

**Evaluation and Planning of the Activities  
of a Rural Library in Kerala**

**S. Gopalakrishnan Nair (late) , K. Vijayakumar**

**Discussion Paper No. 18  
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**Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development  
Centre for Development Studies  
Thiruvananthapuram**

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Dr. K. N. Nair, Programme Co-ordinator,  
Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development,  
Centre for Development Studies,

Prasanth Nagar, Ulloor,  
Thiruvananthapuram 695 011

Tel: 550 465, 550 491

Fax: 550 465

E-mail: [krp@giasmd01.vsnl.net.in](mailto:krp@giasmd01.vsnl.net.in)

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**Dedicated to**  
**S. Gopalakrishnan Nair (S.G. to his friends)**  
**who co-ordinated the KRPLLD project and development activities**  
**of the VN Kesava Pillai Smaraka Library with devotion and distinction**  
**We deeply mourn his untimely demise on 14 October 1999**

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# **Evaluation and Planning of the Activities of a Rural Library in Kerala**

S. Gopalakrishnan Nair (late), K. Vijayakumar \*

## **1. Introduction**

The Library Movement in Kerala has a history of more than a century. The libraries in the State have been playing a vital role in socio-cultural development. The wide network of libraries is one of the important factors that helped the State to achieve the highest literacy rate among the Indian States.

In an age of decentralised planning, rural libraries have the additional role of a co-ordination agency of developmental activities at the grassroots-level, besides their conventional role as centres of knowledge and information. As a first step in this new direction, the libraries should undertake an assessment of their activities hitherto, evaluate the changing reading habits and preference of the members, and generate data based on the socio-economic conditions of the localities concerned. This project is about such an effort made by the V. N. Kesava Pillai Memorial (VNKPS) Library.

## **Profile of the Library**

V N K P S Library is one of the model libraries in the State and has a history of more than half-a-century. The Library has played a leading role in the development of its catchment area in the fields of education, health, arts, and sports. It has earned an integral place in the life of the village community.

V N K P S Library, an 'A' grade library located at Valayanchirangara in the Kunnathunadu taluk of Ernakulam district, has a successful history of 55 years to its credit. The Library is centrally placed amidst three grama panchayats – Rayamangalam, Vengola, and Mazhuvanoor. It has readership from all the three areas and has a stock of about 20,000 books. It subscribes to 8 daily newspapers and about 30 periodicals. The membership of the Library is above 1000 of which about one-third is of women. In addition, there are 300 child members too. The Library owns 15 cents of land, a three-storied permanent building of 2,500 sq. ft with the facilities of reading room, conference hall, recreation club, and children's library.

Apart from the conventional functions of library and reading room, V N K P S Library has been performing the following activities:

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(i) Mobile library: As a part of the 'Rural extension programme' of the library, the mobile book-lending wing of the library covers around 200 families. The books are supplied on weekly basis with the help of a woman librarian.

(ii) Manuscript magazine: V N K P S Library has been publishing a monthly manuscript magazine meant to encourage the budding talents of the locality and also update the level of awareness of the readers about world events. The first manuscript magazine *Sahitee Lata* was published as early as June 1945. The publication of the manuscript magazine was interrupted on occasions but has survived till now under different names and under different editorial boards. Now the manuscript magazine is being published under the title *Agneyam* (Blaze). This unique endeavor has been attracting generations of students and novices in the field of language and literature, to the library. *Agneyam* is published usually following a debate or discussion organised by the library.

(iii) Rural extension programmes: V N K P S Library organises seminars, workshops, and training programmes for households, farmers, students, and the general public with the assistance of Co-operative Societies, Agricultural Universities, Veterinary Hospitals, various government departments as well as agencies such as Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat (KSSP) and Agency for Non-conventional Energy and Rural Technology (ANERT). These programmes focus mainly on extension services on farming techniques, fodder farming, cattle farming, smokeless chulas and *gober* gas and other non-conventional energy sources.

(iv) Literary, Arts, and Sports activities: V N K P S Library also organises literary and arts programmes that include literary camps such as *Kaviyarangu* (poets' ensemble), *Kathakalari* (story writers' workshop), debates, discussions, book reviews, literary competitions (both for students as well as V N K P S Library readers) and one-act play competitions. The sports division of the Library, Olympics Sports Club, provides facilities for sports and games including indoor games. It also organises tournaments, athletic meets, and sports festivals.

(v) Medical Camps: V N K P S Library organises medical camps every year on Allopathy, Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, and Nature Cure. It conducts blood-testing camps to make the public aware of the importance of blood donation. It also conducts classes and discussions on child and mother care, immunisation, and family planning.

(vi) The other activities of the Library include the conduct of classes and seminars for students, unemployed youth, panchayat functionaries, and housewives on recent socio-economic and political developments. Regular career guidance programmes and vocational training programmes for the unemployed are also conducted. The Library is running a ladies' tailoring centre and a nursery school for the past few years. V N K P S Library has instituted annual proficiency awards for students in nearby educational institutions and also for the best adult and young readers of the library.

V N K P S Library has conducted a Readership Survey to assess the changing reading habits particularly in the emerging scenario of audiovisual media. It has also conducted farmers' seminars together with soil testing camps with the help of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

Departments, FACT, Rubber Board, etc. The Library has organised a seminar on Panchayat Raj to make people aware of the importance of People's Planning Programme (*Janakeeyaasoothranam*). It has organised several health awareness camps, literacy programmes, literacy workshops, consumer awareness activities, etc.

People's participation is the lifeblood of the library movement in Kerala. It has played an important role in India's freedom struggle. Libraries have engaged themselves in social education, literacy campaigns, and various extension activities.

Though attempts at exploring the reasons for the progressive decline in readership level are numerous, few scientific studies on the phenomenon are available. The study conducted by Kerala State Library Council on the reading habit of people in the State is a notable exception. Its main objective was to assess the present situation in the reading scenario. The study tried to understand the tastes of people in selecting books, reading newspapers, amount spent on books and periodicals, time spent for reading and viewing television, reading habits among various income groups, etc. The findings of the study reveal the reasons for not reading and for not becoming a library member, reading habits based on educational status, people's opinion on library service, reading time among various sectors, income and time spent on reading, time spent on viewing television, etc. But to our knowledge, no scientific studies have been done to examine the potential of rural library in local level development and community extension programme.

## **The Problem**

V N K P S Library has a multifaceted approach towards the community. As mentioned in the profile, it has been engaged in a variety of programmes, community development awareness as well as action-oriented, for the past 25 years. Owing to the growth of the theatre and the cinema, and in more recent years, of the various audio-visual electronic media as well as to various other changes in the socio-cultural and economic environment, there has taken place a progressive decline in readership. The factors that have led to this change and the new role that the people expect from the library have to be understood so as to make the library relevant and effective in the modern society. It is with this objective in mind that the present study was undertaken.

The following are the priority areas identified for detailed investigation.

### **(i) Studies on readership**

Through this project V N K P S Library intends primarily to understand the extent of decline and the change in reading habits of the readers in the three panchayats forming the catchment areas of the Library; we would also conduct surveys to assess the requirements of the general public. Our findings are expected to be of immense use for the neighbourhood groups formed under People's Planning Programme for effective implementation. We would conduct the studies with the help of educational institutions, teachers' organisations, literacy committees, and other similar agencies. Seminars, workshops, debates, and literary and cultural activities will be conducted in this regard. Extension of library activities with information centre,

career guidance bureau etc., are also proposed to be carried out.

(ii) Rejuvenation of the agricultural sector

The problems of farmers in the locality will be identified giving stress to the prospects of farm extension, farmer credit, agricultural organisation and agrarian relations. This will be done with the help of governmental agencies such as *Krishi Bhavan*, Animal Husbandry Department, and Agricultural University. Organisation of seminars, workshops, soil testing camps, extension programmes etc., is also envisaged. The Library will select a fixed number of interested families to practise horticulture that would enable them to become self-sufficient in vegetables. It will also assist interested farmers to produce vermi-compost and propagate eco-friendly agricultural practices through organic farming; popularisation of medicinal plants will also be attempted. The role of the Library in this context will be that of a link between service personnel and farmers. Enhancing the role of *Karshaka Club* and *Krishi Book Corner* is also proposed.

(iii) Improvement of the health status of the local population

It is intended to assess the health status of the people in the panchayats through an extensive survey. Through the identification of major constraints in the health sector, the Library will work out the possible remedial measures. Activities related to this will be done in co-ordination with the Health Department and technical experts. The level of awareness among people may be raised through medical camps on different systems of medicine (Allopathy, Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, and Naturopathy). The Library will also take initiative to tackle some of the environmental hazards caused by solid wastes, stagnant waters, and pollution of public water sources such as canals and tanks.

The general objective of the study is to understand the new challenges and the responsibilities of rural libraries in the context of changing socio-economic and cultural set-up of the State. The specific objectives are the following:

- (i) To evaluate the efficiency of the activities of the library;
- (ii) To identify the desirable changes in the work plan as demanded by the readers and beneficiaries; and
- (iii) To set up future activity agenda which will enhance the role of the library as a co-ordinating agency and catalyst for socio-economic development of the locality.

The study region identified is Valayanchirangara (which includes three wards, one each from Rayamangalam, Vengola, and Mazhuvannoor panchayats of Kunnathunad taluk of Ernakulam district), an area within a radius of 1.5 km of the library.

## **Data**

Both primary and secondary data will be utilised for the purpose of the study. Secondary data



include the database of the survey conducted by the *Grandhasala Sanghom* for assessing readership and tastes of readers, the report of the Readership Survey conducted by V N K P S Library and articles, periodicals, and documents available from local bodies, schools, hospitals, and annual reports of the Library. Primary data will be collected through an extensive sample survey of households in the study region.

The sample will consist of 360 households, 120 households from each ward having, on the average, about 480 households. The total number of houses and the sample size are given in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Ward-wise number of total and sample households**

<b>Panchayat</b>	<b>Total no. of houses</b>	<b>Survey conducted</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Vengola	676	164	24.2
Rayamangalam	348	87	25.0
Mazhuvannoor	420	105	25.0
Total	1444	356	24.7

The sample was selected from among the total number of households purposively based on economic and occupational status.

## 2. Demographic and socio-economic profile of sample households

### Demographic profile

The demographic profile of the sample population is given in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Demographic profile of the sample population**

Sex	Below 6 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	26-40 years	41-60 years	Above 60 years	Total	Percentage
Male	29	106	174	174	203	72	758	50.00
Female	29	99	148	181	224	77	758	50.00
Total	58	205	322	355	427	149	1516	
Percentage	3.84	13.48	21.24	23.43	28.17	9.84		100.00

Males and females are found to be numerically equal in this community. This is slightly at variance with the State average, which shows a higher number of females. Children below the age of five years constitute less than 4 per cent and about 14 per cent is in the schoolgoing age group of 5 to 15 years. Population in the productive age group of 16-60 years comes to 73 per cent. Old age (60 plus) population comes to nearly 10 per cent. The average size per household is found to be 4.25. Our survey has shown that in most of the households – more than 60 per cent – the size of the household is less than four.

### Religion

In the sample, Hindus predominate, accounting for about three-fourth of the households. Christians form 18 per cent and Muslims 7 per cent (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2 Profile of sample households: Religion-wise**

Religion	Total	Percentage
Hindu	266	74.7
Christian	65	18.3
Muslim	25	7.0
Total	356	100.0

The proportion of the Scheduled Castes/Tribes comes to only less than 7 per cent; more than one-fourth are ‘backward’ communities and the rest – about two-thirds - belong to the ‘forward’ communities (Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3 Sample households by community status**

	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Other Backward Class	Forward Class	Total
Total	19	5	95	237	356

## Education

The educational levels of the population are given in Table 2.4.

**Table 2.4 Educational level of the sample population: By sex and levels of education**

Level of education	Population		
	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	29 (1.9)	84 (5.6)	113 (7.5)
Literate (up to Primary Level)	242 (16.0)	240 (15.8)	482 (31.8)
Secondary School (including Higher Secondary)	365 (24.1)	336 (22.2)	701 (46.3)
Degree	35 (2.3)	48 (3.2)	83 (5.5)
Post Graduation	10 (0.7)	7 (0.4)	17 (1.1)
Technical and Professional Qualifications	75 (4.9)	41 (2.7)	116 (7.6)
Not reported	2 (0.1)	2 (0.1)	4 (0.2)
Total	758 (50.0)	758 (50.0)	1516 (50.0)

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

Students form more than one-fifth of the population. Sex-wise differences in enrolment at the different stages of school and college education are marginal. More than four-fifths of the students are at the school stage. It is observed that almost the entire population in the age group 5-15 are enrolled in school (Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5 Student population by sex and level of education**

Level of education	Student population		
	Male	Female	Total
A. School			
Lower Primary	35 (11.1)	35(11.1)	70(22.2)
Upper Primary	29(9.2)	28(8.9)	57(18.1)
Secondary	39(12.3)	39(12.3)	78(24.6)
Higher Secondary	27(8.6)	26(8.2)	53(16.8)
B. College			
Undergraduate	14(4.4)	6(1.9)	20(6.3)
Post Graduate	7(2.2)	6(1.9)	13(4.1)
C. Professional and Technical			
Professional	1(0.3)	5(1.6)	6(1.9)
Technical	12(3.8)	7(2.2)	19(6.0)
Total	164(51.9)	152(48.1)	316(100.0)

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

Illiterates form about 7.5 per cent of the population (including 3.8 per cent accounted for by children below the age of 6 years). Overall, the educational level of the sample population is fairly high with 92.5 per cent literacy, and matriculates and above accounting for more than 60 per cent. However, the proportion of the professionally and technically qualified is extremely small.

Students attending departmental schools and aided private schools have expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of instruction. The Library realises that it can play a positive and constructive role in this issue.

The proportion of non-schoolgoing children to the total population is around 4 per cent; and they form about one-fifth of the total number of children enrolled in primary and secondary schools. All the non-schoolgoing children are school dropouts. Lack of parental care is reportedly the reason for the dropout of more than two-thirds of the dropouts. The Library has to take upon itself the responsibility of taking these children back to schooling through formal or non-formal streams of education.

### **Activity status**

The activity status of the population is given in Table 2.6. It is found that the proportion of the income-earners in the population comes to 41 per cent.

**Table 2.6 Activity status of the population**

Activity status	Population	
	Number	Per cent
I Income earners	626	41.2
II Non-income earners of whom:	890	58.8
(a) Children below 6 years of age	58	3.8
(b) Full-time students	316	20.8
(c) Housewives	323	21.3
(d) Unemployed; invalids, etc	193	12.7
Total (I + II)	1516	100.0

### **Occupation**

The occupational distribution of the sample population indicates that the proportion of the non-employed is much higher among women than among men. The working population among men comes to 64.8 per cent; the corresponding percentage for women is 57.4. However, there is a big difference in the occupational status as between men and women. Whereas among men, almost the entire working population is income-earning, among women, 75 per cent is non-income-earning persons, namely housewives. Unemployment rates are also much higher among women than among men (Table 2.7).

**Table 2.7 Occupational status of the population by sex (in percentage)**

Occupational status	Population		
	Men	Women	Total
Self-employed	25.1	1.5	13.3
Salaried	18.2	5.4	11.8
Wage Earners	21.5	7.9	14.7
Housewives	-	42.6	21.3
Students	21.6	20.0	20.8
Children below 6 years	3.8	3.8	3.8
Pensioners	2.0	1.0	1.5
Others (including	7.8	17.7	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

## Land

Landed property used to be the criterion by which a person's (or a household's) status in society is adjudged. The importance of this form of asset has come down in recent decades. However, in the rural areas of the State, it continues to be the most significant form in which assets are held. Owing to various factors such as population growth and acquisition of land for public purposes, the extent of land owned per household has become very small. The distribution of land among the households in the study area is given in Table 2.8.

**Table 2.8 Distribution of households by ownership of landed property**  
(in percentage)

Size group of landed property	Percentage of households
Below 10 cents (including landless households)	16.8
11 – 80 cents	37.4
81 – 100 cents	16.6
101 – 200 cents	21.6
Above 200 cents	7.6
Total	100.0

It may be observed that more than half the number of households have only less than 80 cents of land each and that the proportion owning more than 2 acres each is hardly 8 per cent.

## Housing

The housing conditions in the area are, in general, satisfactory. Except for a tiny proportion of less than one per cent, all households have their own houses. Besides, only less than three

per cent of the households lives in poor quality buildings that may be termed huts. The others live in tiled or concrete-roofed houses.

Nearly 90 per cent of the houses is electrified. The proportion of households having piped water supply is only less than 8 per cent. Less than 2 per cent of the extremely poor population takes their drinking water from canals. All other households use wells (88 per cent has own wells and 3 per cent uses public wells) for drinking water purposes.

More than 95 per cent of the households has latrine facilities, mostly with single pit or septic pit tanks. The other 5 per cent defecates in the open in places such as public lands alongside the highways.

Drainage and waste-disposal facilities are poor in the area. Only 40 per cent reported that they did not experience these problems.

### **Household income**

Income levels of the households in the study area fall within a wide range of below Rs. 12,000 to above Rs. 60,000 per year. The proportion with annual incomes of less than Rs. 12,000 (which may be considered to belong to the below poverty level households) comes to nearly 17 per cent. About three-fourths of the households have moderate incomes in the range of Rs. 12,000 to Rs. 48,000. The area does not have households that may be categorised as rich (Table 2.9).

**Table 2.9 Percentage distribution of households by annual income**

<b>Income group</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Below Rs 12,000	16.9
Rs 12,001 – Rs 24,000	44.1
Rs 24,001 – Rs 36,000	19.4
Rs 36,001 – Rs 48,000	11.2
Rs 48,001 – Rs 60,000	3.9
Above Rs 60,000	4.5
Total	100.0

### **Savings**

It is observed that more than 70 per cent of the households has savings in some form or other. About 28 per cent has their savings kept in commercial or co-operative banks or post office savings bank. More than 40 per cent subscribes to chit funds. The proportion of households not reporting savings forms nearly 30 per cent (Table 2.10).

The Table shows that 71.07 per cent of the people has the saving habit. It is more in Rayamangalam panchayat (83.91 per cent) followed by Vengola panchayat (74.39 per cent).

The saving habit is found much lower in Mazhuvannoor panchayat.

**Table 2.10 Distribution of households according to type of savings**

<b>Type of saving</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Commercial bank deposit	70	19.7
Co-operative bank deposit	15	4.2
Post office bank deposit	15	4.2
Chit funds	146	41.0
Others	7	2.0
Not applicable	103	28.9
Total	356	100.0

### 3. Reading habits

We observed earlier that more than 90 per cent of the population is literate. The effective literacy rate (obtained by excluding children in the pre-school age group) is as high as 96 per cent. It is therefore not surprising that more than 86 per cent of the households has at least one member who has active reading habits. In fact, the percentage is lower than what one would have normally expected in such a highly literate community.

Newspaper reading is the most widespread reading habit in the households. Except the households that had responded negatively to the question on reading habits, all households have members who read newspapers habitually. There are households, which have reported that their members read as many as six newspapers a day. But the majority (about 80 per cent) read only three newspapers or less. The proportion that reads only one newspaper comes to 40 per cent (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1 Distribution of households by newspaper-reading habit**

No. of newspapers read	Number of households	Percentage
0	49	13.8
1	149	41.8
2	89	25.0
3	44	12.4
4	12	3.4
5	11	3.1
6	02	0.5
	356	100.0

A large number of households (48 per cent) have members who have the habit of reading periodicals also on a regular basis. Of them, 26 per cent has members who read only one periodical a week. However, there are a few others who read more than three (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Distribution of households by number of periodicals read by their members**

No. of periodicals	No. of households	Percentage
0	186	52.3
1	93	26.1
2	41	11.5
3	20	5.6
More than 3	16	4.5
Total	356	100.00

We have looked into the sources of periodicals and books for the households that have members who have the habit of reading them. We observe that our Library is the major source. Other sources include the places of work, neighbours, and public places such as coffee shops and barber shops.



**Table 3.3 Sources of periodicals and books for household reading**

No.	Sources	No. of households	Percentage
1	VNKPS Library	84	49.4
2	Place of work	25	14.7
3	Neighbourhood	21	12.3
4	Public places	37	21.8
5	Others	3	1.8
6	Total	170	100.0

The monthly expenditure of households for purchasing reading materials (newspapers, periodicals, and books) was examined. It is observed that the largest amount of expenditure incurred under this item is on newspapers; the next is on periodicals; books came only last. The proportion of household that does not incur any expenditure under this item is more than two-thirds. And the proportion of households that incur an expenditure of more than Rs. 200 per month is hardly 5 per cent.

In contrast, households spend slightly larger amounts on entertainment. Here again the proportion of households that does not incur expenditure is, however, quite large (58 per cent), though smaller than in the case of purchase of reading materials.

### **Book preference**

Among the households, only 27 per cent reported that none of their adult members are in the habit of reading books of any kind. Among those who did, more than 60 per cent read only novels and short stories. The proportion which read poetry, biographies, and travelogues are accounted for less than one-eighth of the total number of households (Table 3.4). Households with members having a catholicity of book-reading interests are extremely small.

**Table 3.4 Book-reading preferences of households**

Types of books read	Households (Percentage)
Novels and short stories	57.0
Poetry	4.5
Scientific literature	3.4
Biography, Travelogues	3.4
Other	4.5
Not applicable	27.2
Total	100.0

Among schoolchildren, general reading, outside of their school syllabus, is not at all common. It is found that the vast majority, in more than 80 per cent of the households, does not read books or other publications, beyond the purview of their immediate syllabus requirements.

The adult population in about half the households agrees that the reading habits of the public, including the student population, are on the decline. The vast majority among them (more than 60 per cent) is of the view that other forms of entertainment, particularly the rapid growth of the visual electronic media, is the most important reason for the decline. Other reasons reported include lack of leisure time and availability of other pastime. The other half did not give any response.

On enquiry, we find that television-watching has become a regular habit in about 50 per cent of the households. The average watching time per person exceeds two hours a day. And the number of households having television sets and the level of addiction to television programmes is observed to be continuously on the rise.

### **Library membership**

It is rather disappointing that despite its existence for about half-a-century and relentless efforts to promote reading habits and trigger developmental activities in diverse spheres, readership of the Library still remains confined to less than 40 per cent of the households in the area. Redoubled efforts are therefore essential to attract the households that have yet to enrol themselves as members of the library. The strategy that the library envisages for this purpose is to approach the housewives in these households.

## 4. Agriculture

The second major priority area of the project is agriculture. In this area, ours has been an action research programme with the specific objectives of analysing the pre-intervention scenario of agriculture and implementing an action programme for ascertaining the economics of rice cultivation.

Among the sample households, nearly three-fourths are engaged in agriculture. The break-up of the households by the dominant crop cultivated is given in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Distribution of households by predominant crop cultivated**

Crop	Households	
	Number	Percentage
Rice	146	41.0
Rubber	101	28.4
Pineapple	4	1.1
Others	11	3.1
Not applicable	94	26.4
Total	356	100.0

It is found that the majority of cultivating households has rice as their predominant crop. Rubber is also cultivated extensively. Almost the entire area that could be converted to Rubber has been done so. It is only a small proportion of households that cultivate pineapple or a variety of garden crops including arecanut, pepper, and nutmeg.

Among the farming households, more than two-thirds (182 of 262) face severe problems and economic constraints as may be seen from Table 4.2. It may be noted that the cultivators mentioned to us more than one problem, but the Table provides information only on the most important of them.

### Membership in farm clubs

Farm Clubs have been formed to assist farmers in various agricultural activities. Not all the farmers in the area are, however, members of these clubs. Out of the 262 as many as 127 (48.5 per cent) are found to be non-members.

### Participation in the agricultural programmes of the library

As was mentioned earlier, the Library has been organising awareness programmes for the benefit of farmers (by conducting classes, seminars, and camps). A survey of farmers conducted on participation in such activities of the library showed that nearly 70 per cent participated in awareness programmes. The proportion of farmers who reported benefits derived from such programmes comes to around 40 per cent.

**Table 4.2 Problems of cultivation**

Sl. No.	The biggest problem faced	Farming households Number	Percentage
1	Pests	17	9.3
2	Poor yield	33	18.1
3	Lack of irrigation facilities	8	4.4
4	High production cost	49	26.9
5	Scarcity of agricultural labourers	21	11.5
6	Erosion of soil quality caused by application of chemical fertilisers and pesticides	10	5.5
7	Dearth of organic manure	13	7.1
8	Declining govt. subsidies and rising input prices	17	9.4
9	Proliferation of hybrid varieties and disappearance of indigenous traditional varieties	14	7.7
	Total	182	100.0

Despite governmental efforts to promote agriculture through a variety of schemes including subsidies and the awareness programmes conducted by several social organisations such as our library, the awareness level of the farmers regarding the various government schemes is observed to be only around 60 per cent. The rest 40 per cent remains almost entirely uninformed about them.

Another disquieting feature is the fact that hardly 15 per cent of the farmers follows modern methods of cultivation. The proportion approaching *Krishi Bhavans* for technical advice in cultivation is practically nil. About 16 per cent, who goes to *Krishi Bhavans*, does so only for getting production materials given free or on subsidy.

## 5. Health

The health status of the population in the study area is fairly high. Incidence of diseases and the proportion of population suffering from physical and mental disabilities are relatively low. The proportion of population that reported various chronic diseases and disabilities comes to less than 10 per cent of the population (Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1 Distribution of persons having chronic diseases or disabilities**

Types of disease/disability	No. of persons	Percentage
I Chronic Diseases		
Cardiac Problems	12	0.8
Paralysis	2	0.1
Asthma	11	0.7
Diabetes	31	2.1
Cancer	2	0.1
Other Diseases	65	4.3
Total	123	8.1
II Physical handicap	13	0.9
III Mental handicap	5	0.3
Total	141	9.3
IV No chronic disease/disability	1375	90.7
Total population	1516	100.0

In addition, people suffer from various kinds of acute diseases caused by bacteria and virus. These are mostly seasonal in character. The proportion of the population that has had such acute diseases is reported to be around 9 per cent.

### Expenditure on health care

Table 5.2 shows the distribution of the households by annual medical expenditure groups.

**Table 5.2 Distribution of households by annual medical expenditure (in percentage)**

Expenditure group	No. of households	Percentage
Less than Rs. 500	89	25.0
Rs. 500 – Rs. 1000	81	22.8
Rs. 1001 – Rs. 2000	60	16.8
Rs. 2001 – Rs. 5000	60	16.8
Above Rs. 5000	66	18.6
Total	356	100.0

While one-fourth of the households spends less than Rs. 500 per annum for medical treatment, and nearly one-fifth, 10 times that amount, the majority (56 per cent) spends between Rs. 500 and Rs. 5000.

Different systems of medicine are resorted to in the area for treatment of diseases. Among them, allopathy is the most popular. More than three fourths (77.3 per cent) of the households reported their having approached allopathic practitioners and institutions during the one year preceding the date of survey. The corresponding proportions for other systems are small: 7.3 per cent for Ayurveda, 5.3 per cent for Homoeopathy and about 10 per cent, all the three systems.

**Table 5.3 Distribution of households by sector of medical institutions approached (Govt. or Private)**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Private	325	91.3
Government	18	5.1
Both	13	3.6
Total	356	100.0

While more than nine-tenths of the households habitually approach private clinics and dispensaries for treatment, the proportion that go to government institutions is a mere one-twentieth. The rest, hardly 4 per cent, go to both. One of the reasons for greater reliance on private institutions is the non-availability of government institutions nearby for more than three-fourths of the households.

### **Action programmes**

The major areas of action programmes conducted by the Library were promotion of (i) readership of the library, (ii) education, (iii) health care, and (iv) agriculture. The major types of activity consisted of seminars and workshops in the case of readership promotion and education, medical camps, seminars, and awareness campaigns in the case of health care and seminars and group activities in the case of agriculture.

Seminars on themes such as 'Role of rural library in local level development' (held on 16 May 1998) and 'Women and reading' (held on 17 May 1998), a three-day workshop (30 September - 3 October 1999) for improvement of the reading habits of children and another three-day workshop for children (18-20 October 1999) for acquainting them with the fundamentals of law, science, language and literature, arts and legislation, may be mentioned among the important field-level activities conducted in relation to promotion of the reading habits and educational interests of the population.

Workshops organised with the active collaboration of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat (KSSP) for discussing new economic reforms at the level of elementary education (such as DPEP) also come under this category. Another significant step taken was the launching of a literacy programme in a colony inhabited by extremely poor and socially backward communities.

For improving the health status of the population and increasing the level of their health status, various seminars were held on diverse topics such as environmental pollution, water, atmospheric and sound pollution, blood donation, and preventive and social medicine. Be-

sides, eye care camps were conducted with the co-operation of specialist hospitals. In these camps, eye problems were identified and treatment given to large numbers of the local population with several types of afflictions. Follow-up is maintained in the case of persons who required prolonged medical attention.

It is in the matter of agricultural promotion that the Library has taken some serious field-level activities. Apart from conducting several seminars and workshops on agricultural practices, costs of cultivation, problems of labour shortage and profitability of farming with the active co-operation of the faculty of the Agriculture University, scientists from Pineapple Research Centre and bank officials and forming farmers' groups, the Library has launched a field experiment to collect information on the economics of rice cultivation in the area.

The agricultural programme has two phases: the field experiment and the analysis of the results of the experiment. Analysis of the various items of cost incurred in rice cultivation and of the value of output is the major focus of the experiment. Its main objective is to understand whether the reasons for decline of rice cultivation in the area are economic or not. Rice used to be the most widespread crop in the area till the 1980s. The rapid encroachment of the cultivated area by tree crops and garden crops since then changed the face of farm cultivation in the area. The surveys and interviews conducted by the Library among rice farmers of the locality provided the background for the present experiment. Information on cost of cultivation incurred on various inputs such as seed, farm labour, fertilisers, and pesticides was obtained from 12 rice farmers. Out of them, only five had reportedly earned some amount by way of profits; the other seven incurred losses. Data had been collected on the size of the farm, the major source of income of the household, the principal occupation of the head of the household, the extent of crop damage, and other problems faced by farmers.

At a public meeting held in connection with the one-day seminar on agriculture conducted under the auspices of the Library on 21 November 1998, the Minister of Agriculture of the State had promised to supply seeds and fertilisers to rice farmers of the area at subsidised rates. Keeping that promise in mind, the Library prepared an integrated project for development of rice cultivation in the area with the help of agricultural experts. A co-ordination committee was constituted with the presidents and agricultural officers of three panchayats and representatives of the farmer's club of the Library. Three separate projects each covering 200 hectares of paddy-fields in each panchayat were prepared by the respective agricultural officers.

The main aim of this project is to raise the production of rice from its present level of 2,000 kg per hectare. Mobilisation of farmer's groups, for joint farm activities for better output is the main objective of the project. The project includes the provisions for the supply of high quality seeds, supply of lime for reducing acidity, and standardised use of bio/green manure, chemical fertilisers and pest control measures. The total expenditure of the project is Rs. 36,52,200. In this, Rs. 16,82,100 is expected to be raised through contributions from farmers and the rest Rs. 19,70,100 to be received from government in the form of aid in kind. Detailed projects of all the three panchayats have already been submitted to the Minister for approval and sanction of funds.

## **Experimental plots**

As a follow-up to the survey and the seminar, the Library has taken up a field experiment on rice cultivation by selecting five plots of land from different parts of the region. The main aim of this experiment is to verify whether rice cultivated under systematic methods of agriculture and systematic expenditure on various farm activities is profitable. If the outcome of the experiment is positive, it should be possible to rekindle the interest of farmers in rice farming.

One farmer will be selected from each of the five farm units and he will be the lead farmer. He will be the model for other farmers in the same unit. He will follow systematic agriculture practices as per the guidance of the agriculture officer. For co-ordinating the farm activities, a farm committee is formed in each farm unit. Discussions involving each farm committee and agriculture officers are completed and the standard quantity of seed, fertilisers, and lime that has to be used for *Puncha* crop have also been finalised. We hope that the programme would turn out to be successful and provide a model for all the farmers in the area to emulate.

## **The field experiment**

Four experimental plots were identified with the help of farmers and neighbourhood groups. Group activity was arranged in these plots. In each *Padasekharam* (group of fields), one lead farmer followed the technical guidance and directions of the agricultural officer in the preparation of land, souring, manuring, pest control measures, etc. The farmers in the adjoining plots followed the lead farmer. Accordingly, the *Puncha* crop cultivation was carried out. Presidents and Agriculture Officers of the panchayat together with the KRPLLD faculty held discussions with the farmers regarding the farm operations to be followed. The souring and allied farm activities for ground preparation were completed in all the plots. A campaign was organised to propagate among the farmers the importance of bio-fertilisers, green manure, and controlled use of pesticides.

The results of the experiment, which is proposed to be repeated for a few years in succession, are awaited.



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