

EXPLORING THE CURRENT STATUS OF A PRISON LIBRARY: A CASE STUDY OF NAOGAON DISTRICT PRISON LIBRARY

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the present condition of Naogaon district prison library. This is not a professionally managed library yet; its amenities and services are still lacking. This library is working to support the educational facilities in prison. A structured questionnaire was distributed to the library. The survey data were collected from 24 prisoners and prison staff. The primary data were also collected from prison authority and prisoners through direct interview. The paper identified the major problems of the prison library and included some recommendations.

Keyword: Prison library, Problems of prison libraries, Naogaon district, Bangladesh.

Introduction

Bangladesh prison is an institution for rectification of citizens who are involved in crime and illegal activities. According to section 3(1) of the prison Act 1984, prison means any jail or place used permanently or temporarily under the general or special orders of government for the detention of prisoners and includes all lands and buildings appurtenant thereto. After the arrival of the East India Company in the sub-continent, prison system became visible. In 1818, the Bengal Regulatory Rules were issued for the detention of the state prisoners. After independence in 1971, the independent Bangladesh Jail started with four central jails, 13 district jails and 43 sub-jails. At present, there are 13 central jails and 55 district jails under Bangladesh jail. Although the capacity of total prison in Bangladesh was 40,664, till 2019 there were 94,891 prisoners (“Bangladesh Jail,” 2019). “Keep safe; show the path of light” Bangladesh prison has been providing their service with this slogan. Bangladesh jail’s mission is to make prisoners rehabilitated in society as good citizens. Reading

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has played an important role for rehabilitating these prisoners. Library in prison flourished the culture and became a method of self-empowerment for the prisoners.

Objective

This study is carried out to determine the current status of Naogaon district prison library. Especially the study was to-

- To identify the present condition of Naogaon district prison library.
- Examine the relationship of prison library with other libraries
- Find out the problems of Naogaon district prison library.
- Try to overwhelm the problem giving recommendations.

Literature Review

Prison management in the sub-continent is not able to move far beyond colonization. Here rehabilitation is fictitious. Most of the prison libraries in sub-continent are just about a room without amenities and service. A correctional library is a library that is a fraction of the operational units built within a prison or a custody center. Its services and functions are decorated to serve the inmate's right to use to information and opportunities for own-learning, since many of them are cut off from the external world. The prison library also functions as a social place i.e., a place for the inmates to interrelate with the prison staff and get together with their family members (Prytherch, 2005). In India, there is no good history of prison and prison library except Tihar jail. Though good attempts were made in Tihar jail at the time when Mr. Kiran Bedi was the Inspector General of the jail during 1993-1995, a branch of Delhi Public Library was opened in the jail and prisoners were provided library service (Dhiman & Sharma, 2018). As an Asian country in Japan no professional librarian is found in prison library. Their reading materials are spread in the cell isolated. Their resource is not bad but service is not sorted and clean. Kenichi Nakane visited seven correctional facilities. None of the seven facilities has a functioning library or professional library staff. The reading materials provided by the institution are decentralized and located in many different areas, including work areas, living units, and so called "library work areas" (Nakane & Noguchi, 2011). Many prison libraries globally report that their collection consists mainly of donated items (Dungey, 2008; Sambo, Usman, & Rabiou, 2017). (Shirley, 2006) also agreed that many prison libraries do not meet the standard minimum staffing as specified by the American Library Association (ALA).

On the other hand, the advanced countries give their best priority to prison library to rehabilitate criminals. Many more organizations are working on this issue. Most of the developed countries have linked their public library with the prison library. They

also have a professional librarian. In England, the funding for prison libraries almost doubled between 2005 and 2008. In France, prison libraries are still working in progress and their prison administration had declared that in 2008-2010 transforming prison libraries would be a priority. A UK-based organization, the Reading Agency, is working for reading to a better life. They work in prison across the UK. They directed their one of the projects “Six Book Challenge” and another is “World Book Night”. They have successfully run their projects. A prisoner in Hmp Pentonville said “In your cell reading it’s like meditation. You can shut off the rest of the world, your problems, and just focus”. Neck Walmsley, head of the corruption prevention and counter terrorism at Pentenville said “The Six Book Challenge encourage the prisoner to come into our library and use the facilities and get back into education. Not only does it assist prisoners whilst they are in, but that when they leave, it has positive effect on an ex- prisoners ability to remain an ex-prisoner and not re-offend(“Reading Agency,” 2019).

In Bangladesh, many organizations such as Pally Shohayok Foundation (PSF), BLAST and Human Right Commission, Government Ayen Shhaiyota are working for prisoners’ development. Naogaon district prison library received a very little amount of donation. In most cases no Asian country has any professional librarian working in the prison. But very recently in India some prison libraries appoint library professionals. The library should be operated by the library professionals, but the greater part of the prison libraries is operated by the non-library professionals. In Tamil Nadu out of nine prison libraries, only one library is maintained by the library professional. Books are also borrowed from the District library on loan basis. A prisoner may also obtain books during consultation or by post subject to censorship and they may keep three books at a time (Tamilmani, 2014). Most of the prison libraries in Nigeria and many African nations have not really performed well in terms of library services. In Naogaon district prison, a prisoner provides the library services. Library resources are dated and are too few in comparison to prisoner number. There is no information in citizen charter about library use in Naogaon District Jail. Censorship is a harsh reality in prison library. Here, security is the first concern whereas reading is considered as a privilege.

Methodology

The research designs consisted of questionnaire, observation and interviews with prison authority and prisoners. A number of personal visits and face to face interviews were carried out. Also, a close-ended questionnaire is used to collect data from jailors and prisoners.

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers distributed forty (40) copies of the questionnaire to the respondents in the respective library and copies of questionnaire were collected immediately. Out of the 40 copies of the questionnaire administered twenty-four (24) copies of the questionnaires were returned completely filled and used for the data analysis. This represents 60% return rate. Two separate questionnaires were made. One questionnaire made for prison staff and another for inmates. A brief interview was required to collect information during data collection. Therefore, simple random sampling method was applied. All inmates of Naogaon District Jail were very interested to give their opinions. In several cases they wanted time to give in-depth interview.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the field were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of simple percentage and frequency count. Data collected for the study were coded using SPSS Version 22.0.

Demographic Variables

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-29 years	14	42.4 %
30-39 years	12	36.4 %
40-49 years	7	21.2 %
Total	33	100 %
Gender		
Male	30	90.9 %
Female	03	9.1 %
Total	33	100 %
Status		
Jail Super	1	3.0 %
Jailor	1	3.0 %
Deputy Jailor	1	3.0 %
Jail Staff	1	3.0 %
Koyade	17	51.5 %
Hazoti	12	36.4 %
Total	33	100 %
Education Qualification		

Primary	13	39.4 %
Secondary	7	21.2 %
Higher secondary	5	15.2 %
Degree	3	9.1 %
Masters	5	15.2 %
Total	33	100 %

Limitations of the study

Lack of adequate information on prison library is the main obstacle for this work. Another major problem for this study is the strict security policy to enter into prison library for visiting purpose. It includes only one district jail of Bangladesh. Therefore, this study provides a direction for further research on prison library of Bangladesh.

Prison library and its need

Prison has four major purposes. These purposes are retribution, incapacitation, deterrence and rehabilitation. Deterrence means the prevention of future crime. Rehabilitation refers to activities designed to change criminals into law abiding citizen (Rahman & Ali, 2018). Dike (2002) and Lehmann & Locke (2005) noted, the prisoners need spiritual information materials to attain emotional stability and better life style. The prison library is a substitute for the library at home (Kaiser, 1992). Now the question arises – How the prison library works for deterrence and rehabilitation? In our own view prison library can do many more, such as:

- Prisoner can use library resources for their own training work which are related to prison programme.
- A library operated by a professional can give mental support by giving them a good book.
- At the time of loneliness, the criminals feel remorse. In that case they need a place where they can control their increased emotion. Religious and motivational book awaken their compunction.
- Most of the criminals come from education less environment. Librarian could give their education return. Prison library also helps them who dropped the study life.
- It is possible to increase awareness in prison by displaying various audio-visual materials through the library. For example, sexually transmitted diseases, infectious diseases, the horror of criminal life and a motion picture of lovely family can encourage a criminal to return them to a beautiful life.

- Last of all an individual library card can be their new identity.

Almost a prison library can help to reduce recidivism and make family bounds through reading in a nice environment. Toby Lafferty, founder of book inside said-sixty percent of prisoners go back if they don't get an education in prison.

Prison Library of Bangladesh: In Bangladesh, there are 13 central jails and 55 district jails. In every prison, there is a library to provide books, newspapers and journals for usage by the prisoners. No prison library can borrow books from outside. These libraries contain both English and Bengali books. All newspapers and journals are bound to tight censorship. All prisoners can purchase book or newspaper with their own cost by the special permission of jail authority. In Bangladesh there is no professional librarian in prison library. In most cases inmates who are convicted to life sentence, are providing library services. They are known as "Writer". The scenario of libraries in prison is not so different, only their collections are different.

Current status of Naogaon district prison library

Naogaon District Jail

There is one district jail in each and every district besides Bangladesh central jail In Bangladesh. Naogaon District Jail is one of them. Its total area is 12.50 acre. There are 9 acres of land inside the prison and 3.50 acres is covered outside area.

Capacity of Naogaon District Jail

Naogaon District Jail has accommodation for 586 prisoners. But in total 1240 prisoners live in this prison. Among them 231 prisoners are under trail. Table I shows the land and holding capacity of the Naogaon District Jail.

Table I: Land and holding capacity of the district jail

Amount of land		
Inside	Outside	Total
09.00 acre	3.50 acre	12.50 acre
Allowed holding Capacity		
Male	Female	Total
565	22	587

Educational facility in Naogaon District Jail

Education is human fundamental need. Although not all human right is applied equally in prison. However, education is well directed in prison as a part of rehabilitation. Prison gives opportunities of education such as work oriented

education, vocational training, primary education, mass education, pre-primary education for female prisoners' children. Naogaon prison also helps regular study, higher education and dropped out students who upgrade their education qualification. Naogaon District Jail believes education can reduce crime. But they can't provide accurate data, how many students get their success from prison. Table II shows the education facility of Naogaon District Jail.

Table II: provided education facilities of Naogaon District Jail

Preprimary education	Primary education	Mass education	Work oriented education	General education
yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Naogaon district prison library

Naogaon district is an administrative region of the north western part of Rajshahi division of Bangladesh. It is the central part of Barendra region with an area of about 3435.67 square kilometers ("Naogaon District," 2019). At the heart of Naogaon district sadar on the bank of little Jamuna river, was established as a sub jail in the British period at 1887. Later on 5th June 2004, the overall activities of the new Naogaon District Jail started its journey with the transfer of prisoners from the old prison. Naogaon district prison is well known for its discipline and work for reforming. But overcrowding is a big problem here like all the prison over the country. From 2004 here is a library. We highlighted the library services offered by Naogaon district prison library.

Library Facility in Naogaon District Jail

The prison libraries are not given much importance in Bangladesh. Naogaon District Jail has its own library with separate room. But there is no librarian or library professional. It has reading facility in library room. Every day few prisoners use the library resources. The jail department thinks the library as their good practice. Table III shows the library facilities.

Table III: library facilities of prison library

Separate library room	Librarian	Computer	Internet access
Yes	No	No	No

Collection of the prison library

All prisons of Bangladesh have their own library. But their collection is so poor. All equipment is outdated. Books are categorized as novel, biography, historical books

and motivational books. Journals are only donated journal under strict coverage of censor. The library keeps newspapers named Janakantha, Jugantor, Samakal and The New age daily. Table IV demonstrated the library collection of prison library.

Table IV: library collection of prison library

Resource	Amount
Book	1200
Quran	50
Journal	Only donated Government approved journal
Newspaper	4 daily newspapers

There is no relation seen with other libraries such as public library or mobile library. A little number of donations came from NGO named BLAST& Pally Shohayok Foundation. No specific budget is fixed for library purpose. No book selection policy works here. Selection and book acquisition are totally depending upon Jailor (the head of the prison).

How Naogaon district prison library works

All prisons of Bangladesh have their minimum quality prison library. In Naogaon District Jail library has a separate room with open access for all kinds of prisoners but there is no professional librarian yet. Still now the library services are provided through a prisoner who is convicted for the life sentence. The education qualification of that prisoner is little bit, sometimes graduate. The library is maintaining a register to enter their new materials. The register contains book title, author and accession date. From time to time, a printed book catalogue is carried on the cell to show the prisoners. He who carried the catalogue named “writer”. The prison library condition in all over the country is the same. Prisoner can transaction their reading materials by their own PC (Prison Card). Prisoners do their reading in library or carry their reading materials in their cell by lending system. The prisoners also can bring their reading materials (book, newspaper) from outside with the consent of the prison authority. But everything will be in the coverage area of the censor.

Findings

So many problems are available in the Naogaon district prison library. The prison staff and prisoners were asked about the problems of prison library. They pointed out some problems. Lack of library professionals, reading materials, lack of awareness programs, overcrowded accommodation, lack of library fund, absence of library policy and no separate reading area are the major problems of Naogaon prison

library. 5 points likert scales were used to justify the satisfaction level of the users and prison staff. Figure 1 demonstrated that the largest proportion 19(58 percent) users are not satisfied with prison library, 12 (36 percent) were less satisfied and only 2(6 percent) were satisfied with prison library. There is nobody for very and highly satisfied options.

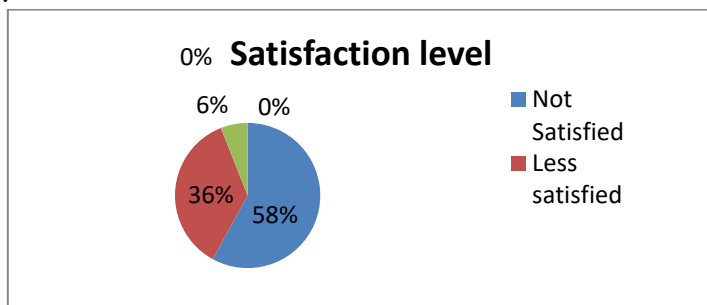


Figure 1: User satisfaction level of Naogaon prison library

Recommendations

Although prison is a punitive based institution but some attempts are taken for rehabilitating the prisoners. It is true that prison keeps not only bad criminals; it keeps also many victims of circumstances and political prisoners. Prison will have a well-established library, there will be medical service for the removal of physical and mental disorders, and there will be a training session to handle the next situation. Criminal citizens will be rehabilitated in society as a skilled person with improved psychological and physical stimuli. To develop prison library in Bangladesh following measures can be suggested-

- The prison laws, rules and regulation are outdated. Prison still follows the British colonial rules which are framed in the 19th century. It is needed to be amended. It is important to promote prison library as reformative institute for prisoners. In this issue we need government's direct co-operation.
- It should be confirmed that every prisoners gets access to the library. In that case library has to make certain policies. The punishment of prisoners' can be reduced for using library. Or the sentence obtained can be performed while using the library hour.
- To improve services the prison library needs a professional librarian. If not possible a minimum requirement is to appoint prison staff with basic library operation training. It's an emergency need indeed.
- If it is not possible to appoint a prison staff for library works. In that case inmate who is in charge as the librarian could be trained. A certificate course

on Library Science can be arranged at central jail with the help of Library Association of Bangladesh.

- Individual budget is necessary for the development of prison libraries. It is impossible to meet the reading materials of diverse prisoners with limited budget or without budget.
- Donation of book from other organizations is common for developed country. But here is no adequate sources identified except Islamic Foundation. So it is important to collaborate with public library. A mobile library in Bangladesh named Bisho Sahitto Kendra can also be appointed. Otherwise public library can give loan 500 books for 2 months and then again like inter library loan services. The American Library Association ALA policy 8.2 (formerly 52.1) states, "The American Library Association encourages public libraries and systems to extend their services to the residents of jails and other detention facilities within their taxing areas. In addition, The Intellectual Freedom Committee has interpreted the Library Bill of Rights to include Prisoners' Right to read."
- It is also a problem that prison has a library but most of the prisoners are not interested for free reading. For increasing interest awareness programs have to be taken.
- Prison library should provide a space where inmates can meet who are in common interest. To arrange workshop, book club, personal letter writing, and community services project. Also prison library can hold a class how we use library or how we should start reading with pleasure. It can convert criminal mind to a better thinking.
- Development of library materials is needed. Reading materials are outdated, subject coverage is limited, magazines are in strong censorship coverage, insufficient legal aid books and many problems have been plugged. Overall head of the prison authority's intervention is needed to solve this problem.
- Restriction on reading materials on prison is imposed by prison authority. Censorship is a big challenge for the prison libraries. Elimination of censor increased reading materials. A book should not be censored.
- Through the library a yearly magazine should be published by the prisoner writings. In where a story of happiness, sorrow and regret of the prisoners could arise. These kinds of good works will keep their criminal mind busy.
- The library has to make certain policies. The punishment of prisoners' can be reduced for using library. Or the sentence obtained can be performed while using the library hour.

Conclusion

The prison library services of Bangladesh are not well enough as western countries. The prison library is administrated by the prison authority and is used to study and mental excellence. Professor Dr. Anwar Hossen has written an article in Daily Samakal, one of the popular daily newspapers in Bangladesh on 9 April 2016. He said “Though the British were colonial rulers, they had the mind and civilization of building a rich library in prison. They did not create the library only, but they had great plans for saving and enriching this library with books. The Colonial power by which a library was built and has been preserved for centuries, we lost it in decades after independence! Those books and those libraries are a living history. We allowed the history to be deleted.” That was the saddest history in our prison library culture. In 2018, the Government of Bangladesh declared 5th February as National library day of Bangladesh. This resolution was adopted to raise public awareness of the importance of using library. Last year a message from government went out urging citizens to use their public libraries. It is hoped that in the near future prison libraries in Bangladesh will be converted to full-fledged libraries that can serve for prisoners’ reform, rehabilitation and reentry in society.

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