



Empowering Education: The Crucial Role of School Libraries in India's Development

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Abstract

India's school libraries have evolved significantly alongside the nation's educational progress. Initially, school libraries suffered from poor infrastructure, limited resources, and underuse. However, as education gained prominence, the role of school libraries expanded, becoming essential to the learning environment for both teachers and students. The primary objectives of school libraries in India are to foster a love for reading, enhance research skills, support the curriculum with relevant materials, and encourage independent learning. By providing access to a wide range of books, periodicals, and digital resources, school libraries create an environment conducive to learning and intellectual growth. This paper examines the evolution, current role, current status and challenges of school libraries in India, emphasizing their critical role in the educational system. The paper highlights the need for increased investment, improved staffing, and a cohesive national policy to address these challenges. To sum up, school libraries in India are crucial for enhancing educational quality. Continued efforts are needed to ensure all students, regardless of location, have access to well-equipped and well-managed libraries.

Keywords: School Libraries; Educational Policy; Library Development; Information Literacy; Funding Challenges; ICT Infrastructure

Introduction

Education is the basic requirement for success of democracy and progress of the country (eGyankosh, 2018). With the universalization of education as a national goal, the school education system is under constant pressure to expand continuously (Govinda & Mathew, 2018). This expansion presents a dual challenge: meeting the growing demand for school education while ensuring quality. In this context, school libraries play a crucial role in enhancing the standard and quality of education. However, their development remains a concern for educational planners, administrators, and the library profession alike (Ullah & Usman, 2023).

The number of schools, and consequently their libraries, is vast and continues to grow. However, several challenges hinder effective school library services in developing countries like India. These challenges include poor staffing practices, inadequate funding, the absence of a library policy, poor ICT infrastructure, inadequate library facilities, and a lack of awareness of the importance of school libraries (Shonhe, 2019). Additionally, since school education falls under the purview of individual

states, achieving uniform standards and quality across the country is challenging. As a result, school libraries have largely been neglected. Despite their professional expertise, school librarians often lack influence in library management, and essential resources are frequently unavailable, hindering effective operation. The state of school libraries varies significantly, not only from state to state but even from one school to another.

The evolving role of school libraries today reflects their function as social institutions established by society to serve educational needs. Yet, they are often seen as routine necessities rather than as vital components of the learning process and promoters of reading habits among students. Consequently, school libraries remain among the most neglected aspects of the education system, even as states across the country strive to improve educational outcomes.

Objectives

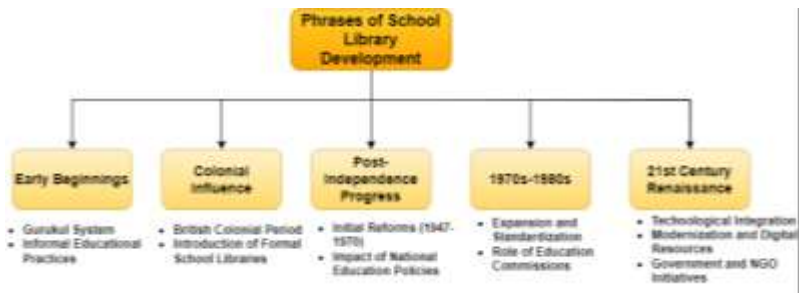
The main objectives of the school library are:

- To explore the evolution of school libraries from traditional models to modern transformations.
- To evaluate the role of school libraries within India's educational system.
- To assess the current status of school libraries in India.
- To examine the challenges faced by school libraries in India.

The Journey of School Library: From Tradition to Transformation

The stages of school library development in India are divided into five phases: Early Beginnings, Colonial Influence, Post-Independence Progress, 1970s-1990s, and 21st Century Renaissance (George, 2023).

Fig. 1: Phrases of School Library Development



(i) Early Beginning

- Gurukul System: In ancient India, education was imparted through the Gurukul system, where teachers orally transmitted knowledge, and formal libraries were non-existent.
- Informal Educational Practices: Early educational practices relied on religious texts and community sharing of knowledge, without dedicated spaces or resources like modern libraries.

(ii) Colonial Influence

- British Colonial Period: The British introduced formal schooling in India, including establishing libraries in some schools to support Western-style education.
- Introduction of Formal School Libraries: The concept of a school library began to take shape, although access was limited and primarily served colonial interests.

(iii) Post-Independence Progress

- Initial Reforms (1947-1970): After independence, efforts were made to establish school libraries nationwide, focusing on providing educational resources to a wider population.
- Impact of National Education Policies: Policies like the Kothari Commission recommended the integration of libraries into the school curriculum, emphasizing their role in quality education.

(iv) 1970s-1990s

- Expansion and Standardization: During this period, there was significant growth in the number of school libraries and attempts to standardize their services and resources.
- Role of Education Commissions: Various education commissions during these decades advocated for better funding and resources for school libraries, influencing policy changes.

(v) 21st Century Renaissance

- Technological Integration: The early 21st century saw the integration of digital resources and ICT in school libraries, transforming traditional libraries into modern learning hubs.
- Modernization and Digital Resources: Efforts were made to modernize school libraries by incorporating e-books, online databases, and other digital tools to enhance learning.
- Government and NGO Initiatives: Recent initiatives by the government and NGOs have focused on improving library infrastructure and access, particularly in underprivileged and rural areas.

Role of School Libraries in India's Education System

Development Era

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan identified four key aspects underscoring the necessity of establishing school libraries. From an educational perspective, these aspects are: (i) the beginnings of universal education, (ii) equality, (iii) sociological pressure, and (iv) the inevitability of mass teaching. Moreover, it can be stated that a well-organized school library can provide a strong educational foundation for any individual **(Marquardt & Bhardwaj, 2023)**. Ranganathan also describes the role of the library in the context of modern education with the following words: "The library is the heart of the school, from which every activity in the school radiates and by which all activities are irradiated. The library should literally and figuratively be the hub of every educational institution, and the librarian should be a guide, philosopher, and friend to all its inhabitants" **(Garg, 2015)**.

The library's role as a vital tool in school education is widely acknowledged. Communities with schools, whether in cities, towns, or villages, recognize the need for a library to support their educational programs. Teachers require access to a variety of books beyond textbooks, and students eagerly read both curriculum-related materials and books of personal interest. The evolving philosophy of education, driven by societal changes, has heightened the recognition of school libraries and underscored their importance in today's educational landscape **(Jamadar, 2022)**. By accepting the principles of this new philosophy—that the fundamental aim of education is growth toward realizing one's best self and achieving maximum social efficiency, and that school library service is essential in any modern educational program aimed at this goal—it becomes clear that the aim of school library service aligns with the aim of the school **(Cecil & Heaps, 1940, p. 21)**.

Secondary Education Commission (1952-53)

There is no denying the fact that good libraries in Indian schools are virtually non-existent, despite the acknowledged need for them. The Secondary Education Commission, led by Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar (known as the Mudaliar Commission), affirmed the importance of libraries and reading rooms in supplementing and expanding formal classroom instruction in its 1952-53 report. The commission made the following remarks regarding the condition of school libraries in India **(Trehan, 1983)**. In most schools, libraries are virtually non-existent. The books are typically old, outdated, and chosen without considering students' interests. These books are stored in a few shelves within an inadequate, unattractive room. The library is often managed by a clerk or an uninterested teacher with no passion for books or knowledge of library management. As a result, there

is no well-planned library service to inspire students to read or develop a genuine love for books. The situation is further exacerbated by the lack of awareness among teachers, headmasters, and educational authorities about the seriousness of this issue (**Ministry of Education [MoE], 1953**).

Mudaliar Commission in its report also made the following recommendations for the development of school libraries:

- As the proper use of a well-equipped school library is absolutely essential for the efficient working of every educational institution and for encouraging literary and cultural interests in students, every Secondary school should have such a library; class libraries and subject libraries should also be utilized for this purpose.
- Trained librarians, who have a love for books and an understanding of students' interests, should be provided in all Secondary schools and all teachers should be given some training in
- the basic principles of library work, in the Training colleges as well as through refresher courses.
- Where there are no separate Public Libraries the school libraries should, so far as possible, make their facilities available to the local public and all Public Libraries should have a special section for children and adolescents (**MoE, 1953**).

National Education Policy (NEP) and Programme of Action (PoA)

NEP 1968

The National Education Policy of 1968 was India's first comprehensive policy focused on strengthening the education system. Although the policy primarily aimed at improving access to education, standardizing curricula, and promoting regional languages, it also acknowledged the importance of libraries in educational institutions. The 1968 policy recognized libraries as crucial support systems for the teaching-learning process and emphasized the need for well-equipped libraries in schools and higher education institutions. However, the policy provided limited specific directives on how to develop and expand library services (**Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2006**).

NEP 1986

In 1985, the Ministry of Education, Government of India, issued a document titled 'Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective' as a foundation for nationwide debate, aimed at facilitating the formulation of the Education Policy, 1986. The report's reference to school libraries in the National Policy on Library and Information System was brief, mentioned under the general heading of the 'Academic Library System.' It suggested

creating a state-level agency for the proper development of school libraries, recommended establishing norms for these libraries, and proposed the creation of a national database on Indian school libraries by a national coordinating agency (**Singh, 1998**). As a result of the debate, the Government of India announced a Education Policy in 1986. This policy called for a nationwide effort to improve existing libraries and establish new ones. It also included provisions for library facilities in all educational institutions and aimed to enhance the status of librarians (**MoE, 1985**).

PoA 1992

The Programme of Action (PoA) 1992, which followed the NEP 1986, further elaborated on the goals set by the earlier policy, providing detailed plans for their implementation. Regarding library development, the PoA 1992 stressed the need for the proper development of libraries at all levels of education. It suggested the creation of a national network of libraries to facilitate the sharing of resources and information across institutions. The PoA also advocated for the integration of library services into the academic framework, ensuring that libraries were not just repositories of books but active participants in the educational process. Additionally, the PoA emphasized the importance of developing ICT infrastructure in libraries, anticipating the growing role of digital resources in education (**MHRD, 1992**).

Across the NEP 1968, 1986, and the PoA 1992, there was a clear evolution in the recognition of the importance of libraries within the Indian education system. While the 1968 policy laid the groundwork by acknowledging the need for libraries, the 1986 policy took significant steps toward improving library infrastructure and services. The PoA 1992 continued this trajectory, focusing on the practical implementation of these goals and adapting to emerging technological trends. Together, these policies underscore the critical role of libraries in enhancing the quality of education in India.

Current Role of School Libraries in India's Education System

Enhancing Academic Achievement

School libraries have become integral to enhancing academic achievement within India's education system. They support the curriculum by offering a broad array of resources, from textbooks and reference materials to supplementary readings that enrich classroom learning. By providing access to these resources, libraries help bridge gaps in knowledge and reinforce key concepts taught in the classroom. Additionally, school libraries play a pivotal role in promoting literacy and cultivating reading habits among students. They create an environment where students can explore different genres and topics, fostering a love for reading that contributes to lifelong learning (**Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya, 2024**).

Developing Information Literacy

In the digital age, the role of school libraries has expanded to include the development of information literacy among students. Libraries are now critical in teaching students how to critically analyze and utilize information from various sources. This involves not only understanding traditional print media but also navigating digital resources effectively. The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into school libraries has further enhanced their ability to equip students with essential skills for the 21st century. By providing access to online databases, e-books, and other digital tools, libraries help students develop the ability to evaluate, synthesize, and apply information, preparing them for the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Supporting Teachers and Curriculum

School libraries also play a supportive role for teachers, aiding in both their instructional practices and professional development. Libraries provide a wealth of resources that teachers can use to enhance their lesson plans, including educational materials, research tools, and access to professional literature. This support allows teachers to stay updated on the latest developments in their fields and incorporate new ideas and strategies into their teaching. Additionally, school libraries facilitate collaboration among educators by offering spaces and resources for professional learning communities. Through these contributions, school libraries not only enhance the curriculum but also empower teachers to deliver more effective and engaging education.

Current Status of School Libraries in India

The current status of school libraries in India reflects a complex landscape marked by both progress and persistent challenges. While there have been significant efforts to improve library facilities in schools across the country, the reality remains that many schools, especially in rural and underfunded areas, still lack access to well-equipped libraries. The disparities between urban and rural school libraries are stark, with urban institutions generally benefiting from better infrastructure, resources, and trained library staff. Despite national policies and programs to strengthen library services, the implementation has often been uneven, leading to gaps in access and quality.

Current Status of Indian Schools having Library Facilities

According to the 8th All India School Education Survey (AISES) (**National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2016**), the position of school libraries in India is Table 1.

Table 1: Stage-wise Schools having Library Facilities

Category of Schools	Locality	Total No. Schools	Schools having Libraries	% of Schools having Libraries
Secondary	Rural	82,462	55,134	66.86%
	Urban	34,789	24,262	69.74%
Higher Secondary	Rural	36,576	28,028	76.63%
	Urban	26,088	20,831	79.85%

According to Seventh All India Educational Survey conducted by **NCERT (2015)** the management-wise position of school libraries in India is given in Table 2.

Current Status of Availability of Library Staffs in Indian Schools

As reported in the Seventh All India Educational Survey by **NCERT (2015)**, the data on the number of schools in India with librarians, categorized by management type, is given in Table 3:

The Seventh All India Educational Survey by **NCERT (2015)** presents the data, as mentioned in Table4, on the number of schools, categorized by management type, that have non-teaching staff.

Current Status of Availability of Books in Indian School Libraries

The Seventh All India Educational Survey by **NCERT (2015)** provides the data, as mentioned in Table 5, on the distribution of schools by management type and the number of books available in their libraries.

Challenges Faced by School Libraries in India

School libraries in India face significant challenges that limit their effectiveness in supporting education. Issues like inadequate funding, staffing shortages, poor ICT infrastructure, and inconsistent policies hinder their development. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that all students have access to the resources needed for academic success and lifelong learning.

Inadequate Funding

One of the most significant challenges faced by school libraries in India is inadequate funding. Insufficient financial resources severely hinder the development and maintenance of libraries, affecting everything from the acquisition of new books to the upkeep of library infrastructure. The lack of funds directly impacts the quality of resources available to students and teachers, resulting in outdated collections and poorly maintained facilities. This financial shortfall prevents libraries from fulfilling their potential as crucial educational tools, limiting their ability to support student learning and development effectively.

Table 2: Management-wise Position of School Libraries in India

Category	Area	Management	Total No. Schools	Schools having Libraries	% of Schools having Libraries
Secondary	Rural	Government	26,084	18,272	70%
		Local body	8,421	5,345	63%
		Private aided	16,694	13,831	82%
		Private unaided	12,377	9,592	77%
		Total	63,576	47,040	73%
	Urban	Government	4,507	3,358	74%
		Local body	1,546	1,199	77%
		Private aided	7,208	6,279	87%
		Private unaided	13,904	12,214	87%
		Total	27,165	23,050	84%
	Total	Government	30,591	21,630	70%
		Local body	9,967	6,544	65%
		Private aided	23,902	20,110	84%
		Private unaided	26,281	21,806	82%
		Grand Total	90,741	70,090	77%
Higher Secondary	Rural	Government	10,077	8,497	84%
		Local body	624	541	86%
		Private aided	8,264	7,615	92%
		Private unaided	3,882	3,272	84%
		Total	22,847	19,925	87%
	Urban	Government	5,516	4,951	89%
		Local body	776	682	87%
		Private aided	7,276	6,853	94%
		Private unaided	7,454	6,890	92%
		Total	21,022	19,376	92%
	Total	Government	15,593	13,448	86%
		Local body	1,400	1,223	87%
		Private aided	15,540	14,468	93%
		Private unaided	11,336	10,162	89%
			Grand Total	43,869	39,301

Table 3: Management-wise Number of Schools Having Librarians

Category	Area	Management	Schools having Librarians	Number of School Having Librarians			
				Full-time		Part-time	
				A	B	A	B
Secondary	Rural	Government	18,272	1,687	558	72	881
		Local body	5,345	99	261	37	117
		Private aided	13,831	318	259	709	427
		Private unaided	9,592	867	849	286	1,106
		Total	47,040	2,971	1,927	1,104	2,531
	Urban	Government	3,358	518	118	29	230
		Local body	1,199	118	73	35	50
		Private aided	6,279	821	243	561	282
		Private unaided	12,214	2,149	1,565	575	1,662
		Total	23,050	3,606	1,999	1,200	2,224
	Total	Government	21,630	2,205	676	101	1,111
		Local body	6,544	217	334	72	167
		Private aided	20,110	1,139	502	1,270	709
		Private unaided	21,806	3,016	2,414	861	2,768
		Grand Total	70,090	6,577	3,926	2,304	4,755
Higher Secondary	Rural	Government	8,497	2,181	273	47	319
		Local body	541	110	35	21	32
		Private aided	7,615	1,693	659	892	360

Category	Area	Management	Schools having Librarians	Number of School Having Librarians			
				Full-time		Part-time	
				A	B	A	B
		Private unaided	3,272	962	581	163	517
		Total	19,925	4,946	1,548	1,123	1,228
	Urban	Government	4,951	2,140	185	44	224
		Local body	682	212	44	21	46
		Private aided	6,853	2,534	668	379	435
		Private unaided	6,890	2,813	1,036	435	973
		Total	19,376	7,699	1933	879	1,678
	Total	Government	13,448	4,321	458	91	543
		Local body	1,223	322	79	42	78
		Private aided	14,468	4,227	1,327	1,271	795
		Private unaided	10,162	3,775	1,617	598	1,490
		Grand Total	39,301	12,645	3,481	2,002	2,906

Note: A- Trained; B- Untrained

Table 4: Management-wise Number of Schools Having Non-Teaching Staff

Category	Area	Management	Total Number of Schools	Schools having Libraries	Non-teaching Staff	
					Number of Schools having Lib./Lab. Attendts.	Number of Lib./Lab. Attendts. per Schools*
Secondary	Rural	Government	26,084	18,272	2,974	0.2
		Local body	8,421	5,345	602	0.1
		Private aided	16,694	13,831	4,578	0.3
		Private unaided	12,377	9,592	2,825	0.4
		Total	63,576	47,040	10,979	0.2
	Urban	Government	4,507	3,358	606	0.2
		Local body	1,546	1,199	303	0.3
		Private aided	7,208	6,279	2,196	0.4
		Private unaided	13,904	12,214	4,542	0.5
		Total	27,165	23,050	7,647	0.4
	Total	Government	30,591	21,630	3,580	0.2
		Local body	9,967	6,544	905	0.1
		Private aided	23,902	20,110	6,774	0.4
		Private unaided	26,281	21,806	7,367	0.4
		Grand Total	90,741	70,090	18,626	0.3
Higher	Rural	Government	10,077	8,497	2,798	0.5

Secondary		Local body	624	541	222	0.6
		Private aided	8,264	7,615	3,990	0.9
		Private unaided	3,882	3,272	1,958	1
		Total	22,847	19,925	8,968	0.7
	Urban	Government	5,516	4,951	2,048	0.8
		Local body	776	682	320	0.8
		Private aided	7,276	6,853	3,673	1
		Private unaided	7,454	6,890	4,610	1.2
		Total	21,022	19,376	10,651	1
	Total	Government	15,593	13,448	4,846	0.6
		Local body	1,400	1,223	542	0.7
		Private aided	15,540	14,468	7,663	0.9
		Private unaided	11,336	10,162	6,568	1.1
		Grand Total	43,869	39,301	19,619	0.8

Note: * rounded off to one decimal place

Table 5: Management-wise Position of Schools with Number of Books in Library

Category	Area	Management	Schools having Libraries	Schools with Number of Books in Library				
				Up to 500	501-1000	1001-2000	2001-5000	More than 5000
Secondary	Rural	Government	18,272	7,946	3,904	3,704	2,455	263
		Local body	5,345	3,211	1,006	646	366	116
		Private aided	13,831	6,046	2,878	2,437	1,940	530
		Private unaided	9,592	6,123	1,642	1,136	584	107
		Total	47,040	23,326	9,430	7,923	5,345	1,016
	Urban	Government	3,358	1,157	574	683	657	287
		Local body	1,199	512	185	194	195	113
		Private aided	6,279	1,881	1,113	1,241	1,274	770
		Private unaided	12,214	5,739	2,308	2,062	1,591	514
		Total	23,050	9,289	4,180	4,180	3,717	1,684
	Total	Government	21,630	9,103	4,478	4,387	3,112	550
		Local body	6,544	3,723	1,191	840	561	229
		Private aided	20,110	7,927	3,991	3,678	3,214	1,300
		Private unaided	21,806	11,862	3,950	3,198	2,175	621
		Grand Total	70,090	32,615	13,610	12,103	9,062	2,700
Higher Secondary	Rural	Government	8,497	2,283	1,157	1,683	2,289	1,085
		Local body	541	199	87	118	99	38
		Private aided	7,615	1,637	1,024	1,511	2,189	1,254

Category	Area	Management	Schools having Libraries	Schools with Number of Books in Library				
				Up to 500	501-1000	1001-2000	2001-5000	More than 5000
		Private unaided	3,272	1,409	581	543	507	232
		Total	19,925	5,528	2,849	3,855	5,084	2,609
	Urban	Government	4,951	799	431	861	1,424	1,436
		Local body	682	148	82	130	175	147
		Private aided	6,853	1,026	712	1,166	1,957	1,992
		Private unaided	6,890	1,968	1,120	1,310	1,486	1,006
		Total	19,376	3,941	2,345	3,467	5,042	4,581
		Total	Government	13,448	3,082	1,588	2,544	3,713
	Local body		1,223	347	169	248	274	185
	Private aided		14,468	2,663	1,736	2,677	4,146	3,246
	Private unaided		10,162	3,377	1,701	1,853	1,993	1,238
	Grand Total		39,301	9,469	5,194	7,322	10,126	7,190

Note: A- Trained; B- Untrained

Staffing Issues

Staffing is another critical issue facing school libraries across India. There is a shortage of qualified librarians, which directly impacts the quality of library services. Many schools, especially in rural areas, do not have trained librarians, and library management is often entrusted to unqualified staff or teachers with no formal training in library science. This lack of professional expertise leads to ineffective library management, hindering the library's ability to function as a dynamic resource center for students and teachers. Furthermore, the lack of opportunities for professional development for existing librarians exacerbates the problem, preventing the continuous improvement of library services.

Lack of Uniform Library Policies

The absence of a standardized library policy across India contributes to the inconsistent quality of school libraries. Library standards and practices vary widely from state to state, leading to disparities in the quality of library services offered to students. Without a cohesive national policy, the development of school libraries remains uneven, with some states making significant progress while others lag. A uniform library policy is essential to ensure that all students, regardless of their location, have access to well-resourced and effectively managed libraries that support their educational needs.

Poor ICT Infrastructure

In the digital age, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into school libraries is crucial. However, many school libraries in India suffer from poor ICT infrastructure, limiting access to digital resources and technology. This digital divide is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where internet connectivity and access to computers are often inadequate. The lack of ICT infrastructure hinders the ability of school libraries to offer modern, technology-driven services that are essential for developing students' information literacy and preparing them for a digitally connected world.

Lack of Awareness

Finally, there is a widespread lack of awareness about the importance of school libraries within the educational system. Libraries are often undervalued and seen as supplementary rather than integral to the educational process. This undervaluation leads to the neglect of library development and a lack of emphasis on the role libraries play in enhancing student learning and fostering a culture of reading. Efforts to raise awareness about the critical role of school libraries are essential to ensure that they receive the attention and resources they need to thrive and effectively support the educational goals of students and teachers alike.

Conclusion

The evolution and current state of school libraries in India reflect both the progress made and the challenges that persist in integrating these vital resources into the educational system. From their traditional roots to the modern transformations underway, school libraries have consistently played a critical role in supporting academic achievement, fostering literacy, and developing information literacy among students. However, the journey is far from complete. The disparities in library infrastructure, the shortage of trained librarians, inadequate funding, and the lack of a cohesive national policy highlight the need for continued focus and action. As India strives to improve its education system, the importance of well-resourced and effectively managed school libraries cannot be overstated. These libraries are not merely repositories of books; they are dynamic learning environments that can inspire curiosity, nurture critical thinking, and provide the tools necessary for students to navigate a rapidly changing world. To fully realize this potential, there must be a concerted effort to address the challenges identified, ensuring that every student, regardless of location or background, has access to a quality school library.

The future of school libraries in India depends on a collective commitment to their development, with a focus on innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability. By recognizing the indispensable role that libraries play in education and by investing in their growth, India can ensure that its school libraries remain central to the educational experience, empowering future generations to achieve their full potential.

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