



IASLIC NEWSLETTER

Indian Association for Special Libraries and Information Centres

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Quote of the Month

“Libraries are reservoirs of strength, grace and wit, reminders of order, calm and continuity, lakes of mental energy, neither warm nor cold, light nor dark.”

— Germaine Greer,
Australian writer

Acknowledgement

Dr. J. N. Satpathi

IASLIC ACTIVITIES

IASLIC 29th National Seminar

Due to some unavoidable circumstances, the organizers of IASLIC 29th National Seminar, which was scheduled to be held during November 24 - 26, 2022 at North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, had to postpone the seminar at the last moment. The inconvenience caused to the intending participants is deeply regretted. The new dates for the seminar are likely to be announced soon and will be available on IASLIC website.

CONFERENCES/SEMINARS/ WORKSHOPS

National

Seminar on Reading Habit

An RRRLF Sponsored State Level Seminar on 'Promoting Reading Habits and the Role of the Use of E-Resources', organized by Central Library, KONGU Arts and Science College, Erode, will be held on February 14, 2023. For details visit: <http://web.kasc.ac.in/docs/20230214lib.pdf>

Webinar on Manifesto for Library Professionals

A Webinar on 'Manifesto for Library Professional', is being organized by Balani Infotech Pvt. Ltd. on February 18, 2023. For registration visit: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_GrkoUzWOS1wQk9aT2hig

Workshop on Koha

A National Workshop on 'Library Automation using Koha' is being organized by the Library Resource Centre, Pandit Deendayal Energy University, Gandhinagar, during February 24 - 25, 2023. For details visit: <https://eventee.co/en/e/two-day-national-workshop-library-automation-using-koha-16221>

Conference on Smart Libraries

A National Conference on 'Smart Libraries' is being hosted by JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bangalore, in association with Karnataka State College Librarians Association, during March 10 - 11, 2023. For details visit: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x5i_ZAWQUjz6vmdstEsgTm6y0FRW9I6d/view

Seminar on Role of Libraries in Research

Rajagiri Business School (RBS), Kochi, in collaboration with Rajagiri College of Social Sciences (RCSS), Academic Library Association (ALA), and Kerala College Librarians Association (KCLA), is organizing a National Seminar on 'Role of Libraries in Academic Research and Publishing' on March 10, 2023. For details email to: rbslibrary@rajgiri.edu

Workshop on Entrepreneurship in LI Work

Institute of Public Enterprise (IPE), Hyderabad, is organizing a National Workshop on 'Entrepreneurship in Library & Information Work' during March 23 - 24, 2023. For details visit: <https://www.ipeindia.org/>

Conference on Knowledge Transaction

A National Conference on 'Knowledge Transaction in Digital Scholarship' is being organized by DLIS, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, during April 10 - 11, 2023. For details visit: https://www.bhu.ac.in/Site/EventDetails/1_100_610?Upcoming&4603

International

Conference on Information Infrastructure

An International Conference on 'Information Infrastructure of Social Science Research in India (IISRI-2023)' is being organized by the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata, during March 2 - 3, 2023. For details visit: <https://idsk.edu.in/conference-iisri-2023/>

Seminar on Indian Knowledge System

An International Seminar on 'Indian Knowledge System for LIS and Allied Disciplines (IKS-LISAD)' is being organized by DLIS, Netaji Open University, Kolkata, during March 24 - 26, 2023. For details visit: http://www.wbnsou.ac.in/student_zone/courses/school_of_professional_studies/seminar_conference_workshop/20230207_2023-FINALE-IKS-LISAD-2023-Brochure.pdf

Conference on Digital Library

An International Conference on 'Digital Library Managing and Importance of Securing Information (ICDLMISI)' will be held during March 29 - 30, 2023 in Sydney, Australia. For details visit: <https://waset.org/digital-library-managing-and-importance-of-securing-information-conference-in-march-2023-in-sydney>

Conference on Academic Libraries

An International Conference on 'Academic Libraries (ICAL-2023)' is being organized by Delhi University Library System, University of Delhi (North Campus), during April 5 - 8, 2023. For details visit: <https://crl.du.ac.in/ical2023/>

LI Professionals' Summit

The 11th International Library Information Professionals Summit (I-LIPS) is being organized by the University Library, Galgotias University, Greater Noida, during April 13 - 15, 2023. The theme of the summit is 'New and Innovative Libraries in the Digital Era: Services and Practices'. For details visit: <https://galgotiasuniversity.edu.in/i-lips2023/>

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

Librarian Honoured for Social Work

Palam Kalyanasundaram, an 82-year-old retired librarian and social worker, is often lauded for his exceptional dedication in the field of social work. Now, adding one more feather to his hat, the Tirunelveli-born man is being awarded Padma Shri for the year 2023, says a story available on *dtnext.in* website. The Padma award is one of the highest civilian awards of the country. For this year, 106 awardees have been selected under three categories. And, for the outstanding work in the field of social work, Kalyanasundaram is set to receive the award from President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhawan soon. Kalyanasundaram, who pursued education in the University of Madras is a gold medalist in library science. Additionally, he has been honoured with India's best librarian award. Despite having worked for several years in the field, the man is known to have donated his entire salary to the economically poor. Kalyanasundaram, with the aim to serve people, remained unmarried, dedicating most of his time, efforts and money for the welfare of the needy. As part of which, he established a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Paalam (bridge), which initiated a slew of activities for those in need. Not just in India, recognizing his work abroad, an American organization honoured him with 'Man of Millennium' award along with a huge sum. But, as expected, Kalyanasundaram donated the whole amount to charity. For original story visit: <https://www.dtnext.in/tamilnadu/2023/01/26/palam-kalyanasundaram-bags-padma-shri-for-social-work>

TN SLC Reconstituted after 19 Years

The School Education Department of Tamil Nadu has reconstituted the State Library Committee and the Chennai Municipal Library Commission after 19 years, says a *Times Group e-paper* report. A GO passed in this regard appointed G Gopanna and G Rathina Sabapathy of Tamil Nadu Library Association, K Nithyanandam of Chennai Library Association, and Roja Muthiah, Research Library Director G Sundar and 11 others as members of the State Library Committee. Writers Manushyaputhran and Thamizhdhasan and nine others were appointed members of the Chennai Municipal Library Commission. For original report visit: <https://epaper.timesgroup.com/the-times-of-india/mumbai#Times%20Global>

Drop in DPL Membership

A parliamentary committee has raised concerns over the decrease in membership of the Delhi Public Library and recommended that the government form a virtual library through large-scale digitization of texts, says a PTI report broadcast by *News 18* channel. The parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture's 328th report,

'Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations of the Committee contained in its Three Hundred Tenth Report on the subject Functioning of Central Libraries in the Country,' has stated that the Delhi Public Library has witnessed a decrease in membership in recent times, one of the reasons being the COVID-19 pandemic. "It has come down to 1.5 lakh membership from what it was prior to coronavirus period i.e. 1.85 lakh. Being a model library created in 1951 in Asia with UNESCO's technical, financial assistance, it should lead other libraries in the country and extend all possible help in their growth. Delhi Public Library should make all out efforts to increase its membership/viewership in the interest of general public," the report stated. The Ministry of Culture in its reply accepted that there had been a "perceptible decline" in the membership of Delhi Public Library (DPL) during last two years. "This was mainly due to the Covid situation and also absence of reading habit among the members of the society. However, Delhi Public Library has been striving to increase its membership by conducting outreach activities, approaching schools/colleges/RWAs, distributing membership forms and waiving of membership fee," the ministry said. The Committee also recommended that public library system in India should be modified while keeping in mind the latest developments in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) so as to provide minimum network based services for the urban and rural populace. Libraries should be developed as Community Information Centre models and computerization of libraries should be taken up fast to upgrade them, it said. In its reply, the Culture Ministry said it had already developed Indian Culture Portal where knowledge and cultural resources of various organizations of Ministry of Culture were now available in public domain on a single platform. "This project is a part of the Prime Minister's Digital India initiative to showcase information about the rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage of India, both at home and abroad," the Ministry said. For full report visit: <https://www.news18.com/news/india/parl-panel-raises-concerns-over-decrease-in-membership-of-delhi-public-library-proposes-digitization-of-texts-6609007.html>

Punjab to set up Toy Libraries

Giving top priority to the overall development of children, Punjab Government has released a grant of ₹ 38.53 crores to establish toy libraries for pre-primary students across the state, says a report available on *babushahi* website. According to Punjab School Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains, this grant has been issued by the Punjab Government to impart education through modern tools to the students studying in pre-primary classes in 12846 schools of the state. He added that students could also be made aware of health care, cleanliness and health and safety modules as well as good or bad touch. The Cabinet Minister said that parents were showing great interest for admission in pre-

primary classes located in government schools this year as compared with previous years. For original report visit: <https://www.babushahi.com/full-news.php?id=155583&headline=Punjab-Govt-to-setup-toy-libraries-worth-%E2%82%B938.53-crores--Harjot-Bains>

Kashmiri Youth sets up Library

While the youth of Jammu and Kashmir are showcasing their talent in different fields like art, sports and others, some are also striving for a better future for other youth like them. A good example of this is Irfan Ali from Budgam district in central Kashmir, who has established a library-cum-reading room in the district at an individual level, says an IANS story by Zubair Qureshi available on *daijiworld.com* website. The establishment of such a library at an individual level is a first of its kind initiative, where all the necessary books and other resources are provided to the youth to shape their future, and to prepare for the competitive exams. Irfan, who himself is a civil service aspirant, does not want to let other aspiring youngsters face the difficulties he faced in preparing for competitive exams. "I don't want other aspirants to miss out on the guidance and proper counselling which were not available to me. Due to lack of resources, I could not prepare properly. So I took this initiative so that the other youths can prepare better for the competitive exams," he said. Irfan got the inspiration for this initiative during his stay in Delhi where he went for coaching in 2019 after receiving a scholarship from the Zakat Foundation of India. "During the few months I spent in Delhi, I saw beautiful libraries where all the necessary materials were available to prepare for competitive exams. So I was inspired to start a similar library in my own hometown where the youth could study. The idea was to help those who cannot afford books or other study materials," Irfan said. The year after he returned from Delhi, Irfan started his library from a small rented room in his hometown, where he got good response from the students. As the number of visitors grew, Irfan shifted to a bigger complex. At present, the library consists of individual single cabins for reading purposes and has more than 300 books of UPSC alone. According to Irfan, he had to take a loan to fulfil his dream. "I have named the set up 'Iqra Library-cum-Study Hall', and its salient features include IAS, KAS, JKSSB, SSC, NEET, JEE, and GATE materials. The library provides students with free books, study materials, notes, and daily newspapers, among others," Irfan said. For original story visit: <https://www.daijiworld.com/news/newsDisplay?newsID=1045553>

Six Modern Libraries in Barnala Soon

District Barnala in Punjab, also known as Mecca of Literature, is all set to get new libraries in six villages with modern facilities and rich literature in Punjabi and English. The Minister for Higher Education and Languages of Punjab Gurmeet Singh Meht Hayer said in a press statement recently, says a report available on *babushahi.com* website. Reiterating the Punjab Government's commitment to the promotion of

education and inculcating reading habits in the people of Punjab, Meet Hayer said that the Punjab Government had proposed these libraries in its first budget. These libraries would be a befitting tribute to doyen of Punjabi literati like Sant Ram Udasi, Ram Sarup Ankhil and others who rose from land of Barnala. Divulging details on the project, he said that in first phase around ₹ 1.5 crores were being spent on rural libraries, of which construction of two libraries would be completed soon. Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer added that these libraries would be equipped with good books and infrastructure which would increase intelligence quotient and would be immensely helpful for intellectual growth of the youngsters. The cost of each library is ₹25 lakhs, which include construction as well as furniture and the books. Work on libraries in four villages - Pharwahi, Dangarh, Rureke Kalan and Raisar - will be completed soon. He further said that the ultimate target was to set up a library at every village so that the people could have easy access to sources of wisdom - books. Deputy Commissioner Punamdeep Kaur added that apart from this, work on setting up libraries at villages Badbar and Nangal was going on. She added that these libraries were coming up at panchayat land as well as in the precincts of government schools. He said that these air conditioned libraries would have computers and Wi-Fi facility to help students prepare for competitive exams. Each library would have both Punjabi and English literature and lists had been finalized that include best of literature - both modern and contemporary. For full report visit: <https://www.babushahi.com/full-news.php?id=156490&headline=Mission-Rural-Libraries:-6-modern-libraries-to-come-up-in-Barnala>

Admin. in J&K Dist. Launches e-Library

In Jammu and Kashmir, the Doda district administration has launched an e-library to benefit thousands of students of the district by providing them with notes and study materials prepared by the best subject matter specialists in the district, says a report available on newsonair.gov.in website. AIR Jammu Correspondent reports that the feat has been achieved after working for more than five months under the ADBHUT Doda campaign launched in the district. The facility will enable the students to use the study material prepared not only for the examination in the month of March/April but to clear their doubts/concepts when schools reopen after winter vacations. The site www.adbhutdoda.org/elibrary shall have the facility of reading, downloading and getting the notes printed by any student in the district or for that matter any part of the UT. The e-library would be upgraded further and in due course of time notes for class 9th onwards shall be made available for the students. The notes shall also help during online ZOOM classes to be launched soon for the students who want to use the vacations for more productive purposes. For original report visit: <https://newsonair.gov.in/News?title=Jammu-and-Kashmir%26%2339%3Bs-Doda->

[district-administration-launches-e-library&id=453455](https://www.babushahi.com/full-news.php?id=453455)

Most Innovative Library Award

Odisha's Bakul Foundation was presented the Most Innovative Library Award category in the 5th edition of the India Reading Olympiad in Hyderabad. Bakul Foundation's founder Sujit Mahapatra and two of its volunteers, Nilanjana Das and Debajyoti Baij, received the award at the concluding function of Hyderabad Literary Festival recently, says a report available on odishabytes.com website. In his acceptance speech, Sujit said, "When we started promoting reading, we realized that our goal was not just to reach readers with books but that we had to create readers. Hence, the need to attract children and adults to books through various methods including bringing books to people through innovative formats." The India Reading Olympiad, instituted by the Food 4 Thought Foundation, recognizes the efforts of individuals and organizations to promote reading in India, and are the only such awards in India. The awards are given in 14 different categories. Bakul Foundation was the only organization or individual that was shortlisted in categories of "Best NGO" and "Most Innovative Library". It won the "Most Innovative Library" award for its innovations in promoting reading. The jury was impressed with Bakul's innovations such as unmanned libraries in refrigerator at Ekamra Haat, tree library in Forest Park and library in an old discarded bus in the Parking area of Kalabhoomi in Bhubaneswar. Madhavi Sharma, director of Food 4 Thought Foundation, said, "All jury members were unanimous for this award since other nominees had made one innovation or the other." For original report visit: <https://odishabytes.com/odishas-bakul-foundation-presented-most-innovative-library-award-in-hyderabad/>

Old Tree turned into Library

For about a year now, a century-old Siris tree has been serving as an outdoor library in Alipurduar, West Bengal, where children, young adults and senior citizens congregate every Sunday, says a story by Partho Burman available on TwocirCircles.net website. Located at European Club Ground in Kalchini Block in the Alipurduar, readers are seen browsing the bookshelves at the tree library named Swaraj. The tree-library houses more than 200 books of fiction, nonfiction, comics and other genres of literature in English, Bengali, Hindi and Nepali. It is thrown open every Sunday from eleven in the morning until two in the afternoon. Residents of the neighbourhood gather at the tree library to perform plays, poetry and songs. These events are called 'Sunday Art-Haat'. The tree library was started by a 23-year-old youth Nimesh Lama. While going to college and to the fields to play sports, Lama said he would find drunken people lounging on the ground near the tree. "I saw a bunch of crooks engaged in gambling. I had an epiphany. I thought if they could hook up here for the wrong motives, why can't we work together for the right reasons," Lama told

TwoCircles.net. Lama started working on the idea in 2021 when he was in his last year of college. “To affect some societal change, I decided to call this library Swaraj. The Hindi word Swaraj, which means self-rule, in my perspective, stands for transformation. Every time it was spoken, a revolution followed,” Lama said. He said his childhood dream was to build a museum in honour of India's freedom fighters. “They are only remembered on their birthdays or their deaths and their visions are lost to time,” he said. To set up the tree library, Lama began saving his money. Finally, the tree library began operations in March last year with only 20 books. “Only two to three individuals showed up when I first started this tree library with my 10-year-old cousin Arnab Tamang. But it has now increased to 30. People started donating books after finding us on social media, and a word-of-mouth campaign helped us in growing the collection to over 200 books,” Lama said. For original story visit: <https://twocircles.net/2022sep17/446967.html>

A Life Changing Initiative

A couple in Odisha's Junagarh are making a significant change in the life of several students, especially those belonging to the underprivileged section of the society. Dipak Sahu and his wife, who hail from Kalahandi, are doing this by running a free library and a coaching centre, says a story available on *indianarrative.com* website. Hailing from a poor family, Sahu was unable to pursue his education beyond matriculation even though he ensured that his wife did her graduation and then post-graduation in history after their marriage. Now, Sahu doesn't want others to suffer the same fate as his and remain uneducated due to financial constraints. Sahu, who is now 48 years old, is a successful businessman who owns three restaurants and a catering business, while his 42-year-old wife takes care of the library and coaching centre. Talking to the media he said that when his business started doing well, he and his wife in 2019 decided to open a public library for youngsters preparing for competitive examinations. The couple continues to buy books and magazines which help the children and youth immensely while appearing for competitive and entrance exams. When the Covid-19 pandemic made school education difficult for those who did not have a smart gadget, the Sahus stepped in and on November 1, 2021, started a free coaching centre for such children who could not attend virtual classrooms. Today it has three part-time teachers imparting lessons to 105 children from primary to high school levels from morning 7 to 8 and then 4.30 to 8 in the evening. The centre, besides free tuition, also provides the children books, notebooks and stationery. To avoid making the classes boring, teachers organize activities like drawing, debating, sports and painting also. Though the centre is running from their library, the Sahus plan to shift it to a new building to accommodate more children. For original story visit:

<https://www.indianarrative.com/culture-news/couple-in-odisha-run-free-library-and-coaching-centre-for-poor-children-105156.html>

Book Hospital in School

Block Education Officer of Shamli in Uttar Pradesh, Seema Chauhan recently inaugurated a Book Hospital at Primary School No. 15 at Gulshan Nagar in Shamli, says a story available on *india.postsen.com* website. Principal Neeraj Goyal has recently established this book hospital. The headmaster said that according to the concept of Book Hospital, small children often spoiled their books and notebooks. Book Hospital had been established to cure them. In this, some children of classes IV and V sew, repair and bind the damaged books of small children and return them. This makes the books look like new again. The stuff that children use is given to children from the school itself. Praising the Book Hospital, Block Education Officer Seema Chauhan said that this was a different theme in the entire state, which had been implemented in this school for the first time. With this developing a sense of camaraderie, children would remain aware of the safety of their books. Block Education Officer praised while observing the paintings equipped with print rich environment of the school. For full story visit: <https://india.postsen.com/books/amp/273998>

First Library Village

Maniguh village in Rudraprayag in Uttarakhand has been turned into a Library Village. Bina Negi Mishra played a pivotal role in transforming this remote village. She quit her plum job in a multi-national company in Delhi and returned to her native village - Banjgaddu - with a firm resolve to develop theme villages in Uttarakhand so as to solve the problems of educational backwardness and unemployment. The first library village developed with the help of 'Hamara Gaon Ghar Foundation' was formally inaugurated on last Republic Day. Libraries being built at different places in the village have been named as Pustak Mandir. Books will be kept in these small temples and they will be used as reading spots. Four thousand books of different subjects and languages are currently available in the first such library. For details visit: <https://www.etvbharat.com/hindi/uttarakhand/bharat/maniguh-village-of-rudraprayag-will-become-uttarakhand-first-library-village/na20230121193325454454266>

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

WhatsApp's New Contact Sharing Feature

WhatsApp is the messaging platform that keeps launching new features to make the instant messaging platform friendly for users. Meta-owned WhatsApp is back again with yet another feature update. According to a blog post on WABetaInfo, WhatsApp just unveiled a new feature for

the beta version of the WhatsApp programme for Microsoft Windows that will allow "contact" sharing. It is available only for a few beta testers and for others it is expected to roll out soon, says a *dnaindia* story. The entry point "Contacts," as seen in the screenshot, will appear if the functionality is already turned on for your WhatsApp account for the Windows beta app. A contact card can be shared via the "contact card" feature, making it simple for the receiver to add it to their address book. The "contact card" feature is already available in the WhatsApp beta for Windows 2.2247.2.0 update, which is accessible from the Microsoft Store, and it will soon be made generally available to all other beta users. In a report published by WABetaInfo, which included some screenshots showcasing new and impending WhatsApp updates and capabilities, it was revealed that WhatsApp would also introduce call history tracing within WhatsApp Web. "Since the app is a beta version, the call history may not immediately be in sync with one of your mobile devices." This will be end-to-end encrypted and it will be available for group and individual chats both. WhatsApp recently added an option to create polls within chats which are found in a separate icon near the chat and now easy sharing and addition of contacts. But the positioning of this feature is still not confirmed. For original story visit: <https://www.dnaindia.com/technology/report-whatsapp-launches-contact-card-feature-for-lucky-beta-users-here-s-all-you-need-to-know-3006238>

WhatsApp Rolling out Personalized Avatars

Meta Founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg has announced that its messaging platform is now getting support for Facebook and Instagram like personalized avatars, says a *dnaindia* story (with inputs from IANS). The feature was under testing for quite sometime and the Meta chief announced its roll out recently through a Facebook post. "We're bringing avatars to WhatsApp! Now you can use your avatar as a sticker in chats. More styles coming soon across all our apps," said Zuckerberg. For those who are unaware, an avatar is a digital version of you that can be created from billions of combinations of diverse hair styles, facial features, and outfits. On WhatsApp, people can now use their personalized avatars as profile photos or choose from one of 36 custom stickers reflecting many different emotions and actions. "Sending an avatar is a fast and fun way to share feelings with friends and family. It can also be a great way to represent yourself without using your real photo so it feels more private," said WhatsApp. The company said that it will continue to deliver style enhancements including lighting, shading, hair style textures, and more that will make avatars even better over time. Zuckerberg looks forward to "seeing people explore and build immersive worlds, and to bringing this to more countries soon". "We want everyone to have control over

their experience in Horizon Worlds, so we're always working to add more tools and features that let people customize their own experiences," Meta had said in a blog post. Meta has also announced plans to add legs to its virtual avatars which are not yet on its VR platform Horizon Worlds, and may arrive early next year. For original story visit: <https://www.dnaindia.com/technology/report-whatsapp-starts-to-roll-out-facebook-like-personalised-avatars-3008889>

Skype's Voice Translation Feature

Microsoft has launched real-time voice translation in Skype, which can now translate a person's voice in real-time using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to make the translated voice sound similar to the original speaker, says a *dnaindia* story. "We are launching translation of Skype to Skype video calls in real-time, using your natural voice. This means that you can have a conversation with someone who speaks a different language, and the translation will happen automatically, in real-time, as the conversation is taking place," Microsoft said in a blog post. Real-time translations with natural voice would be coming to group video calls and Telephony in the next months, said the blog post. The new translation feature uses AI to automatically detect the languages being spoken during a video call and translate them in real time. In order to do this, speech recognition technology and natural language processing are combined to understand, interpret, and translate spoken words. Moreover, if users activate the use of their natural voice, the company says that they will use AI to sample their words and tune the translation to sound like them, making the conversation more human, according to the blog post. "This is a huge step forward for Skype, as it makes it possible for people who speak different languages to easily communicate with each other," said the company. For original story visit: <https://www.dnaindia.com/technology/report-skype-gets-real-time-voice-translation-feature-here-s-how-it-works-3011096>

SPECIAL FEATURE

On A Noble Mission!

Two youths - one from Nainital district of Uttarakhand and another from Kupwara district of Kashmir - have embarked upon a noble mission of building libraries in villages in their respective areas to help students and job aspirants. The story of Uttarakhand youth Himanshu Kafaltia by Tine Freese is available on *Better India* website, while that of Kashmiri youth Mjubashir Mushtaq by Naseer Gani can be found on *Outlook India* website. As these interesting stories may be of interest to the readers of this newsletter, excerpts from those stories are produced below with due acknowledgement to the writers and the news organizations concerned.

The first story reads:

It's a pleasant morning in the quaint little village of Tusrar in Uttarakhand. The year is 2004, and a teenager is readying for a long school day ahead. His mother has packed a warm lunch for him. But then, ahead of him is a 4 km trek along the mountainous paths to reach school. For Himanshu Kafaltia, the standing joke of a lot of urban Indians on how their parents had to walk miles to reach school was his reality, even in 2004. But even during those days, Himanshu would dream of becoming an IAS officer one day. And for that, he knew he would have to move to a city, owing to the unavailability of suitable coaching spaces and books in his village. He moved to Delhi for further education but promised himself that he would try to make it easier for the next generation.

The 18-year-old boy who dared to dream big is the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of Karnaprayag in Uttarakhand today, having joined the Provincial Civil Service in 2019. And he kept his promise and undertook the task of setting up a library in every village in Uttarakhand. He established his first library in November 2020 in Tanakpur. "We set up 16 more subsequently in nearby villages including Banbasa, Gyankheda, Uchologoth, Kaligunth, Sukhidhang, Salli, Taliyabaanj, Budam, Danda, Fagpur, Chhinigoth, Tusrar and Nai," he says.

"I had to struggle a lot to reach my current position. I hope to make it easier for the upcoming generations by establishing more such libraries. We include competitive exam books in the libraries so that the children don't have to travel to cities to avail them," he tells *The Better India*. "My motive is to provide exposure to children even in the remotest areas of the state." What kept him going, he says, is the way the kids reacted to his initiative. These libraries are a ray of hope for them, more than anything else. Since I too come from a very rural background, I can relate to these kids on a deeper level," he adds.

He continues, "We also provide the students with career guidance. My wife is an IRS officer, and initially, the two of us would visit the libraries and give seminars and guidance lectures on any career path they wanted to choose. Later we started inviting other experts to speak. We organize general knowledge and maths tests on Sundays at times to better their performance." And the results have started showing. So far, 38 students from the villages have cleared different competitive exams, Himanshu informs. "These kids come back and donate books to the libraries, as a way of expressing their gratitude."

The process of establishing the libraries is low-cost and efficient, says Himanshu. "The space is mostly donated by the *Gram Panchayat* or by individuals. Most of the books are second-hand ones procured from scrap dealers, but the

new editions are all newly purchased." "We started a campaign where we asked the villagers to donate two books each. This was hugely successful. We got so many books that the cost of buying books is almost negligible," he adds.

The maintenance of the libraries was a challenge for Himanshu initially, but he soon figured out an innovative solution. "We ask the villagers for donations to maintain the library, just like how it's done for religious festivities like *Ram Lila* or a community event. This is done mainly to instil a sense of responsibility in them to keep the libraries clean and safe." He says, they also formed *Pathak Club* or reader's club, and today, the villagers take care of the libraries themselves. "The youth in these villages is so eager to take up the responsibility that they consider it an opportunity. It is very surprising to me how successful these clubs have been." "They clean the libraries every day and even decorate them during festivals. It is heartwarming to see. If a fan or a light needs repair in the library, they collect money and fix it themselves," he informs. The libraries are open 24 hours a day. Students come to the library as early as 5 am and sometimes stay till late into the night.

"We noticed that it was not just school-going kids who visit the libraries but many others as well, who come in just to read. Initially, we brought in just academic books for competitive exams. Now we have fictions as well so that a habit of reading is inculcated in the villagers," he says. As the number of libraries grew, so did the popularity of the initiative.

The SDM has no plans of stopping. There are two more libraries in the pipeline, and he hopes to keep going forward. "I aim to set up a library in every village and every small town of the state. With the advent of social media, reading habit is declining. I want to revive it. Children in these rural areas are prone to drug addiction etc. if they are not given the right direction at the right time. I believe that no kid with a book in their hand can ever do wrong," he says.

The second story reads:

A narrow asphalt road lined with willow trees, buzzing cicadas and a few men amid vast paddy farmlands leads to 'Let's Talk Library', a single-storey structure at the foothills of Kumbkadi Mountain, not far from the Line of Control (LoC), at Helmatpora village in north Kashmir's Kupwara district. A wooden door opens to the library where students of the border district have crammed into a small reading room to read and prepare for competitive examinations. Many students have shown interest in reading novels and poetry.

In 2019, Mubashir Mushtaq, 22, started the library. He called it 'Let's Talk Library'. It's set up in a 14x10 room, with over 2,000 books, mostly related to competitive exams, including UPSC and NEET. "Most of the rural kids are shy and don't talk about their career plans. It's an attempt to bring students together and talk about their interests and

goals. That's why it's named Let's Talk Library," said Mushtaq.

Mubashir got books for competitive examinations, like NEET and UPSC, from different sources. He has travelled all across Kashmir Valley meeting people who wanted to donate costly books required for preparation for the NEET, JRF, and other competitive exams. For the past one and a half years, he has been collecting books from different people after sharing the concept of establishing small libraries in the villages of the frontier Kupwara district. Once done with the books about competitive exams, Mubashir bought novels and self-help books. The first self-help book he bought was *Rich Dad Poor Dad* and after that he bought *Animal Farm* and *1984* by George Orwell. Almost all booksellers in Kashmir say these books sell in large numbers.

At Helmatpora in Kupwara, Mubashir says, students ask for books like *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* and *1984* as everyone seems to be reading them. He says people in the village had a perception that he opened a book shop rather than a library and they would ask for stationary and school books. "The concept is still new but it is slowly picking up and I have the ambition to establish these small libraries in every village in Kupwara," says Mubashir. Over the years, literacy level has increased in Kashmir and also in frontier district of Kupwara. "But students are facing the problem of not having books available. Some students drop out of school for want of books. Here we give books for reading and at the same time encourage students to do reading in our library even though we have small space," says Mubashir, adding that book reading culture is growing in the Valley as there is an appetite among people to read books.

Mubashir says that when he discussed the idea of establishing small libraries in the villages, his parents started laughing about it. Since he established the first library at Helmatpora, students have started borrowing books and perceptions of people have started changing. He says around 25 students of the village were first to borrow books from his library. "They are preparing for NEET and were not in a position to buy books and the library came to their help," he adds.

Mubashir has kept books in the library that usually coaching centres in Kashmir ask students to study for the competitive exams. In his library, there are costly books on modern economics. Such books are not usually available in book shops in Kupwara. He has visited each village in Kupwara. He has been in Keran, Karana, and other far-off villages of the district to explore the idea of establishing a chain of small libraries in the villages. He says 'Let Us Talk Library' at Helmatpora is just beginning. "We are going to have these libraries in every village," declared Mubhashir.

Epilogue

The mission undertaken by the two youths is certainly praiseworthy. We have also heard of similar efforts to set up libraries for students and jobseekers by fellow citizens and NGOs in other areas too, though in a small scale. Let us hope that such efforts will turn into a movement and one day no village in our country will go without a library.

[Sources: <https://www.thebetterindia.com/310032/ias-officer-himanshu-kafaltia-sets-up-libraries-in-villages-in-uttarakhand/>, <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/on-a-mission-to-build-a-library-in-every-village-in-kashmir-kupwara-news-226024>]

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