

PADIPPURA



Kerala-born Padma Shri awardee, Sathyanarayan Mundayoor (Uncle Moosa) writes about his library movement in Arunachal Pradesh.

Books are on the Way

Dear nephews and nieces,

Greetings again, from the Lohit valley in Arunachal Pradesh!

Imagine that from tomorrow, the Kerala Govt. decides to teach everything in schools in Norwegian or Zulu language; how would you feel?

This is what happened to the children of NEFA (now Arunachal); a small population of 26 major tribal groups, each with a different language, but with no script. So their mother tongues are only spoken. Hence, English became the medium of instruction in schools. But, as the population of Arunachal Pradesh is thinly scattered, all schools and all children do not have equal facilities for good education. Most schools have no libraries to give students adequate exposure to the English language and develop reading skills. So, what can we do to help them?

Moved by such thoughts, a group of book lovers in the Dibang & Lohit valleys decided that, if children cannot come to books, books must go to them. If children cannot go to libraries, libraries can come up near them, all managed by themselves. Each one can teach many to

read and discover the joy of reading.

Because, to be a good reader, they need a friend, who would connect them and the book. And we need so many mentors to reach youth across a large state.

These friends started conducting mini book exhibitions across remote areas of Dibang and Lohit valley. The people had never seen a library book before! It was hard, travelling in trucks and crowded jeeps over steep mountain-roads. Sometimes they had to even walk, carrying cartons! At last, after a decade of effort, their dream came through. Bamboosa Library, the first youth library in Arunachal, was set up in Tezu in May 2007, with a wonderful collection of books.

Later, they decided to distribute these books to start another 12 little libraries, for spreading the joy of reading all over the valley. Thus was born the Lohit Youth Library Network, a reading movement wholly managed by volunteers.

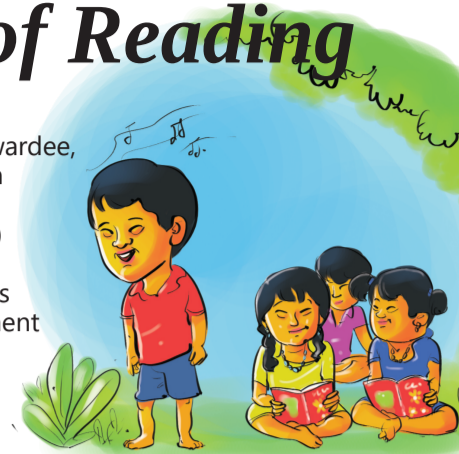
How do these volunteers spread the joy of reading in their neighbourhoods? We shall read about it next week.

Yours affectionately,
Uncle Moosa

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Joy of Reading

Kerala-born Padma Shri awardee, Sathyanarayan Mundayoor (Uncle Moosa) concludes the write-up on his library movement in Arunachal Pradesh.



I was on my first visit to Kaho, the last Indian village on the China border beyond Walong, for the reading programme and mini book exhibition. After Kibithu, the last Arunachal Govt. circle HQ, there was only a mountain foot-track to Kaho, where the Meyor tribe lived. Except for the Kaho villagers, the others needed the Army's permission to go beyond Kibithu. We started at 6.00 am with 2 labourers from the Circle office to carry our book cartons and an army escort. The 8 km walk along a mountain track and pine forests was fun in the morning chill, which soon vanished in the bright sun. Crossing a narrow hanging bridge swinging over a deep rapid stream was exciting! When we reached Kaho, the only primary school was not open and the teacher was nowhere. Then I heard a boy singing, "Murgi maa ghar se nikali, jhola le bazaar chali...". The poem we recited during the reading campaigns! How did it reach here at the China border? Delighted and greatly surprised, I asked the boy, "Who taught you the rhyme?". He smartly replied, "I was in Walong school last year, when you came for the book exhibition". A poem just heard once from a library book, he was able to remember even after one year! The magic of library books!

Every book exhibition we conduct always has story-

telling, recitations and book-quiz for students. Once, I lost a purse after a programme. Many days later, a volunteer found it and returned it – everything untouched! This habit of not taking or stealing items belonging to others has been a unique virtue of the tribal communities of Arunachal. We can learn a lot from them!

Ever heard about a vacation mini-library? A library which runs only in the summer vacations by a group of students, by borrowing books from a bigger library. Our APNE Library in Wakro supports 10 such mini-libraries in tiny remote villages. Our library activists conduct programmes and exhibitions independently, even if they are school students. Many of them have emerged as confident smart youth, winning laurels in important programmes! Only because they love to share the joy of reading with those less fortunate! What about you?

Yours affectionately,
Uncle Moosa

Activity

Gift a Book

Dear students, Let's start collecting books to distribute among your friends, classmates or other children around you. Let's gift it on the last day, before summer holidays start.