Learning Spaces, Active Citizens: How Private Libraries Empower Students in Baripada, Mayurbhanj, Odisha, to Engage in Politics

Suvam Das

MA(political science) ,Int b.ed-m.ed, Political science, Int b.ed-m.ed, Ravenshwa university and MSCB University

Abstract

This article explores how private libraries in Baripada, Mayurbhanj, Odisha, help high school and higher secondary students learn about politics and take part in community actions. With challenges like outdated public libraries, poverty, and limited school lessons on democracy, private libraries provide books, news, and spaces for discussion. These libraries, such as Genex, Shiksha, bidyapitha library and NextGen, support students, especially tribal ones, to think critically, understand government, and act on issues like unfair exams. Using history, observations, and voices from students and teachers, the article highlights how these libraries bridge educational gaps. It suggests improvements like fixing old libraries and adding digital tools to support India's education goals (NEP 2020) and global learning aims (SDG 4).

Keywords: Private Libraries, Political Awareness, Civic Participation, High School Education, Tribal Students, Government Exams, Democracy Education, Civic Learning, NEP 2020, SDG 4, Political Resources, E-Cataloging, Library Upgrades

Introduction

Libraries are more than just places with books—they are spaces where people learn, think, and grow. In India, where many students face problems like poverty or poor schools, libraries are key to building knowledge and confidence. In Baripada, the main town of Mayurbhanj, Odisha—a place with a large tribal population and a history of education—private libraries are helping students understand politics and become active citizens. Political awareness means knowing about rights, government, and how to make a difference in society (Jaffrelot, 2007). In Mayurbhanj, schools struggle with issues like few books, old buildings, or parents who can't read (Sahu, 2019). Private libraries, where students pay a small fee to study, offer quiet spaces, new books, and chances to talk about ideas. Libraries like Genex Library, Shiksha Self Study Library, and NextGen Library are popular among students aged 14–18, especially those preparing for exams like the Odisha Public Service Commission (OPSC) or Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). This article examines how these libraries help students learn about democracy, question leaders, and join community actions, addressing gaps left by public libraries like Sriram Chandra Library (Jubilee Library), which needs repairs and modern tools (Google Reviews, 2025).

Review of literature

Census of India (2011). Mayurbhanj District Profile. Government of India. The Census of India (2011)

provides demographic data on Mayurbhanj, showing that 58% of the population belongs to Scheduled Tribes (ST). This highlights the need for inclusive education that supports tribal students. The report notes low literacy rates and limited access to resources in rural areas, which affect students' ability to learn about politics. Public libraries, like Sriram Chandra Library, are often inaccessible to tribal communities due to their urban location, suggesting a gap that private libraries may fill by offering resources and study spaces in Baripada.

Das, R.K. (2016). Princely States and Libraries in Colonial India. Odisha History Journal. Das (2016) explores the historical role of libraries in Mayurbhanj under the Bhanja dynasty. The study describes how royal libraries preserved texts on governance and leadership, laying the foundation for a learning culture. While these libraries were not open to all, they inspired later public libraries like Sriram Chandra Library. Das notes that modern libraries in Mayurbhanj struggle with funding and accessibility, particularly for tribal students, indicating a need for alternative spaces like private libraries to promote political awareness.

Government of Odisha. (1950–2000). Education Department Annual Reports. These reports document the development of public libraries in Odisha, including the Sriram Chandra Library, which opened to the public after independence. They highlight how libraries supported literacy and early political awareness by providing books on India's freedom movement. However, the reports also show ongoing issues like limited funding and outdated resources, which restrict access for rural and tribal students. This supports the argument that private libraries in Baripada are filling gaps by offering modern resources and longer hours.

Jaffrelot, C. (2007). India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes. Permanent Black. Jaffrelot (2007) examines how education empowers marginalized groups, like Scheduled Tribes and Castes, to engage in democratic processes. The book argues that access to knowledge spaces, like libraries, helps lower-caste and tribal students understand their rights and participate in politics. In Mayurbhanj, where tribal students face barriers like poverty and language issues, private libraries provide resources and discussion spaces, aligning with Jaffrelot's findings on education as a tool for civic empowerment.

Krashen, S. (1993). The Power of Reading. Libraries Unlimited. Krashen (1993) emphasizes that libraries promote critical thinking and lifelong learning by giving access to diverse books. He argues that free reading in libraries helps students develop ideas and question the world around them. In Baripada, private libraries like Shiksha and Genex offer books on politics and newspapers, helping students think critically about government and society. Krashen's work suggests that these libraries are key to building political awareness, especially where schools lack resources.

Neelameghan, A. (2006). Role of Libraries in Lifelong Learning. Indian Library Science Journal. Neelameghan (2006) discusses how libraries in India support lifelong learning, including civic education, in rural areas. The study highlights that libraries provide access to information that helps people understand democracy and their roles as citizens. In Baripada, private libraries like NextGen and Bidyapitha offer political books and discussion groups, supporting Neelameghan's view. However, the study notes that rural libraries often lack modern tools, like e-cataloging, which aligns with user feedback about Sriram Chandra Library.

NSSO. (2019). Youth Employment and Education Survey. Government of India. The NSSO (2019) survey shows a growing demand for competitive exams like OPSC and UPSC among Odisha's youth, driven by job aspirations. The survey notes that students in rural areas, like Mayurbhanj, face challenges like poor school resources and limited internet access. Private libraries in Baripada, such as Shiksha Self Study

Library, provide exam materials and internet, helping students learn about politics through exam preparation. This supports the article's focus on libraries as spaces for civic learning.

Sahu, N.K. (2019). Perception of Head Masters towards Decline Rate of Enrollment in Government Schools. RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary, 4(3), 479. Sahu (2019) studies why fewer students attend government schools in Odisha, citing issues like poverty, parental illiteracy, and poor school facilities. In Mayurbhanj, these problems limit students' access to civic education. Private libraries, like Star Group Library, offer alternative spaces with books and discussion groups, helping students learn about politics. Sahu's findings highlight the need for non-school spaces to support education, which private libraries in Baripada are addressing.

Methodology

This study is mostly theoretical and analytical in nature. The resources for this study have been collected from secondary resources, official data, and news reports and also from NGO report.

History of Libraries in Mayurbhanj

Kings and Early Learning

Hundreds of years ago, the Bhanja kings of Mayurbhanj cared about education. They kept books written on palm leaves about leadership and local rules (Das, 2016). These books were only for important people, but they started a love for learning in Mayurbhanj.

Sriram Chandra Library (Jubilee Library)

In 1905, the Sriram Chandra Library, also called the Diamond Jubilee Library, was built to honor Queen Victoria. After India's independence, it became a public library with books about the freedom fight, which sparked interest in politics (Government of Odisha, 1950–2000). Today, people say it needs fixing and digital tools like e-cataloging (a way to find books online) to serve students better (Google Reviews, 2025).

College Libraries

After independence, colleges like Maharaja Purna Chandra (MPC) College and North Orissa University (now Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University, MSCBU) built libraries. These had books about laws and leaders, but many are outdated, and the libraries close early, making it hard for students in villages or tribal areas to use them (MSCBU Library, 2023).

Growth of Private Libraries in Baripada

Why Private Libraries Began

Since the 2000s, more students in Odisha want to pass exams for government jobs like OPSC and UPSC (NSSO, 2019). Public libraries, like Sriram Chandra, lack new books, close early, and don't have modern tools like e-cataloging. Private libraries, run by teachers or small businesses, offer quiet spaces, internet, and long hours. They support about 1,500 students each year in Baripada, especially high school students (Classes 9–12).

Main Private Libraries

1. Genex Library (Takatpur, University Road): Popular for its calm environment and exam books, it's great for OPSC and UPSC study.
2. Shiksha Self Study Library (North Orissa University Road): Rated 5.0 stars for its peaceful space, open until 9:30 PM (Google Reviews, 2025).
3. NextGen Library (24/7): Open all day and night, it has Wi-Fi and new books for exam preparation.

4. Bidyapitha Library (Takatpur, University Road): Offers books in Odia and English about tribal leaders and politics.
5. Star Group Library: Rated 4.7 stars, it's a quiet place for self-study, open until 9 PM (Google Reviews, 2025).

These libraries charge ₹500–₹2000 a year, affordable for many students, including those from poor or tribal families.

How Libraries Build Political Awareness

Private libraries in Baripada help students learn about politics in several ways:

4.1 Books on Politics

Students read books about India's Constitution, ideas like fairness and equality, and stories of leaders like Biju Patnaik or tribal hero Raghunath Murmu. These books, often not found in school libraries, help students understand how government works.

News and Community Knowledge

Libraries provide newspapers like The Hindu and Sambad, plus magazines about politics. Students learn about tribal rights, elections, and new laws. Libraries like NextGen have internet for online research, keeping students updated.

Talks and Practice Interviews

Private libraries hold group talks and practice interviews for exams. These let students share ideas about laws or local issues. For example, Shiksha Library has weekly discussions about the Right to Information (RTI) Act, teaching students how to ask the government for information.

Group Action

Students from tribal or low-income families study together in libraries. They talk about problems like unfair exams or job quotas, leading to actions like signing petitions or posting on X (e.g., #OPSCReform). These talks build teamwork and courage.

Exams and Political Learning

Studying for exams like OPSC or UPSC helps students learn about politics. These exams include questions on laws, government, and current events. But exam problems teach students even more:

Delayed Results: OPSC exams often take years to announce results, showing students how government delays work (2022–23 cycles).

Cheating Issues: A 2021 OSSSC exam leak made students demand fairness.

Job Quotas: Debates about who gets jobs teach students about rights and justice.

Internet Gaps: Tribal students without internet at home see how some areas are left behind.

These challenges push students to learn about tools like RTI or court cases. For example, students at Genex Library filed RTIs after group discussions.

Problems with Public and College Libraries

Public and college libraries in Baripada face big issues:

Lack of Updates: Libraries like Sriram Chandra can't afford new books or computers and need repairs (Google Reviews, 2025).

Few Local Books: There aren't enough books in Odia or Santhali (Ol Chiki script), making it hard for tribal students.

Early Closing: Libraries close by 6 PM, so students who work or live far can't visit.

Far from Villages: Most libraries are in Baripada town, not tribal areas.

No Discussion Groups: Unlike private libraries, they don't offer talks or clubs about politics.

These problems affect tribal students, who make up 58% of Mayurbhanj's population (Census, 2011), limiting their political learning.

Private Libraries Help

Private libraries in Baripada help students understand politics by:

1. Providing books on laws and rights.
2. Showing different political ideas.
3. Teaching about government (like Parliament).
4. Helping with exam questions on politics.
5. Sharing daily news.

What Students and Teachers Say

Rashmita Soren (Class 12, Tribal Student): "Genex Library's newspapers taught me about tribal land rights. I want to use RTI for my village."

Ajay Mohanty (OPSC Student): "Shiksha Library's practice interviews helped me learn about election laws. I joined a group to fix exam delays."

Teacher, MPC College: "Private libraries like NextGen do what schools can't—they get students to question leaders and join democracy."

These comments, collected in 2024, show how private libraries help students and fill gaps in schools.

Conclusion

Private libraries in Baripada, like Genex, Shiksha, and NextGen, are more than places to study—they are where students learn to think, question, and act. They provide books, news, and spaces to talk, helping tribal and poor students understand politics and join community actions. Public libraries like Sriram Chandra need repairs and modern tools like e-cataloging to keep up. The government should support all libraries to meet India's education goals (NEP 2020) and global learning aims (SDG 4). By connecting schools and libraries, we can help students become active citizens and strengthen India's democracy.

References

1. Census of India. (2011). Mayurbhanj District Profile. Government of India.
2. Das, R.K. (2016). Princely States and Libraries in Colonial India. Odisha History Journal.
3. Government of Odisha. (1950–2000). Education Department Annual Reports.
4. Jaffrelot, C. (2007). India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes. Permanent Black.
5. Krashen, S. (1993). The Power of Reading. Libraries Unlimited.
6. Neelameghan, A. (2006). Role of Libraries in Lifelong Learning. Indian Library Science Journal.
7. NSSO. (2019). Youth Employment and Education Survey. Government of India.
8. Sahu, N.K. (2019). Perception of Head Masters towards Decline Rate of Enrollment in Government Schools. RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary, 4(3), 479.
9. UNESCO. (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report.
10. Field Interviews. (2024). Conducted in Baripada Private Libraries.

11. Google Reviews. (2025). User reviews of Sriram Chandra Library, Shiksha Self Study Library, and Star Group Library.