct under a two-decade pogrom eliminating natural procreation in favour of a cloning technology that gives complete control to a dictatorship of Generals. Meiji, the niece of the protagonist Youngest, has survived in secret, bought up by her uncles, but now as she approaches puberty, her sex and her sexuality is a threat as much to herself as to her protectors. And so they must go, skirting radio-active wasteland and mindless warriors, speed-boating down rivers and dallying with suspect strangers, to a promised land where there are people like her.

Courting Destiny : A Memoir *Shanti Bhushan*

Penguin Books, Price Rs.650

This memoir of a former Indian Law Minister and senior advocate provides a ringside view of some milestone legal battles; most notably the election petition against Indira Gandhi which led to the Emergency period and India's first tryst with a non-Congress government at the Centre. Besides defeating Indira Gandhi in Allahabad High Court—a case which admittedly brought him instant fame—some of the

cases to his credit include the election petition against Charan Singh, the Congress symbol case, the Emergency-period Habeas Corpus case (better known as the ADM Jabalpur case), and the more recent contempt case against Arundhati Roy and the Parliament attack case. While these parts make interesting reading, the author evidently could not resist going into every little detail of his life which at times makes the memoir a little tiring.

Crossing Over : Partition Literature from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

Ed. Frank Stewart and Sukrita Paul Kumar

Daoba Publications

What makes this collection wholesome is that it includes works from those affected by Partition along India's eastern border also. Much partition literature available in English translation so far was from the writers writing in Hindi, Punjabi or Urdu, like Saadat Hasan Manto, Bhisham Sahni, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Mohan Rakesh, Gulzar, Intizar Hussain, Kamleshwar and others. But that Bengal also suffered tremendously the burden of Partition and Bengali also offers ample stories of people caught in that

whirlpool is reflected in an English translation anthology majorly for the first time. Reading the works of Prafulla Roy in this collection will be a revelation for the readers.

The Forgotten Palaces of Calcutta

Joanne Taylor

Niyogi Books, Pp 96, photographs 150, Price Rs. 1,250.

The Forgotten Palaces of Calcutta discovers the old areas of Calcutta where heritage houses and history fill every crowded lane and secret courtyard. Languishing in another time and place, at the end of narrow lanes and behind untidy shop-fronts, Calcutta's rich heritage waits to be discovered through this volume. These great houses of Calcutta are an important but forgotten part of Calcutta's architectural history. While much has been written and photographed on the British colonial architecture and lifestyle, very little has so far been done on the indigenous equivalent. The present book, by focusing on Calcutta's heritage mansions and palaces, makes an important contribution to the architectural history of both Calcutta and India.

Compiled by Nilanjan Bhattacharjee

There is a lower and higher knowledge. Lower knowledge consists of the study of the Vedas, phonetics, code of rituals, grammar, etymology, metrics and astronomy. By the higher, the Imperishable is attained. That which is invisible, ungraspable, unoriginated and attributeless; it has neither eyes, nor ears, nor hands, nor feet; it is eternal, all-pervading, immeasurably subtle, and limitless.

Mundaka Upanishad