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Perceptions of Buddhist Monks towards Monastic Library: A case study of Dali Monastery, Darjeeling

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Abstract: *This paper examined the Buddhist monks' attitudes toward monastic library and their reading preferences. These monks are attached with the Dali Monastery of Darjeeling. 62 residential and trainee monks participated in the survey. All the monks are male. Survey method has been adopted for the present study. A structured questionnaire was prepared and circulated among the monks. 80 questionnaires were distributed and among them 62 filled-in questionnaires were received with response rate of 77.5%. The researcher personally visited the monastery to collect data and get a chance to talk with the monks and closely observe the resources and facilities. Hence the findings are based on personal experience. Based on the findings the study suggested some recommendations for the improvement of monastic library and also calls for the co-ordinated efforts of all stakeholders for the development of this treasure house of knowledge.*

Keywords: Buddhist Monastery, Monastic Education, Monastic Library, Darjeeling Hill, Buddhist Monks, Opinion of Buddhist Monks.

1. Introduction

Buddhist education system came into existence in the 5th century BC. It occupies a significant place in the history of education in ancient India for training men in morality and mental culture leading to wisdom and salvation. It emerged as a reaction to Vedic or Brahmanic ritualism. Ancient education system involved sages and scholars who are imparted education orally, but after the development of letters, it took the form of writing. Palm leaves and barks of trees were used for education, and this in turn helped to spread the written literature. Monasteries, Temples and community centers often took the role of schools. The primary goal of

Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, the Buddhist wisdom was called —Anuttara-Samyak-Sambhodi meaning the perfect ultimate wisdom. It is practiced through informal relationship between the master and the disciples. (Mookerji, 1947). The same system is prevalent in many parts of our country especially in the hilly regions. There is number of monasteries imparting such education in a systematic manner. Buddhist Monks ranging from small ages coming from various parts of the country are being educated in these monasteries. As formal institutions like school, colleges, the monasteries used to have library which is use by monks for their religious and academic pursuit. This unique library is called '*perjo khang*' (in Tibetan language). It is quite interesting to delve into the attitude of Buddhist monks towards their monastic libraries which is indispensable for the master and the taught alike.

2. Dali Monastery: A short Profile

The district of Darjeeling fondly called “Queen of the Hills” has its own glory as a very beautiful hill station in India having rich biodiversity of international importance lies between 26.31’ and 27.13’ North Latitude and between 87.59’ and 88.53’ east Longitude. Its total area is 11, 99.7 square miles. In shape, the district is an irregular triangle. The district is located in the northern most part of West Bengal and is bordered by Sikkim in North, Bhutan in East, Nepal in West and the districts of Jalpaiguri and Purnea (Bihar) in South. The district consists of a portion of outlying hills of the lower Himalayas and a stretch of territory lying along the base of the hills known as Terai. The altitude ranges from 300 feet (Terai) to 12,000 feet in the hills. (O’Malley, 1907).

The hill city of Darjeeling brags of an interesting cultural and religious diversity. People of several religions and cultures live here in peace and harmony. After Hinduism, Buddhism is the religion most popularly followed here. The architecture, culture, cuisines, costumes of Darjeeling reflects Buddhist influence to quite an extent. Darjeeling has a long association with this religion and this is evident in the large number of Buddhist monasteries established there. Druk Thupten Sangag Choling Monastery, more popularly referred as the Dali Monastery or Dali Gomba, is located at a distance of 5 km from the main town of Darjeeling. Built in 1971 by Kyabje Thuksey Rinpoche, the monastery is known for preserving the age old culture and tradition of the Tibetan Monks. It is home to around 260 monks who came down from the Himalayan region to make Darjeeling their home. This monastery is the headquarters of

Drukchen Rimpoche XII, the supreme head of the Kargyupa lineage. Present Head of the Monastery is H. E. Drukpa Thuksey, a Rinpoche of Kargyupa Sect of Buddhism. In the year 1993, Dalai Lama had paid a three day visit to the Dali Monastery to spread the words and teachings of Buddha and the Tibetan culture. Every morning religious prayers take place in the main hall of the monastery. This is one of the biggest monasteries in Darjeeling. There are two libraries in the premises of Dali Monastery –one is **Druk-Gar Library** which is more religious in nature and another one is **Pema Karpo Reading Room** which is almost academic in nature.

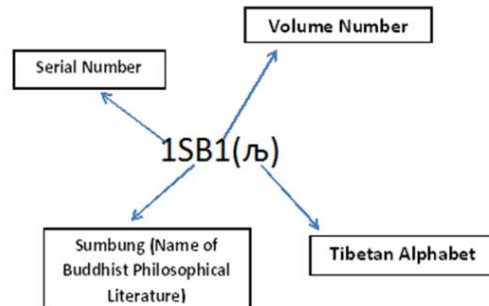
Druk-Gar Library: The library is situated at the main premises of the Monastery. It was established in the year 1979. It is housed in a single room. There is one prayer area inside the library. One reading space is there with single table and attached chairs. One close display cabinet is present besides the chair of the Librarian in charge. The book racks are all closed and attached with the wall. The library holds collections mainly Buddhist religious books (*'Pecha'* in Tibetan Language) and most of the books are xylographs. The common books found are the Lamaic encyclopaedias, *'Kan-gyur'* and *'Tengyur'*. There are also a few manuscripts. The books are mainly of philosophical literature.

Pema Karpo Reading Room: The reading room cum library is located just next floor or beneath the main library. It was established in the year 2016. It is also housed in a single big room. The book racks are all open racks. There is periodical display rack at left corner of the library. Six reading tables with four chairs in each table are available to the readers to study the library resources. There is seating arrangement for small monks with desk and floor mate at the right side corner of the library. One small audio-visual room is inside the library for demonstrating mainly religious and philosophical depictions and audios.

Library Collections: The Druk-Gar Library is Buddhist and Philosophical in nature. The shelves of which are filled with books on Buddhism and philosophical acts of life. The number ranges from 8000 – 10000 collections. The total collections of Pema Karpo Reading Room range from 4000- 5000 books. The collection comprises Buddhist literatures, English Literatures, Nepali Literatures, Social science, Environmental science, Bengali literatures. Most of the collections are based on Curriculum of the study taught at the monastic school. The library has some collections of CDs and DVDs and the number is not more than 30.

Arrangement and Access: Books are arranged according to broad subject wise based on four sect of Buddhism namely Ningma Sect, Sakya Sect, Kargyupa Sect, and Gyulok Sect. In-

house classification system is followed to classify the books. No catalogue is followed till now. Access is open to the shelves.



Classification Number Followed

Library Membership: The membership mainly comprises the residential Buddhist Monks of the Monastery. Some time visitors are allowed to the library with permission from the authority. The trainee monks are mainly using the Pema Karpo Reading Room for their curriculum study.

Services: The library provides only the reading and reference service to its members. Lending service is restricted but the service in special permission is available to some senior residential monks for lending one or two books within the Monastery premises. No other service is provided by the library.

3. Objective of the study

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To examine current status of library facilities available in Dali monastery
2. To ascertain the frequency of use of the library's collection by the Buddhist Monks
3. To find out the purpose of such use
4. To know the satisfaction level of user
5. To identify problems encountered in the use of the library
6. To make out ways to improve the library's efficiency

4. Methodology

The primary purpose of the study was to assess the opinion of Buddhist monks towards the library attached with the Dali Monastery of Darjeeling. Survey method has been adopted for the present study. A structured questionnaire was prepared and circulated among the monks. 80 questionnaires were distributed and among them 62 were received with response rate of 77.5%. The researcher personally visited the monastery to collect data and get a chance to talk with the monks available in the monastery and closely observe the resources and facilities. All the monks are male. Hence the findings are based on personal experience.

5. Literature Review

Laloo and Sumnyan (2017) conducted a study titled ‘collection development in Tawang monastery libraries’ provides an enumerative account of collection development in the Tawang monastery libraries (especially Parkhang library). The study highlights the shortcomings like shortage in staff and space which need to be addressed at the earliest and also suggest adopting proper preservation policy to preserve the collections especially Kanjur and Tanjur religious texts which is vital knowledge resources. Chhetri (2014) had conducted a comprehensive study titled ‘A study of the Buddhist Monastic Libraries in the hilly region of Darjeeling district’ provides the present situation of twenty four monastic libraries in the hilly areas of Darjeeling district in respect of their histories, physical facilities, collections, services etc. The study also covered the opinion of users and non-users of the libraries. Based on the findings the study suggested some recommendations for the improvement of the libraries.

6. Result and discussion

Some of the findings of the study are discussed below;

Table-1 Age-wise distribution of the respondents

Age groups	No. of users	% of users
6-10 yrs.	3	4.83%
10-20 yrs.	17	27.41%
20-30 yrs.	10	16.12%
30-40 yrs.	13	20.9%
40-50 yrs.	7	11.29%

50-60 yrs.	6	9.67%
60-70 yrs.	3	4.83%
70-80 yrs.	2	3.22%
80 yrs. and above	1	1.61%

The above table- 1 reveals the age of monks surveyed and it shows 3(4.83%) are age between 6-10 yrs, 17(27.41%) are age between 10-20 yrs, 10(16.12%) are age between 20-30 yrs, 13(20.9%) are age between 30-40 yrs, 7(11.29%) are age between 40-50 yrs, 6(9.67%) are age between 50-60 yrs, 3(4.83%) are age between 60-70 yrs, 2(3.22%) are age between 70-80 yrs, and only 1(1.61%) is above 80 yrs of age.

Table-2 Educational status of the respondents

Qualification	Number of users	% of users
Graduate (Acharya)	17	27.41%
Class VIII Passed	25	40.33%
Class V - VIII	11	17.74%
Below Class V	9	14.52%

Table-2 gives report on educational status of the respondents. Figures in table shows that 17(27.41%) monks have graduate degrees also called Acharya in Monastic education system, 25(40.33%) monks are having class eight passed certificate from the monastic school, 11(17.74%) monks are studying in class V - VIII, and 9(14.52%) monks are studying in class up to V in the monastic school.

Table-3 Frequency of using the library

Frequency	Number of users	% of users
Daily	10	16.12%
Once in a week	9	14.52%
Twice in a week	6	9.67%
Once in two week	13	20.9%

Once in a month	8	12.91%
Once in six month	6	9.67%
Once in a year	7	11.29%
Never	3	4.83%

The table-3 discloses the frequency of using the library by monks. Facts indicates that 10(16.12%) monks respond to use the library daily, 9(14.52%) monks said to go to library once in a week, 6(9.67%) use the library twice in a week, 13(20.9%) visit the library once in a two weeks, 8(12.91%) use the library once in a month, 6(9.67%) respond to visit library once in a six months, 7(11.29%) use the library once in a year, while 3(4.83%) monks claims that they never visit the library for any purposes.

Table-4 Duration of visiting the library

Time Duration	Number of users	% of users
Less than 15 mts	22	35.49%
15 - 30 mt	23	37.09%
30 mts - 1 hr	9	14.52%
1hr – 2 hrs	5	8.07%
2 hrs and above	3	4.83%

The table 4 shows respondents' duration of visit to the library. 22(35.49%) monks responded that they remain in the library for less than 15 minutes, 23(37.09%) respondents spend their time in the library in between 15 - 30 minutes, 9(14.52%) monks stay in the library in between 30 mts - 1 hour, 5(8.07%) monks remain in the library in between 1 hrs – 2 hrs while only 3(4.83%) monks responded that they use the library for more than 2 hours.

Table-5 Time of visiting the library

Time of visiting the library	No. of users	% of users
Intervals/Break	14	22.58%
Off Period	7	11.29%
Free Time	41	66.13%

Others	-	-
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The above table-5 shows the monks time of visiting the library, and the facts indicates that majority of them 41(66.13%) do visit the library in free time, 14(22.58%) monks do visit the library in intervals or breaks time, while 7(11.29%) do visit the library in off periods. This indicates that the library is getting more users presence in free time.

Table-6 Purpose of using the library

Purposes	No. of users	% of users
Read Newspaper / Magazines / Periodicals	16	25.80%
Home issue	10	16.12%
Books related to curriculum	15	24.19%
Books related to philosophical literature	32	51.61%
Using reference tools	13	20.9%
Pass time reading – story, essays etc.	18	29.03%
Preparation for exam	15	24.19%
For cultivation of knowledge	21	33.87%
Others (specify).....	-	-

(Multiple choice question)

It is observed from the above table that, 16(25.80%) monks responded that they look around to the library to read newspapers, magazines and periodicals available in the library. 10(16.12%) monks do visit the library for home issue, 15(24.19%) do visit the library for book related to the monastic school curriculum, 32(51.61%) do visit the library for books related to philosophical literature, 13(20.9%) do visit the library for using reference tools, 18(29.03%) opt for pass time reading like story, essays etc., 15(24.19%) entered the library for preparation of examinations, and 21(33.87%) approach the library for cultivation of knowledge embodied in the library resources.

Table-7 Meeting required information by the library

Meeting information	Number of users	% of users
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Very Often	2	3.22%
Often	6	9.67%
Once a while	19	30.65%
Seldom	20	32.26%
Never	15	24.19%

Table 7 shows the meeting of information required by the monks, only 2(3.22%) respondent state that they often get their required information from the library, while 6(9.67%) monks reveal that they get their required information very often from the library. Likewise 19(30.65%) respondents find required information once in a while, 20(32.26%) say that they seldom get their required information and 15(24.19%) monks respond that they never get their required information from the library.

Table-8 Opinion about library collection

Library Collection	Number of users	% of users
Poor	7	11.29%
Adequate	20	32.26%
Good	25	40.33%
Very Good	10	16.12%

The above table 8 shows that 7(11.29%) monks report that the collection of the libraries is poor, 20(32.26%) monks say that the collection is adequate, 25(40.33%) monks claim that it is good and 10(16.12%) monks recount the library collection as very good.

Table-9 Opinion on library facilities and services

Library facilities and services	Number of users	% of users
Very Satisfactory	10	16.12%
Satisfactory	37	59.69%
Not Satisfactory	15	24.19%

The monks were asked to give their opinion about library facilities and overall services and the facts available in table 9 indicates 10(16.12%) state that they are very satisfied with the facilities and various services provided by the library. Likewise 37(59.69%) monks express the facilities and services provided by the library are at the level of satisfaction while 15(24.19%) respondents find the collection as not satisfactory.

7. Suggestion for improvement of the Library

Location of the libraries within the Monastery premises is not up to the mark. There is lack of space, sanitation facility in the library. So proper planning is required to provide adequate physical facilities.

The proper collection development policy should be formulated and be followed in the library. Procurement of more books covering all other religions should be initiated.

There is lack of preservation of collections in the library. So, keeping in mind the weather of the place proper preservation policy should be followed to preserve the treasure of knowledge.

Indigenous system of classification is followed in the library. No cataloguing is followed to catalogue the documents. So, appropriate classification and catalogue system should be introduced to organize the collections to provide effective library services.

There is lack of manpower in the library. Only one retired monk assisted by other three monks is looking after the library since many years without any professional training. So more staff should be employed and train them with library techniques and tools.

Finance is not adequate. It is totally depend upon the Monastery authority and for the development of the library quantum of finance should be increased considering the rising cost of reading materials and increasing demand of services.

Lending of books is restricted to single book for a particular user. So, proper lending facility with more books to every user should be introduced to attract users into the library.

The library should occasionally arrange user's education, library orientation programs to help users to use the library effectively. Trainee monks should especially be trained to use the library.

It is observed that the computer is not yet introduced in the library. So computerization of the library should be immediately initiated by the Monastery Authority to facilitate smooth

functioning of libraries according to changing need of the day. Internet facilities should also be introduced in the library.

8. Conclusions

A monastic library is a special library which holds a special collection of literature of a particular subject or group of subjects. The library especially meant for residential monks. Though, users from outside are allowed sometime with permission from the authority. The library situated inside the premises of the Dali Monastery is special rather monumental and providing services since last many years. The role played by the monastic library in imparting monastic education as well as lifelong reading services is very crucial to the residential monks, teacher and taught. Still it has to go many miles with more effective services. The services have to be redesigned using modern day ICT technologies to make them more effective and responsive to the actual need of the users. So, sincere efforts from all stakeholders should be made to provide adequate facilities to the library which ultimately helps the library to provide efficient and effective services to its user community.

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