

**Document:
Democratization of Information with a
Focus on Libraries**

**Report from the World Social Forum IV, Mumbai, India,
January 2004**

Mikael Bök

This workshop on Democratization of Information with a Focus on Libraries might have been one of the first signs of an involvement of professional librarians in the World Social Forum. The initiative to the workshop came from the Network Institute for Global Democratization (NIGD). Much of the preparations were made at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), which is situated in an Eastern suburb of Mumbai.

First Session at TISS, Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library, 18 January from 9 a.m. to 19 p.m.

The session was attended by ca 80 persons, most of whom were library and Information Professionals (LIS) from Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi, Dharwad (city of Karnatak State University, where many of the Indian LIS are being educated), Ahmedabad and other Indian cities.



Mirja Ryyänen, Harsha Parek and Kay Raseroka at TISS, Mumbai, January 2004 (Photo: M.B.)

Speakers:

Prof. Usha S. Nayar, Deputy Director, TISS (Welcome Address)
Dr. Muttayya Kaganuramath, Librarian, TISS (Introduction to Workshop)
Dr T.A.V. Murthy, INFLIBNET, (Address by the Chief Guest)
Prof. R.R.Singh (Presiding Remarks)
Ms Kay Raseroka, President, IFLA, Gaborone, Botswana (Keynote Address)
Prof. Harsha Parekh, SNTD University, Mumbai, India
Mr Doug Schuler, Evergreen State College, Washington, USA
Dr Sangayya Shirumath, IIM, Ahmedabad, India
Prof. E Rama Reddy, University of Hyderabad, India
Mr Sunil Abraham, MAHITI Company, Bangalore, India
Mr N.V. Sathyanarayan, MD, Informatics Ltd, India
Mr G.K. Manyunath, IGIDR, India
Prof. C.R Karisiddappa, President, ILA, Dharwad, India
Dr B.D Kumbar, Karnatak State University, Dharwad, India
Mr D.V. Singh, Sri Ram College of Commerce, India
Mr Mikael Böök, NIGD, Finland
Dr Pandey S.K. Sharma, PLIO, UGC
Ms Mirja Ryyänen, former Member of European Parliament, Finland
Dr Ravinder Kumar Chadha, Director, Parliament Library, New Delhi, India

The importance of libraries and the librarians in society was stressed, or taken for granted, by all speakers. There was a near consensus on the opinion that democratization of information can only be achieved through an adequately and publicly funded global network of libraries. At the same time it was recognized that, henceforward, the democratization of information "implies a fundamental change in the role of the library", as IFLA president Kay Raseroka said in her keynote address. She explained her own position as follows: "As a facilitator of communication, the library has to establish contextual operations that are determined by the needs of the community they serve." Raseroka went on to say that librarians should take an active interest in society, and engage in documentation and communication. For instance, professional librarians should preserve, organise and present the information brought to the World Social Forum by hundreds of social movements and organisations, Raseroka said. - This possibility of involving the insitutional library is clearly something which the organizers of future World Social Forums (and of regional and local social forums) should also take into consideration.

The change in the role of the library also necessitates further democratization of the library itself. Two different aspects, in particular, were brought to the forefront and discussed:

- The Right to Memory: the non-literate as well as the literate people must be served by the library, and both groups must be included in its collective memory. The new information and communication technologies should be fully used for this purpose (Raseroka).

- Free and Open Source Software (FOSS): the increasingly digitalized libraries as well as all other public information services must be built on free and open source software; this is a precondition of transparency, accountability and democracy. (Prof. Rama Reddy, Mr. Sunil Abraham and others). The objection that technical support is not always available for FOSS was met by Mr Abraham, who maintained that the support is nowadays there, if only the libraries take the necessary steps to contract it,

as they do with firms which support proprietary software.

Under the the theme of "alternative knowledge formation", Mr Doug Schuler introduced the concept of a collective 'civic intelligence', without which the complex environmental and social problems of today cannot not be tackled. Further discussion of the role of the librarians in the construction of 'civic intelligence' would be most welcome! At least, several speakers elucidated the related concepts of "knowledge formation" in organisations (Sirumath), "information literacy" (Karisiddappa, Ryyananen) and "capacity Building" (D.V.Sing).

"Library Paradigm and Library Power" was discussed, first with special reference to Indian academic libraries (Pandey K. Sharma), and, secondly, starting from the question: where comes the library in the existing power structure of society? (Mikael Bök) A pledge for a Constitutional Upgrading of Libraries and the Internet was made: the libraries and the net must be granted power and secure status by means of constitutional provisions.

This thesis was supported by several participants. It also corresponds to Dr Koganuramath's introductory remark that the "library has to perform the role of a super system" in today's information environment.

In these discussions of abstract concepts and lofty principles some of the real contradictions and inequalities of, say, India's "information environment" risked, of course, to be neglected. Fortunately, this was not the case.

The existing legislation on libraries, intellectual freedom, and freedom of information in India was critically reviewed by Dr Ravinder Kumar Cahdha, Director of the Parliament Library, and Dr B.D Kumbar from Karnatak State University. "It is hearting to note", said Dr Kumbar, "that the major states in terms of population [...] like UP, MP, Bihar, Rajasthan and Panjab have no library legislation". He also noted that even in Karnataka, which has built a relatively wide network of public libraries on the basis of its own Public Libraries Act (1965), "lot of negligence and indifferent attitude have marred the growth of the system as a whole".

Second session, 19 January 2004 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m, at NESCO Grounds Venue 126.

While the first session had been planned in detail, the second was rather improvised, and the participants fewer (ca 25 persons). NESCO grounds is a huge industrial area, where most of the events of the World Social Forum in Mumbai were organised. The workshop actually took place in a tent next to a noisy construction area, in striking contrast with the well-equipped, air-conditioned auditorium in the quiet surroundings of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences where we had met the day before.



NESCO Grounds, the venue of World Social Forum in Mumbai, January 2004 (Photo: M.B.)

Speakers and active participants

Ms Kay Raseroka, President, IFLA, Gaborone, Botswana (Chair)
Mr. Mikael Bök, NIGD, Finland (Introductory Remarks)
Mr Potare Dilip Pochiran, ex-student of library science, Nandeh (Mah.), India
Mr. Rashid Ali, Documentary film-maker. New delhi, India
Ms. Shweta Verma, Village Libraries Project, Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, Delhi
Mr. Mika Rönkkö, Technical Advisor, Puxirum Project, Alter do Chao, Brazil
Dr. Helen Jarvis, Librarian, Advisor to Council of Ministers, Cambodia
Dr Boris Kagarlitsky, Director, IPROG, Moscow, Russia
Dr Alla Glintchikova, Political scientist, Moscow, Russia

Mr Potare Dilip Pochiran, a former student of library science, gave a memorable description of the conditions of education and the libraries in the area where he lives, a rural district in Maharashtra. He said that libraries in rural India are "pathetic". The public domain is dominated by the political parties, which can be seen as a major cause of the bad state of libraries. All in all, the rural areas are totally marginalized. We are speaking here about two completely different worlds, he said, thereby also reminding us of the slogan "another world is possible". Potare said that he has not been able to complete his education because he knows only the Marathi language (his speech at the workshop was translated into English by Mr Rashid Ali). Nor has he found any job after he left his studies.

Further documentation

The full report of the first session at TISS, 18 January was prepared by Dr. B.S. Kademani, Scientific Officer at the Library and Information Services Division of Babha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai.

The second session of the workshop at NESCO grounds 19 January was reported by Mikael Bök

The proceedings and papers of this workshop are available in "International Workshop On Democratization of Information: Focus on Libraries. Proceedings. Edited by Muttayya Koganuramath, Mikael Book, B. S. Kademani, Mallikarjun Angadi and Satish Kanamadi (96 pp.).

An online version is found at www.nigd.org/libraries/mumbai.