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Information Needs and Use Pattern of Disadvantaged Communities: A Case Study

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Introduction

Efforts at the local, regional, national, and international levels are necessary for development of a society and a nation. The quality of planning and programmes depends upon the quality of human resources devoted to them. However, the rapid spread of higher education has resulted in the deterioration of the standard of education in every sphere: ill equipped laboratories, poorly stocked libraries with conventional thinking, an information explosion without thevuse of information technology in academic institutions, inadequate space in buildings and playgrounds, neglected and remote campus facilities, uninterested and ill-qualified teachers, inexperienced administrators and managers, a lack of involvement by parents and guardians in the affairs of institutions of higher education, and a lack of vision from the academic and executive bodies of the universities. All these factors have contributed to the decay of higher education in general, as described by Gupta (2004). Disadvantaged people (mostly scheduled caste and scheduled tribe [SC/ST]) in India do not have economic resources for their educational development, even if our constitution has provided various special privileges for this since independence. Instead, they have to depend on academic libraries. The libraries and information centers in academic institutions in India are not able to cope with the growing demands of its user communities. A recent report states that, "except some of the states in the South, Maharastra, West Bengal, and Metropolitan areas that at least have the basic structure, in the rest of the states and UTs the growth is haphazard with no significant and planned development. In the computer age, the important thing to do is computerization of libraries, especially academic and special libraries, for effective and efficient services. Out of 29 States and 6 Union Territories only 12 states have enacted their public library legislation. Recently Orissa Public Library Act-2002 was passed as 12th Public Library Act in the country without provision for cess. This is the state of affairs even after more than 57 years of Independence" ("Library development in India.")

Changing Information Environment

Kanjilal (1997), states that,

In the context of the emerging Information Society, information organization, dissemination and management is getting more emphasis. Today computers are playing an important role in any organization. The developments in the Internet, multimedia technology, worldwide web etc., have changed the whole scenario of information management. Adoption of wide range of information technologies for information related work calls for redefinition of services, roles and responsibilities of the information professionals. As a result, there is a rising demand for a new kind of information workers accomplished with the skills of various professions. How to generate appropriate manpower for the National Information Infrastructure is the major issue confronting the information profession today. Keeping in view the changes taking place in the society, there is a strong needs to develop adequate number of trained information professionals with specialized skills for the emerging market. But, most of the LIS institutions in India follow traditional curriculum, which are inadequate to meet the demand of the emerging market. This calls for reassessment of strategies for developing competent manpower. The existing curriculum of most of the universities are based on the recommendation of the Ranganathan Committee and the Committee set up by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1978. The recommendations made by these committees where mainly for the Bachelors level courses which are quite outdated and irrelevant in the present day context. In order to restructure the curriculum and bring about a uniform national pattern of LIS education in India , the University Grants Commission (UGC) appointed the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) in 1990.The Report brought out by the CDC was however found to be unsatisfactory and was not adopted by most of the universities stated by Mohod (2003). In view of the latest developments in the information technology and rising demand for the information professionals, there is an urgent need to develop strategies conducive for the National Information Infrastructure.

Students from historically disadvantaged castes and tribes, who come to universities coming from underdeveloped areas, are eager to fulfil their information needs. Orissa, for example, is an underdeveloped state of India that has a population that is 40% historically disadvantaged castes and tribes. They are often unaware of government plans and programmes for them and of the help they can receive from libraries. They may believe that class notes are sufficient to pass examinations. Some may want to study more by visiting the library, but do not get materials at the right time (ARI-1991).

Literature Review and Methodology

A number of studies have been made in the area of information needs of students, teachers, scholars, scientists of various academic institutions and research organisations in India and abroad, including (Ahmad (1983), Gupta (200), Mohod, (2003), Ambedkar Research Institute (1991)Sahoo,(1998), Fizdani (1998), Wilson (1994), Zumer(1994), but this type of research is unusual, since it studies the information needs and requirements of a particular community, i.e. the SC/ST, the most educationally undeveloped and largest disadvantaged community in India. The present study is focused on the information needs and seeking behavior of the SC/ST students, researchers, and faculty, with specific reference to higher education in Orissa. The aim is to assess the information needs of SC and ST communities in higher education, to identify the most useful sources of information, and to obtain suggestions for further improvement of these communities.

A structured questionnaire was administered to elicit both quantitative and qualitative information. The study covers of all the SC/ST students, researchers, and faculty working in the eight universities and twelve autonomous colleges of Orissa. Five hundred questionnaires were distributed. The questionnaires were checked and 324 questionnaires were found fit for analysis. Secondary data has been collected from Annual Reports, College Calendars, Academic Libraries, brochures, syllabi, advertisements, and government departments of Orissa and India. The time period for studied was 1999- 2004.

Data Analysis

The present study was conducted in the academic institutions of the eleven districts of Orissa, covering SC/ST students, researchers, and faculty. Khurda district (the state capital) has three universities and two autonomous colleges. Twenty institutions are represented the study, out of which equal numbers of questionnaire were distributed among SC/ST students, researchers, and faculty of eight universities and twelve Autonomous Colleges.

Table 1: Distribution of Responses

Districts Covered in the Survey	No. of Univ.	No. of Auto. College	Total Insti. Taken	Question Collected SC	%	Question Collected ST	%	TOTAL Responses Collected(%)
Balasore	1	1	2	22	9.91	5	4.90	27(8.33)
Bhadrak	-	1	1	10	4.50	5	4.90	15(4.63)
Cuttack	-	1	1	14	6.31	6	5.88	20(6.17)
Dhenkanal	-	1	1	14	6.31	0	0.00	14(4.32)
Gajapati	-	1	1	3	1.35	9	8.82	12(3.70)
Ganjam	1	1	2	25	11.26	6	5.88	31(9.57)
Jajpur	-	1	1	16	7.21	4	3.92	20(6.17)
Khurda	3	2	5	62	27.93	32	31.37	94(29.01)
Maurabhanja	1	1	2	7	3.15	25	24.51	32(9.88)
Puri	1	1	2	28	12.61	6	5.88	34(10.49)
Sambalpur	1	1	2	21	9.46	4	3.92	25(7.72)
TOTAL	8	12	20	222	100	102	100	324

The table above shows district-wise distribution and collection of data from various institutions in Orissa. Among 324 respondents, the largest majority of the respondents are from Khurda district (29.01%), followed by Puri district (10.49%). More institutions in the study are located in Khurda(3+2) which is also the capital city. A small number of respondents are from Gajapati district(3.70%), which is an underdeveloped educational district. A larger number of SC are from Khurda 62 (27.93%). There are 32 (31.37%) ST respondents. The fewest SC are from Gajapati (1.35%) , no respondents (ST) from Denkanal. Similarly, Korda and Mayurabhanja districts are having more ST respondents (31.37% & 24.51%) than any other district in the state.

Table - 2 : Categorise Distribution of Colleges and Universities						
	College	%	Universities	%	Total	%
SC	126	66.67	94	69.63	220	67.90
ST	63	33.33	41	30.37	104	32.10
	189	100%	135	100%	324	100%

It follows from the above table that from the study population 324 respondents, 67.90% are from SC and 32.10 % from ST, which are half of the SC in both the institutes of Orissa taken for the study.

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TABLE – 3 : Education Level Distribution

	+3 Level /Degree/Dep.	Percent	PG/MPhil/PhD	Percent	Other	Percent
SC	116	58.29	75	81.52	29	87.88
ST	83	41.71	17	18.48	4	12.12
Total	199	100%	92	100%	33	100%

A majority of the respondents are from SC, where 81.52 % are PG/M.Phil/PhD, 58.29% are from +3 /Degree, and 87.88% are other levels of respondents. But in +3 levels the ST percent is very closer to SC (41.71%) and very poor percentage in higher levels.

TABLE – 4: Reading Interest Among Respondents Category-wise

Sources	SC	%	ST	%
Text Book	56	25.45	34	32.69
Popular Magazine	28	12.73	12	11.54
Newspaper	37	16.82	18	17.31
Class Note	40	18.18	28	26.92
Reference Book	35	15.91	10	9.62
Abstract/Index	8	3.64	Nil	#
Fiction	11	5.00	Nil	#
Non-Fiction	2	0.91	1	0.96
Govt. Publications	1	0.45	Nil	#
Other Sources	2	0.91	1	0.96
	220	100.00	104.00	100.00

Reading interest among SC/ST respondents is shown in Table-4. It is found that SC respondents are interested more in textbooks (25.45%), class notes (18.18%), and newspapers (16.82%) and have less interest in government publications (0.45%), non-fiction (0.91%). ST respondents are less interested in government publications, fiction, indexing/abstracting, and non-fiction (0.96%), having more interest in textbooks (32.69%), class notes (26.92%).

Table – 5 : Types of Information Provided in the Libraries

	Universities	Auto. Colleges	Total	Percentages
Sociological	213	101	314	21.73
Economical	136	91	227	15.71
Political	137	75	212	14.67
Educational	220	104	324	22.42
Technical	138	87	225	15.57
Any Other	57	88	143	9.90

Educational and sociological information are more used by the SC and ST communities than any other information in the field of academic institutions. Whereas 22.42% of information are related to education, 21.73% are sociological and 15.71% are economic, among all the six categories of information given in the above table.

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TABLE – 6: Types of Document Provided in the Libraries

	Universities	Auto. Colleges	Total	Percentages
General	161	91	252	22.34
Special	146	75	221	19.59
Commercial	105	55	160	14.18
Entertainment	94	67	161	14.27
R&D	85	39	124	10.99
I &T	98	30	128	11.35
Other	54	28	82	7.27

Table-6, shows that the academic libraries in the study have more general types of material (22.34%), while other major collections are related to particular courses. Research and technical material are less importance. Special material (19.59%), commercial sources (14.18%) and entertainment (14.27%) are found in the collections also.

User awareness of the services provided by the library is essential for effective use of the collection. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of difference services. Information collected in this regard has been analysed and presented in the following table.

TABLE – 7: Service Offered in the Libraries

Services	Universities	Percentages	Auto. Colleges	Percentages
Text Books	104	77.04	167	88.36
References Books	58	42.96	61	32.28
Journals/Magazines	23	17.04	15	7.94
Trans./Repro.	43	31.85	24	12.70
News Clipping	9	6.67	2	1.06
Bibliographic	3	2.22	-	######
Index/Abstract	2	1.48	-	######
CAS/SDI	8	5.93	-	######
CD-ROM/Online	13	9.63	1	0.53
Internet Surfing	16	11.85	5	2.65
Inter Library Loan	-	######	-	######
	135	100.00	189	100.00

The libraries circulate textbooks more than journals and have no interlibrary loan service, with low percentages of other services, including index/abstracting (1.48%), bibliographic(2.22%), CAS/SDI (5.93%-only in higher institute). In comparison to colleges, universities provide fewer textbooks (77.04%) and more in reference (42.96%), journals (42.96%), trans/reprographic (31.85%), news clipping (6.67%), CD-ROM/online (9.63%), Internet searching (11.85%).

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INF.NEEDS/SATISFACTION	YES	%	NO	%	NEUTRAL	%
TABLE – 8: Information Needs Satisfaction						
Present Services Offered	75	9.59	82	45.81	167	16.99
More Qualified Staff Required	98	12.53	35	19.55	191	19.43
More Fund for Collection Dev.	109	13.94	17	9.50	198	20.14
Up-to-date Collection Needed	167	21.36	17	9.50	140	14.24
More Mechanical Aids Required	205	26.21	9	5.03	110	11.19
Users Education Programme	128	16.37	19	10.61	177	18.01

Some respondents were satisfied with present service (9.595), staff (12.53%), collection (13.94%) etc. There was more response on the question of mechanical aid required (26.21%), more funds (26.21%) and collection development (21.36%). Some of the respondents are not satisfied with present service (45.81%) and staffing levels (5.03%), but most respondents were neutral on all questions in this category.

TABLE –9: Purpose of Visit to the Library

SL.No	Purpose	Numbers	Percentages
1	For Study/ Research/Training	64	19.75
2	To Find Book/ Journals	77	23.77
3	To Read Some Entertainment materials	21	6.48
4	To Spend Leisure Time	19	5.86
5	To Borrow/Return Books/Journals	90	27.78
6	Any Other	53	16.36

The highest percentages of users (27.78) visit the library to borrowing books, to find books and journals 77(23.77%), while 19.75% of users use the library to study. The reasons for coming to the library largely depend on free time available or not having various alternative sources of study or research materials.

TABLE –10: Frequency of Visit to the Library

S.No.	Frequency of Visit	No. of Response	Percentages
1	Daily	37	11.42
2	Weekly	83	25.62
3	Quarterly	57	17.59
4	Monthly	39	12.04
5	Occasionally	108	33.33

Respondents stated that they visit the libraries daily (11.42%), weekly (25.62%) and occasionally (33.33%).

Findings

The study reveals that the progress of people from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe in higher education is unsatisfactory. SC shows more progress, and urban areas fare better than rural

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institutions. This area of librarianship is neglected and needs immediate and continuous attention in Orissa . For all these academic libraries, UGC and ICSSR grants, aid, etc., is available for library infrastructure (Ghoukhande and Kumar 2004). There is no separate budget for libraries. Even the existing books in the libraries are not properly catalogued, and are not maintained properly due to lack of funds, manpower, training, expertise, space, and technology. Orissa faces the challenges of actually preparing a plan from scratch, a complete blueprint to develop academic libraries during the coming centuries.

Conclusion and Suggestions

In a disadvantaged rural community, there is a struggle for daily survival. People are deprived of education and information. This deprivation is made worse by a lack of awareness, affordability, motivation, and information access, which leads to greater imbalances among and between regions, castes, and gender, etc. This does not mean that they are not developing, and that facilities provided by the government do not help them in improving their plight. Their access to higher education is made easy by these programmes but could be made more effective by implementing them properly.

Librarians in Orissa can no longer be silent spectators at the IT revolution. Libraries in the industrial and academic environment as well as public libraries in the developed states are making full use of the information technology tools. We, in Orissa, must change with the times and learn from latest trends, adopting sophisticated technology in libraries and information centres in order to keep pace with other states in our country (Parida 1999). All these can be solved by the following measures:

- Proper implementation of the constitutional provisions and special facilities for them without any discrimination in the state. It is time for the state government to take specific steps and positive action for the development of the SC/ST community in the states through national and state level administrative and professional training institute for the SC/ST.
- Implementation of Orissa Public Library Act-2001, establishment of public libraries in each Panchayata with mobile library facilities to the remote areas having more disadvantaged communities.
- Planning for SC/ST education and employment, separate educational institutions in local areas.
- Modern technology must be implemented in the academic libraries in all level.

The library has a very important role to play in education. Without a good library, education cannot attain its desired objective (Seth 1992). Each educational institution should have a library with adequate funds, infrastructure, collections, and technology. In Orissa, even though we do not have electronic information or information technologies in the academic libraries yet, some private and government organizations, institutions, and agencies are acquiring computer applications for their day-to-day information needs. Neighboring states like Andrapradesh, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh are more advanced in using electronic resources in their academic libraries. Recently, the government of Orissa highlighted to use of IT in its governance and also implemented the Right to Information Act on 12 October 2005, for more transparency and convenience, which is a milestone for the overall development of the state. It is time for cooperation among libraries in Orissa's as well as India's academic institutions, which will help students to access library information in order to prepare themselves for the challenges that they will face in the forthcoming 21st century.

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