
Satinder Kaur Ramdev Memorial Trust for Advancement of Librarianship

- SATKAL Lifetime Achievement Award 2019

National Conference on 'Rediscovering Dr. Ranganathan in the Context of Media and Information Literacy'

Prof B S Ghuman, Honourable Vice Chancellor, Prof M P Satija, Prof I V Malhan, Dr D V Singh, Dr Joinder Tyger, Dr Jagtar Singh and respected dignitaries and guests in the audience.

First of all, I would like to pay my homage to Mrs. Satinder Kaur Ramdev in whose memory SATKAL Trust is established. She herself was a librarian, teacher and headmistress in various institutions and universities.

She was a noble lady, having affectionate nature and kind heart. She was very generous and caring towards everybody around her. She was particularly sympathetic and generous towards sick, poor and needy persons.

Combining professionalism with kindness and heart for others who need help, love and care, is the message for all of us from her life.

Just a smile, and giving space to others who are not known, and leave an impact that they remember you every moment, is what is the message we all have to remember from Mrs Satinder Kaur Ramdev's life.

My deepest regards and respect to Professor Jagindar Singh Ramdev, a well-known legendary personality of the library profession, and for his outstanding contribution in the establishment of SATKAL in memory of Mrs Satinder Kaur Ramdev. Professor Ramdev is certainly an exceptional librarian and a teacher who has been involved in different activities that often went beyond the domain of his profession. It speaks volumes of his dedication and commitment to the field of education and library science.

I would like to express my gratitude to Satinder Kaur Ramdev Memorial Trust for honouring a very ordinary woman with the prestigious award Satinder Kaur Ramdev Memorial Trust for Advancement of Librarianship-SATKAL Lifetime Achievement Award 2019. This award has immense value for hundreds of grassroot social animators associated with READ India and READ Global with a mission to bring smile, prosperity and education among the rural community in India.

And, the kindness and “GIVING” aspect which emanates from the lives of both the stalwart personalities, Mrs Ramdev and Prof Ramdev, is what I also learnt when I travelled to villages in India and starting touching their lives merely by talking to them and providing a space to them to express themselves. That turned my life completely. I would like to emphasise that I have never been very outward personality and I belong to very conservative family. But somehow, I spent almost 15 years of my life travelling every month to one or the other rural areas in India, meeting rural communities, sitting with them, talking to them, and learning their life patterns.

This auspicious occasion: “National Conference on Rediscovering Dr. Ranganathan in the Context of Media and Information Literacy”, quickly takes me back to the day, 8th June 2008, when after joining READ India, I was in one of the villages, namely Ullon in 24 South Paragnas, where I read the Five Laws of Dr Ranganathan, dovetailing around Books and Libraries, two sides of the same coin, inculcating reading as a habit and taking this forward for self-growth and enhancement of knowledge.

Several eminent scholars of the World, as we all know, write articles, lessons, books and talk about importance of libraries, information science and changing concepts in digital era, and the world is moving fast towards the digital arena. I am taking all present here to the '90s when the connectivity was a big challenge beyond metropolitan cities. I travelled around rural Asia to initiate the process of setting up Knowledge Centers “Gyan Kendras” with the concept of collating local knowledge and exchanging the same with the global knowledge.

We all are always attracted with what we do not have but what we have, either we tend to ignore or do not value. I started the process of advocating among grass roots communities, making them realise that there is ocean of knowledge around you, but how to collate that is an art in your hands. It was the time when National Institute of Technology (NIT) designed a web portal, wherein, I still remember, the local villagers were given access to the needed information and knowledge, which helped them in their day-to-day lives. Connectivity, however, was one of the serious issues. No power, no internet! Offline contents were also collated but the reach was local.

With changing time, now we have mobile penetration, contents are available in almost all languages and every person in cities have access to mobile, and in rural areas, gender discrimination still plays a dividing rule that girls are not being given access to mobile phones but the boys/men of the family have the phone in their hands.

We value the technology, we also value its effective use in information and knowledge sharing, but when we step in rural areas, where the communities do not even have access to books, technology is a dream for them. I have worked in those areas by setting up ‘Community Library and Resource Centers’ through a prestigious organisation, Rural Education and Development (READ) India, affiliated with READ Global based in the USA. The model of community libraries was initiated by the Founder of READ Global while

she was in Nepal's hills enjoying the Himalayan range and tracking the mountains, she asked one shepherd, what she can do for them, he asked books for their children.

The vision and mission of READ was laid on this beautiful concept of "Giving Books" and the journey started in 1991. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation realised the work being done in Nepal by READ, and conferred a prestigious replication award to replicate the model in India and Bhutan. In 2007, the READ India was born by virtue of getting registered as pan Indian Public Philanthropic Trust under the Trust Registration Act of India, and the journey of setting up rural libraries started then. The model was based on the barter system, give us land, we will construct libraries for your children in your area. Manage the libraries, we will give training to rural people, give your time, we will give you infrastructure and resources to empower your communities.

This beautiful-meaningful and, to the best of my knowledge, most practical model since then has been working in rural India, Nepal and Bhutan. We have 107 such libraries in these countries. I can pin pointedly tell you that READ Model has been able to reach 2.5 million rural villagers, 418 villages with its multiple activities and with 184 sustaining enterprises managed by women to sustain these libraries. Our model attracts the villagers who live in the surrounding localities of our operational Community Library and Resource Centers. This way, we inspire a large number of indirect beneficiaries as well.

This phenomenon is unique, where mothers of the children, women of the villages, come forward, enhance their skills, continue their education and move forward with pride by adding value to their families, saving money for the higher education of their children, delaying the age at marriage of their daughters, saying that now their daughters can get better matches as they are confident, they continue their education, they learn a skill and are adding income to their families. Such activities and participation sensitizes them for gender equality, higher-professional education, and empower them to take active role in the decision-making process of the family, community and society. We transform them as informed and democratic citizens of the world.

READ grew with this response from the community. Introspect our model, now whether we should only build libraries or strengthen the sustaining enterprises which women are managing, and enhance their skills to develop their own production houses, vocational centers, pre-schools for their small children to self-sustain the libraries that are considered as safe spaces in the communities where a woman or a girl does not need permission from their mothers or fathers to visit. They prefer to spend three hours a day in the libraries and curtail their time to visit the temples or gossip around.

I always ask a question to myself: *"Why this all happened?"*

The answer is simple and self-explained. It happened because we sought their participation, we gave importance to them to manage their own show, we involved the local resource persons and community leaders in the programme, who speak about betterment of their families, and we showed the way to mothers, who think about the future of their children, especially their daughters.

Though we started with books in Nepal, but with changing time, emphasis has not only been on books, but also on computers that were part of the library set-up at their doorsteps, free access to the Internet, connectivity with the global world, and learning high-end technical programmes for better jobs. In India with 42 such libraries, we have a collection of 1,00,000 books. Though it is a small number, but the reach is to 5,00,000 rural communities. Average footfall at one library is 50-80 persons every day.

Every library has Dr. Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science and his picture. There are about 6,70,000 villages in India. We need at least 1,50,000 such libraries to cover a group of 4-5 villages with one library. We have the vision, but can we generate the funds of that level needed to obtain this vision? Can corporates support it and do we have the money for establishing such kind of infrastructure?

What we need is commitment for the cause, will of general people for realisation of such community libraries. Who can do in this demographic transition period? Youth with their positive energies can help themselves and their surroundings. They can create the ambience.

With Indian Public Library Movement in place, Dr Jagtar Singh and myself being mentors of public librarians in partnership with the Bill and Melinda gates Foundation, and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the International Network of Emerging Library Innovators-INELI India, we believe that youth can take this movement forward. While advocating with various stakeholders, India needs libraries with innovation and infrastructure with peoples' participation and commitment.

I invite youth to read the recommendations of the National Knowledge Commission constituted in 2005 by the then Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, primarily, Right to Education. Access to Knowledge and the emphasis on languages are an integral part of the role and responsibilities of librarian and the services to be provided through the libraries. Let us analyse the need for putting these recommendations into action with collective efforts. India has a lot of potential. It has to be mustered together to transform the minds of people and take actions accordingly.

I salute Dr. Ranganathan and humbly remember him for sowing the seed of this thought process. With similar enthusiasm, I respect the wisdom of those who took this mission forward. Now is the time for youth to take this mission forward with new vision and commitment.

Once again thanks to the dignitaries present here and my best wishes to the youth of Punjabi University, who can passionately show the enlightened path to their counterparts and future generations in India.

Namaskar!