

The Importance of Libraries in Rural India



Comments 0



Banjit Sarmah 21 August 2026 1081 views

I still clearly remember my college days. At that time, we did not have smartphones, and cable television had not yet reached every home. Apart from our regular studies, the district library was our main place for expanding our knowledge. We regularly visited the library and spent hours reading newspapers, magazines and novels. We also borrowed books to read at home.

The career-related books and guidance materials available there were particularly helpful to students like me in deciding the direction of our future. Looking back, I feel that the district library played an important role in helping me eventually establish myself in the teaching profession.

But times have changed. As education has increasingly moved online, many people may feel that the relevance of libraries is gradually declining. However, such a view overlooks the reality of millions of students living in rural and remote areas who still lack reliable internet access and digital facilities.

For these students, a library is not a relic of the past. Even today, it remains a gateway to knowledge, new opportunities and a brighter future.

Many rural students face numerous challenges while preparing for competitive examinations. They may not have access to a personal smartphone, computer, high-speed internet or expensive coaching. In such circumstances, a community library can provide textbooks, reference books, previous years' question papers, newspapers, magazines and competitive examination materials under one roof.

For examinations such as the UPSC, SSC, banking, railways, various state-level examinations, TET, defence recruitment and other government jobs, printed study materials continue to be extremely valuable. Newspapers keep students informed about current affairs in India and around the world, while general knowledge books introduce them to a vast world beyond their school curriculum.

A library is not merely a place for examination preparation. It is also a space for the independent exploration of knowledge. If a student wants to learn more about space, science, history, geography, literature, the environment, wildlife or technology, a library gives them the freedom to learn and think according to their own interests.

Libraries Must Also Modernise with the Changing Times

Preserving the importance of libraries does not mean simply keeping a few shelves of old books. Libraries today must become modern, technology-friendly and multifunctional spaces.

Every library should regularly provide newspapers, magazines, periodicals and career-related publications. This will help students remain aware of new opportunities and developments in India and around the world.

At the same time, digital resources should also be properly incorporated. Today, thousands of educational books, question papers and study materials are available in PDF and e-book formats. Even in remote areas without reliable internet access, these resources can be made available through an offline digital library.

Libraries can store such materials in advance on computers, tablets, pen drives and other storage devices. For example, a student who does not have internet access at home could visit the library and copy the required PDFs or study materials to a pen drive for later use. In this way, the digital divide can be reduced to a considerable extent.

Libraries can also provide large display screens on which e-books, educational videos, maps, presentations and other learning materials can be shown to groups of students. This can be particularly useful for students who find small printed text difficult to read or who understand concepts better through visual learning.

In other words, the library of the future should not remain merely a room where books are stored. It should become a “hybrid library” that combines printed books with digital knowledge and resources.

A Collective Effort to Establish More Libraries

Establishing more libraries in rural areas cannot be the responsibility of the government alone. Schools, colleges, student organisations, local social organisations and NGOs must also come forward.

In particular, NGOs working for rural development can give priority to establishing village-based community libraries as part of their development programmes. A small room, a few bookshelves, useful books and magazines, a computer and a digital screen can be enough to begin the journey towards a good rural library.

Schools can also establish reading corners or community libraries within their campuses for students and, where possible, local residents. Book donation drives can be organised to collect useful books from teachers, former students, parents and members of the community.

It is important to remember that libraries should not contain only conventional textbooks. They should offer diverse books covering science, literature, history, geography, general knowledge, biographies, agriculture, the environment, computer education, language learning, career guidance and children's literature, among many other subjects.

It Is Time to Include Libraries in Rural Development Schemes

The government should not view libraries merely as a matter concerning the Education Department. Libraries should also be recognised as an essential component of rural development. Rural development schemes should consider providing dedicated funding and planning for the establishment and maintenance of community libraries.

Just as roads, drinking water, electricity and other physical infrastructure are essential for a village, “knowledge infrastructure” is equally important. A good library can benefit several generations of students in a village.

The real meaning of rural development is not limited to building physical infrastructure. Developing people's knowledge, skills, confidence and capacity to think is equally important. From this perspective, a modern library is a long-term and valuable social investment.

Technology has changed the way we acquire knowledge, but the benefits of the digital revolution have still not reached everyone. Therefore, for students living in areas without reliable internet access, the combination of printed books and offline digital libraries can be a powerful resource.

The government, local communities and voluntary organisations should work together to strengthen the educational and social foundations of rural areas by establishing more libraries.

We must remember: a road connects a village with other places, but a library connects the minds and dreams of a village's younger generation with the entire world.

A library is not merely a storehouse of books—it is a source of dignity for a community, a beacon of knowledge and a strong foundation for building the future.

Banjit Sarmah

Banjit Sarmah is an assistant teacher based in Dhekiajuli, Assam.

BY BANJIT SARMAH

Zubeen Garg: Assam, Society and the Rhythm of a Universal Vision

Assam's Floods: We Need to Think Beyond Embankments

Beyond Rewards: Encouraging Creativity Through Constructive Consequences in the Classroom

Assam's floods demand more than sympathy

ON THIS DAY

Tribute paid to senior journalist Bolen Bora

NE shinning in Puducherry

Janajati Suraksha Manch oppose ST moves to 6 communities

Zaraguri GBF defeat Dhupdhara Academy 6-5

International day of girl child observed

RELATED

Restoring Forest Food Sources to Address Goalpara's Human-Elephant Conflict

Zubeen Garg: Assam, Society and the Rhythm of a Universal Vision

Lost Winters and Tropical Nights

Surviving patriarchy beyond care

Lakes: The lifeblood of our planet
