

## Public Libraries in Tripura

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Provides an overview of the land and the people. Describes development of public libraries in historical perspective. Gives library structure. Describes financial resources, collections, services and qualifications of library personnel. Points out the problems faced by public libraries.

### 0 INTRODUCTION

Formerly, a princely state of great antiquity, Tripura is a tiny and hilly state in India's north-eastern corner and lies between Assam and Bangladesh.

It is difficult to ascertain about the origin of the name of Tripura. Tradition has it that the name 'Tripura' originated from an ancient king named Tripur. Apart from this traditional view, there is another opinion which states that Tripura has been coined from two tripuri words – *tui* and *pra*. In Tripuri 'tui' means water and 'pra' means near, *i.e.*, a country adjacent to marshy lands and sea, etc. Some people believe that the name Tripura is derived from *Tri* (three) and *pura* (cities/town); a land having three cities or town. According to the official records of the state, Rajmata, a scion of the lunar dynasty of the Mahabharata moved eastward along the course of the Ganges and with Kapil Muni's blessings established a small kingdom called Tribeg in South-east Assam. From Tribeg, the dynasty came to the Baraka valley in modern Cachar; from Cachar it migrated to the Gomati valley in Tripura sometime during the eighth century AD. Between the period from 1240 to 1757 Tripura was attacked and invaded several times by the Afghans, Turks, Pathans and Mughals. This was followed by a period of peace and prosperity during the British period (1757-1947) in India. The Britishers treated it as a native state and called it Hill Tipperah.

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This native state merged with the Indian Union on 15th October, 1949. It became a Union Territory on November 1, 1956 and became a full fledged state on 21st January, 1972 and is divided into three (3) districts - North Tripura, West Tripura and South Tripura with their respective headquarters at Kailashahar, Agartala and Udaipur. Agartala, the capital of the state is situated on the right bank of the river Haora.

## 1 DEVELOPMENT IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The first library in Tripura was started in 1897 during the reign of Maharaja Bir Chandra Manikya, a versatile genius, an able administrator, a social reformer, an artist, a poet and a writer, in one room of the royal palace. However, due to illness and premature death, he could not enrich the library.

It was Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya, who erected a separate library building a little away from the palace and opened it for the general public also. However, the readers were mostly ministers, officers and members of the royal family. Though formally the public was not forbidden by any royal order to use the library, still the general public would hesitate to go inside the palace for reading. Maharaja Radha Kishore was intelligent enough to realize this, and thus he shifted the library elsewhere.

The reign of Birendra Kishore was short and stormy. The first World War occurred during his reign, and Tripura was affected by this war, and therefore he could not do much for the library.

The reign of Bir Bikram was also short and stormy. The struggle for independence and the Second World War were the main events of this period. Tripura was involved in these happenings. He was a widely travelled man. He was the first king to tour Europe. He visited Europe twice and collected many valuable books from the European countries and these enriched the library.

Independence was preceded and followed by a period of turmoil. Maharaja Bir Bikram died in May, 1947. The next king was too young to rule. On his behalf, his mother Kanchan Prava Devi ruled. Immigration of thousands of refugees on one hand and threat of the Muslim League to annex Tripura on the other worsened the situation. The crisis was so terrible that the Queen alongwith her young son had to leave Tripura and take shelter at Shillong.

It was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who saved Tripura by sending the Indian Army. The native state of Tripura merged with the Indian Union in 1949. Obviously this period was not at all congenial for the development of libraries.

During the First Five Year Plan (1951-56), in 1953 the public library at Agartala named after Maharaja Bir Chandra was taken over by the Education Department, Government of Tripura. Truly speaking the development of public library services in Tripura started after 1953. Nine subdivisional libraries at the respective subdivisional headquarters were established in 1953.

The Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961) added a new dimension to the Tripura public library system. In late 1956, a mobile library was introduced and for distribution and recollection of books as many as 55 delivery centres were established covering 9 blocks.

From the point of view of the library development, the Third Five Year Plan (1961-66), was a period of consolidation. It was not a period of expansion. The main contribution of this period was recruitment and training of library personnel.

The fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74), again saw expansion in the library system. The library services started reaching down to the block levels. At this stage two libraries at block level were opened.

During the Fifth Year Plan (1974-79), expansion was made at the rural level. Two more libraries were opened at the block levels.

During the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85), five more block level libraries were established.

During the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90), the library services reached down to the village level. The village libraries were opened, one at Paharpur and the other at Rajnagar in Belonia subdivision.

## 2 LIBRARY STRUCTURE

The library structure of Tripura can be categorised as under:

- Type I – State Central Library
- Type II – District libraries
- Type III – Subdivisional libraries
- Type IV – Block Level libraries
- Type V – Rural libraries

*Table 1* shows the strength of different types of libraries in the state:

Table 1

*Types of Library*

Types	No of Libraries
I State Central Library	1
II District Libraries	3
III Sub-Divisional Libraries	6
IV Block Level Libraries	9
V Rural Libraries	2
	21

*Type I:* State Central Library falls in this category. This Library controls all the public libraries in the state. The library is equipped with trained and qualified library personnel. It acquires books and other materials centrally and distributes them to the district, subdivisional, block and rural libraries in the state.

*Type II:* This type of library includes 3 district libraries in 3 districts of the state. These libraries have been established with a view to decentralize work as well as to ensure speedy service to the readers. These libraries have hardly any role in selecting books and other reading materials according to the needs and choice of their readers.

These libraries are rendering two major services:

- (1) Free circulation for limited period; and
- (2) Controlling consultation of reference collection within the four walls of the library.

*Type III:* This type of library includes various subdivisional libraries in the state. Books and other materials are delivered from the State Central Library. Services provided are the same as in case of District Libraries.

*Type IV:* This type of library includes block level libraries in the state. They are poorly organized and book strength is poor. They do not provide any reference service.

*Type V:* This type includes rural libraries in the state. Book strength consists of a few shelves for circulation. Staff provided in most cases not professionally trained.

## 2 FINANCIAL RESOURCES

There are different sources of public library revenue such as subscription, endowments and private benefactions, library rates, library taxes, government grants, gifts, fees and fines. But in Tripura, the main sources of finance are:

- (i) Government grant; and
- (ii) Grant from Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation.

Table 2 and 3 show the total income and expenditure of public libraries in Tripura for six years.

Table 2

*Income*

Income	Financial Year					
	1984-85 Rs	1985-86 Rs	1986-87 Rs	1987-88 Rs	1988-89 Rs	1989-90 Rs
Grant (Govt) Both Plan and Non-plan	11,22,500	11,47,500	16,56,000	26,37,050	30,94,412	31,29,200

Table 3

*Expenditure*

Particulars	Financial Year					
	1984-85 Rs	1985-86 Rs	1986-87 Rs	1987-88 Rs	1988-89 Rs	1989-90 Rs
1 Purchase of books and journals	1,10,000	1,17,500	1,15,000	1,30,000	1,35,000	1,20,000
2 Staff salaries and wages	10,00,000	10,20,000	15,30,000	25,00,000	29,50,912	30,00,000
3 Miscell- aneous	12,500	10,000	10,420	7,050	8,500	9,200
Total	11,22,500	11,47,500	16,56,000	26,37,050	30,94,412	31,29,200

An analysis of *Tables 2 and 3* reveals that the government grant is not always the same over the different financial years. It also reveals that a lion share of government grants is spent on meeting staff salary and wages. A small portion is available for purchase of books and journals and meeting other expenses. As such, it can be derived that the overall development of public library services in the state is hampered due to lack of adequate funds. Further, taking into consideration the expenditure on library services for financial year 1989-90 as Rs 31,29,200, and the population of Tripura according to 1981 census as 20,60,189, it can be assumed that the per capita expenditure for library services in Tripura is Rs 1.50

### 3 LIBRARY COLLECTION

Libraries are generally holding different types of reading material such as reference aids, children literature, current and standard fictions, non-fictions, periodicals, pamphlets, recordings, films and documents etc. *Table 4* shows the strength of books and journals in different libraries of the state:

Table 4

*Books and Journal Strength*

Sl No	Name of the Library	Books	Journals
1	State Central Library	1,15,927	35
2	Kailashahar Public Library	25,473	22
3	Udaipur Public Library	27,376	25
4	Dharmanagar Public Library	16,827	20
5	Kamalpur Public Library	10,884	15
6	Amarpur Public Library	7,279	15
7	Belonia Public Library	12,766	19
8	Sabroom Public Library	10,767	18
9	Khowai Public Library	12,653	15
10	Sanamura Public Library	14,479	20

An analysis of the *Table 4* reveals that except 6 libraries all other libraries have poor book strength. The distribution of books from the State Central Library is not on an uniform pattern. This has no relationship with the rate of literacy, population and demands of the localities.

### 4 LIBRARY SERVICES

The services that are rendered by the different types of libraries in the state can be categorised as follows:

- (a) Circulation for 14 days (lending section); and  
 (b) Service of reference collection, newspaper and periodicals for use within the library's four walls.

## 5 LIBRARY PERSONNEL

All the employees under public library service in Tripura are the employees of the Education department and consequently the recruitment of staff and expansion of library service are within the jurisdiction of Education department. Table 5 shows the classification of professional posts:

Table 5

*Designation, Qualifications and Status*

Designation	Educational Qualifications	Status
1 Head Librarian	Bachelor degree in any branch and professional degree or diploma in librarianship and three years of active service on the post of senior librarian.	Class II gazetted post
2 Senior Librarian	Bachelor degree in any branch and professional degree or diploma in librarianship and 5 years experience as librarian	Class II gazetted post
3 Librarian	Bachelor degree in any branch and professional degree/diploma in librarianship from any recognized university	Class III non-gazetted post

Table 6

*Classification of Semi-Professional Assistant Post*

Designation	Educational Qualifications	Status
1 Library Assistant	Madhyamik/HS passed	Class III non-gazetted
2 Sorter	Class VIII standard	-do-

## 6 CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis clearly reveals that public library services of Tripura at present, are confronted with many problems such as inadequate funds, defective acquisition policy, inability to convert the potential readers into actual readers, failure to cover the entire village population, lack of proper physical facilities and shortages of trained staff etc. To overcome these problems and to put the library services on sound footings, it is essential that library legislation is enacted.