DVK Garden Library

An Environment for Enlightenment

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DVK Garden Library: An Environment for Enlightenment

Introduction

Recently, the renovation of the DVK Garden Library, an open-air sanctuary dedicated to learning and research, was completed and is now in use. This oxygen-rich green space in the most crowded Bangalore city, spans 50,000 square feet and is designed to promote enlightenment. It is organized into three main Kōśas* (layers) and thirty-three Maṇḍalas* (areas imbued with specific contemplative energy) and includes power and data connectivity as part of its research facilities. In this write-up, I will provide a concise overview to clarify the purpose and significance of each component/facility within this unique environment. (*The importance of these terms is explained below).



An Environment for Enlightenment

The DVK Garden Library, an extension of the DVK Central Library in Bangalore, is an outdoor reading and research space designed to foster reflective reading and produce high-quality knowledge. Modern libraries strive to create environments that support reading, reflection, and extended study. In alignment with this objective, the DVK Central Library has developed a dedicated space comprising 45,000 square feet indoors and 50,000 square feet outdoors to facilitate thoughtful reading and research. For the past twenty years, the outdoor area of the DVK Central Library has been known as the DVK Garden Library.

5 Kōśas: Distinct Layers of Learning Space

Since its inception in 2004, the DVK Central Library has developed into five distinct 'Kōśas,' each symbolising a different aspect of enlightenment: Bodhivṛkṣam (Tree of Enlightenment), Bōdhagraham (House of Enlightenment), Bōdhārām (Garden of Enlightenment), Bōdhivanam (Forest of Enlightenment), and Bōdhaguhara (Cave of Enlightenment). Each Kōśa has its own significance related to reading, reflection, and research. Bōdhagraham (House of Enlightenment) refers to the library's-built area, while the other four Kōśas are located outdoors. Of these, Bodhivṛkṣam (Tree of Enlightenment) is positioned at the entrance of the library building, with the remaining three Kōśas situated within the Garden Library area.



33 Maṇḍalas: Distinct Areas, Seats, and Structures with Unique Energy

The recently renovated DVK Garden Library incorporates three of these Kōśas: Bōdhārām (Garden of Enlightenment), Bōdhivanam (Forest of Enlightenment), and Bōdhaguhara (Cave of Enlightenment). This space covers 50,000 square feet outdoors and features thirty-three distinct areas, seats, and structures known as ' Maṇḍalas.' Each Maṇḍala has its own name and unique energy designed to support reading and research. The names and significance of each Maṇḍala are described below. The names, drawn from various languages, include brief English poetical explanations rather than direct translations. The more profound significance of each Maṇḍala is detailed hereafter.



Ameti Pīṭham: Space of Silence



Is an open-air reading area featuring traditional tables and chairs. This space is close to a creeper-covered fence, creating a serene and secluded atmosphere. It accommodates four people comfortably, allowing them to sit, read, and discuss in peace. The beauty of Ameti Pīṭham lies in its tranquil solitude, with the sky serving as its ceiling and Badham leaves adding to the natural ambience.

Nididhyāsana: Space for Assimilation



Features one side bordered with a granite stone wall. It comfortably accommodates four people, providing a tranquil setting for reading and discussion. This Maṇḍala is designed to help readers assimilate the knowledge acquired in the library. The surrounding environment encourages introspection, facilitating a meaningful inward journey that enhances the assimilation of information.

Mauna Pīṭham: Silent Valley



It is an artistic structure designed to inspire and invite readers into a space of silence, fostering the creation and publication of quality knowledge. This creative piece depicts the form of an ink bottle and a traditional writing stick with a nib, symbolising the process of writing and the pursuit of intellectual endeavours.

Chāvara Kuṭir: Chavara Hut



Is a charming homage to traditional creeper huts. Its ceiling, an artistic tapestry of intricately woven creeper branches, creates an enchanting atmosphere. The hut's circular design comfortably accommodates over ten individuals, offering a serene space for learning and dialogue. Dedicated to St. Chavara, the esteemed founder of the CMI Congregation, this hut stands as a beacon of inspiration, celebrating his legacy and nurturing the spirit of creative thought.

Olive Chōla: Shade of Transformation



The olive tree symbolises enduring wisdom and has witnessed countless meditations and transformations throughout history. The library serves as a sanctuary for profound contemplation and the journey from ignorance to wisdom. This tranquil space features four stone benches close to a single olive tree. Surrounded by nature, with the open sky above and leaves rustling nearby, it offers all users a unique and enriching experience.

Arul Mārg: Way of Grace



This installation features a light pole with an open scripture beneath it, displaying John 1:1-14. The phrase “The Word became flesh” is emphasised, reflecting the library’s role in bringing words into the realm of human experience. This installation serves as a reminder that those who integrate these words into their lives can truly embrace the path of grace.

Tāpasa Pīṭham: Prolonged Sitting Space



The ancient tapas concept, often associated with deep meditation and discipline, parallels the modern research practice. Both involve prolonged periods of sitting and focused contemplation. This seating area features a plus '+' or cross shaped desk, complemented by stone benches, all situated beneath a Pala tree under the open sky. This serene ambiance fosters a positive energy, encouraging users to engage in extended periods of reflective reading and contemplation.

Hṛdaya Guharam: Cave of the Heart



This maṇḍala belongs to the Bōdhaguhara (Cave of Enlightenment) Kōśa. The cave serves as an environment for mystical experiences, offering researchers a space to achieve a profound union with knowledge, which may lead to wisdom. The "Cave of the Heart" is a philosophical concept explored by many thinkers, including Plato, Śaṅkarāchārya, and Rumi.

Beth Rauma: Mount of Enlightenment



The Mount has a historical legacy as a place of contemplation. It serves as a reminder of enlightenment and higher-level thoughts. St. Chavara used this term to emphasize the importance of Darshan for the committed life.

Swapnālayam: Bamboo House for Dreams



Dreams play a crucial role in creative work and contemplative thinking. This elevated cottage, constructed from bamboo and wood, provides an ideal environment for dreaming and reflection. The palm leaf roofing offers a nature-friendly shelter and protection from the rain.

Avatāra Maṇḍalam: Space of Incarnation



One interpretation suggests that incarnation is the process through which the Word come into being. In this light, the library can be seen as a space of continuous incarnation. This symbolic art structure reminds us to embody and engage with the power of the word.

Mullavalliyum Thenmāvum: Jasmine and Mango Tree



This concept draws inspiration from the play Śākuntalam. The setup is designed to be in the open air, with seating arranged around a mango tree and jasmine plants. These elements provide ample shade, delicious fruits, and delightful fragrance, creating an inviting and stimulating environment. The aim is to inspire users to generate valuable knowledge and foster creative thinking.

Sūkṣma Darśanālayam: Mud-House for Inward Vision



The Sūkṣma Darśanālayam is a square-shaped mud house with a palm-leaf roof supported by four bamboo pillars. It features a low seating wall around tables, accommodating more than ten people. The arrangement allows those seated to see each other easily, fostering introspection and an inward vision. This Maṇḍala creates an atmosphere conducive to deep reflection and inner insight.

Puṣpagopuram: Garden Tower



The Puṣpagopuram is an inviting structure featuring a circular garden adorned with multi-coloured flowers. It offers a soothing environment that encourages creative thinking. Additionally, it provides expansive views from the Bōdhārām (Garden of Enlightenment), enhancing the overall experience.

Jñāna Stūpa: Threshold of Hope



It is a gracefully crafted timber structure shaped like a doorway and adorned with a bell, evoking a sense of timeless elegance. This threshold, symbolizing hope, gently guides those who pass through it, marking their entry into new realms and departure from the old. It stands as a beacon for seekers of fresh inspiration and new horizons, offering quiet support for their journey of discovery.

Śilōha: Pool of Wellness



Śilōha is renowned for its healing properties. This serene space features a stunning stone structure, vibrant climbing plants, water lilies, and a soothing waterfall and fountain. It emanates positive energy, encouraging dynamic thinking. Additionally, it serves as a reminder that pure knowledge has the power to heal and foster a healthy society.

Mazhavil Vēdi - Rainbow Stage



The Rainbow Stage features a striking structure with a symbolic rainbow backdrop adorned with vibrant colours and plants. It serves as the venue for regular Satsaṅg sessions in the evening as the library's hours close. Like a Human Library, Satsaṅg is designed to inspire rather than focus on extensive speech, encouraging participants to engage in deeper reflection and pursue the path of truth. Additionally, Satsaṅg sessions can include music to enrich the experience further.

Vānavil Valāgam: Rainbow Gallery



The Rainbow Gallery is a two-level, semicircular seating area surrounding a majestic banyan tree, positioned toward the Rainbow Stage. It serves as a space for sitting during Satsaṅg sessions and can also be used as a seating area for study and research. The Gallery offers a serene and inspiring ambiance, ideal for both learning and reflection.

Jñāna Garbha: Womb Library



The concept of the womb holds profound significance in this library. Nestled beneath a delicate, transparent, triangular canopy, a basket swing chair invites readers to sit, sway, and immerse themselves in their reading. This enchanting setting enhances the pleasure of reading and fosters the birth of new ideas, much like how a womb nurtures new life. The imagery of the reader gently swinging in the chair evokes the serene experience of an infant within the mother's womb, symbolizing both the physical form and the creative process of nurturing ideas.

Śravṇa Pīṭham: Listening Space



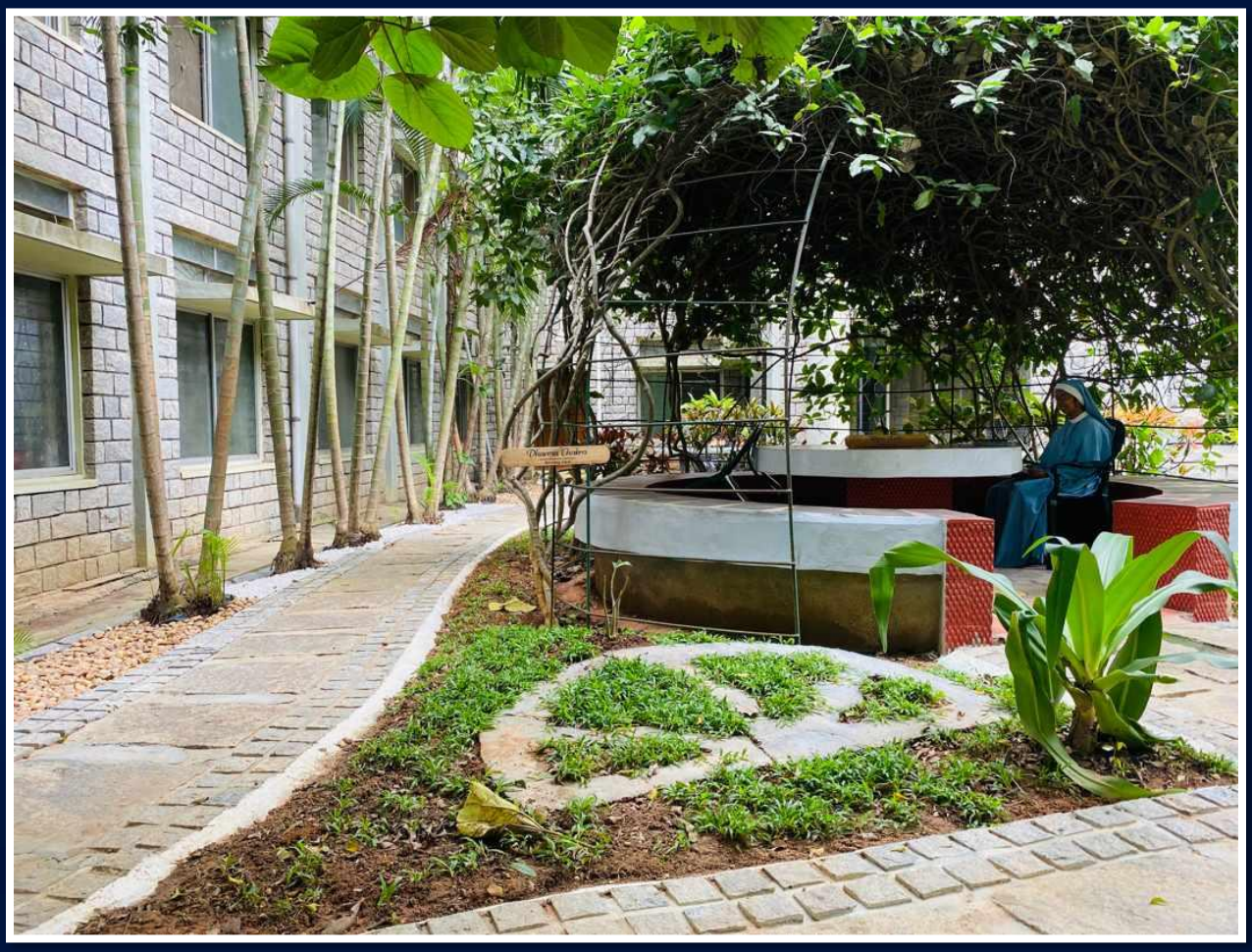
This installation consists of a tower-like structure made from bamboo and other wooden elements designed to hold flowerpots. It symbolizes the importance of listening (Śravṇa) in the process of acquiring and sharing knowledge. The space serves as a reminder of how crucial attentive listening is to the journey of learning.

Svādhyāya: Self-Learning Space



A table with three seats awaits those dedicated to self-directed learning. Named Svādhyāya, which means self-study, this area is designed to offer a retreat of ultimate silence and solitude, fostering an environment where individuals can immerse themselves in personal exploration and study.

Dharma Chakra: Reviving Wheel



This installation, resembling the remnants of an ancient wheel, symbolises the Dharma Chakra. It serves as a reminder to users of their ethical responsibilities and the dynamic nature of research and learning.

Bāpu Kuṭir: Mahatma Hut



This modest hut, dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, emanates an atmosphere conducive to research and learning, inspired by the values of India's Father of the Nation. The circular-shaped structure can accommodate over ten people, providing a space for reading and discussion as part of the research and learning process.

Nāthān Chōla: Shade of Rebirth



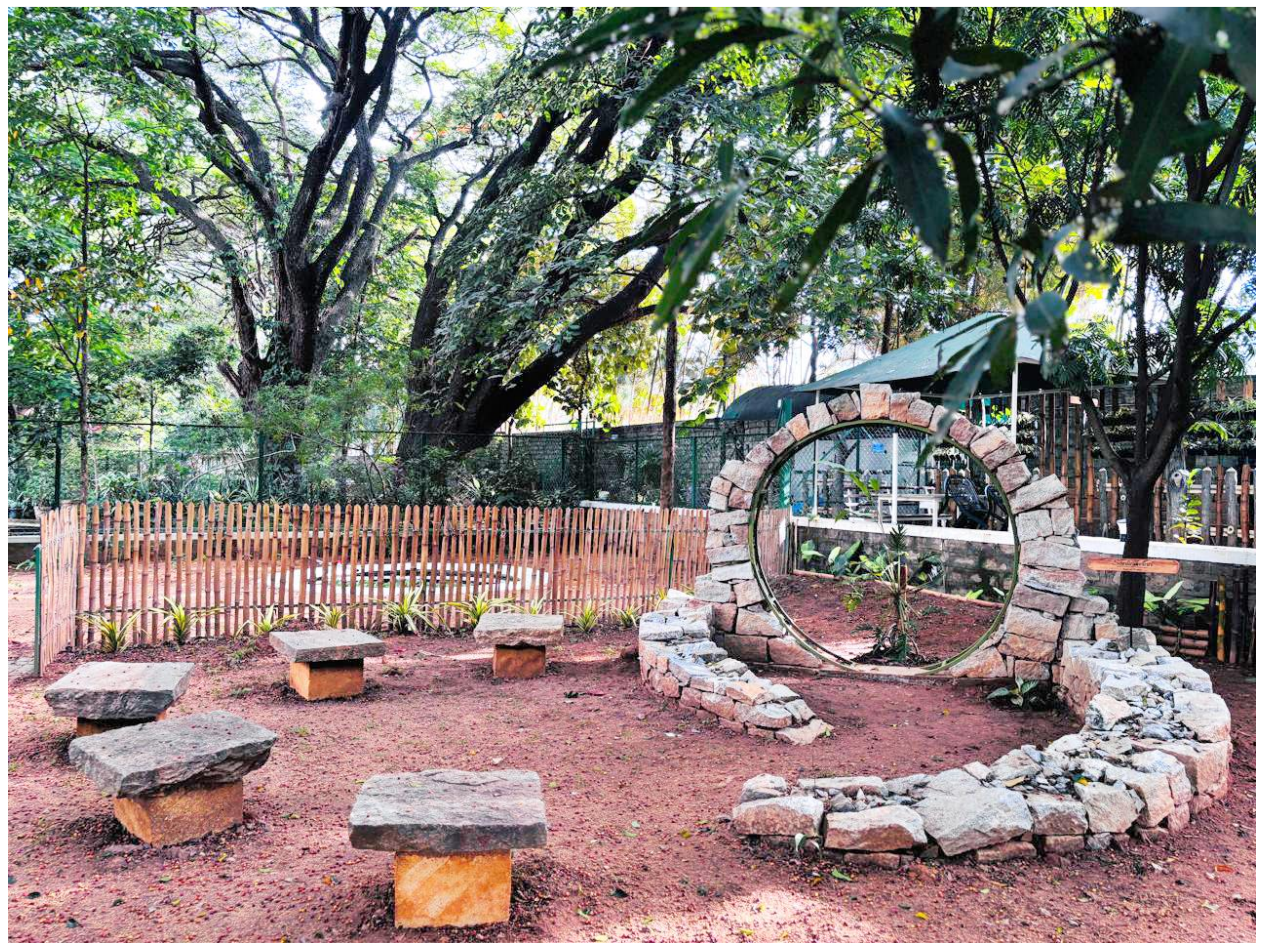
This seating area, situated beneath a fig tree, offers a space for contemplation. It evokes the biblical story of Nathanael, who gained wisdom while sitting under a fig tree. Accommodating more than ten people, this area encourages deep reflection and research, symbolizing rebirth through wisdom.

Haṁsa Tīram: Swan Abode



This dedicated space for swans symbolizes their unique ability to filter milk from water, serving as a metaphor for the researcher's task of discerning truth from falsehood. Situated within the Bōdhivanam (Forest of Enlightenment), the Swan Abode also enhances the aesthetic beauty of the environment.

Śāntiniketan: Seat of Peace



This serene space, situated under trees, features five stone benches for reading and reflection. A vertical, round-shaped stone structure enhances the beauty of the area. Inspired by the renowned poet Rabindranath Tagore's Śāntiniketan, this space radiates the energy and tranquillity of his thoughts.

Sthūla Darśanālayam: Mud-House for Broader Vision



This mud house features seating and tables arranged to provide a panoramic view of the Bōdhivanam (Forest of Enlightenment). Accommodating up to six people, it offers a space for reflective reading while enjoying the natural beauty surrounding them. The mud house serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining a broad perspective in research and wisdom.

Pergola: Roof of Wisdom



This elevated pergola structure, prominently situated, welcomes readers and researchers to this wisdom park. It serves as a distinctive gateway to the space, symbolizing the pursuit of knowledge and insight.

Vidya Kshetram: Abode of Wisdom



This canopy, featuring four seats, is dedicated to the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, the foundational heart of this facility. It embodies the essence of wisdom and serves as a tranquil retreat for contemplation.

Vinaya Nilayam: Abode of Spirituality



Under this four-seat canopy lies a tribute to the Vinaya Sadana Institute—DVK's Institute for Spirituality and Counselling. It serves as a reminder that humility is the cornerstone of true wisdom.

Nīti Nilayam: Abode of Law



This four-seat canopy honours the Institute of Canon Law at DVK. It stands as a beacon for researchers, emphasizing the importance of justice and ethical awareness in their scholarly pursuits.

Tatva Nilayam: Abode of Philosophy



Dedicated to the Philosophy Faculty of DVK, this four-seat canopy encourages researchers to delve deeply into their studies and cultivate a disciplined approach to philosophical inquiry.

Veda Nilayam: Abode of Theology



This canopy with four seats pays homage to DVK's Theology Faculty. It serves as a reminder that devotion to the divine is the highest source of wisdom.

Vidyānikethan: Abode of Knowledge



This maṇḍala is part of Bōdhivanam (Forest of Enlightenment). In ancient times, particularly within Indian traditions, forests were revered as sacred spaces to pursue wisdom. To honour this ancient tradition, we have named this maṇḍala Vidyānikethan - Abode of Knowledge. It features an 'S'-shaped seating arrangement and a table, all nestled beneath a grand banyan tree, evoking the serene environment of a forest.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the DVK Garden Library exemplifies a harmonious blend of nature and intellect, offering a unique sanctuary for learning and enlightenment. Spanning 50,000 square feet, this thoughtfully designed space incorporates three major Kōśas and thirty-three distinct Maṇḍalas, each imbued with specific energies to enhance the learning experience. From tranquil reading areas to symbolic installations, every element is meticulously crafted to support reflection, research, and personal flourishing. This library honours the tradition of sacred learning spaces and provides a modern environment that fosters and thorough intellectual engagement and spiritual enrichment, making it a true haven for knowledge seekers.

Acknowledgement

The realization of a project often relies on the contributions of many generous individuals, including their ideas, concerns, assistance, and approvals. The renovation of the DVK Garden Library is a prime example of such a collaborative effort. I initially presented the concept of creating an open-air environment for the DVK Central Library to Prof. Dr. Kuncheria Pathil CMI, the then-president of DVK, during the planning phase in 2004. He embraced the initiative, which began modestly but has since evolved significantly, culminating in the recent extensive renovation featuring thirty-three Maṇḍalas.

The idea for this extensive renovation was first discussed at the DVK Syndicate Meeting on February 23, 2024. The project received strong support from the DVK President, the Library Council, and other authorities, who facilitated the necessary permissions and resources. The renovation, which spanned over a hundred days, was executed by Arun Constructions & Builders with the extraordinary support of Mr. Ajith Jose, a partner in the firm, an experienced engineer, and someone well-versed in constructing garden libraries. Mr. Ajith Jose played a crucial role by involving skilled artists and workers and providing essential materials and resource support.

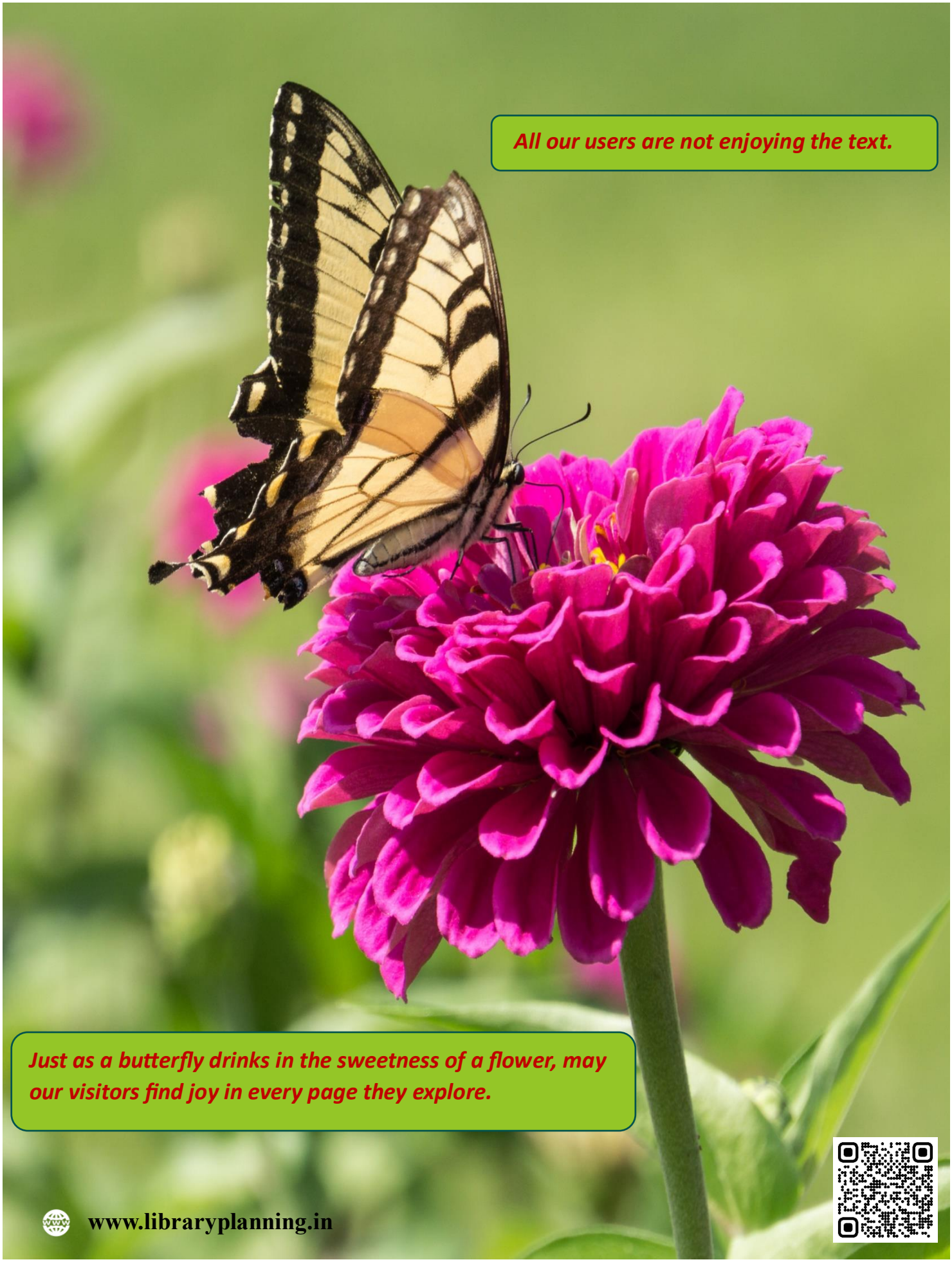
We also received valuable materials and services from various individuals and institutions, including Dharmaram College and the Christ Group of Schools. We are particularly grateful to the authorities of Dharmaram College, especially our Rector and Administrator, for their generosity. Additionally, the project benefited greatly from the dedication of our library team and the support of many well-wishers.

With gratitude to all, I remain,

Fr. Dr. John Neelankavil CMI [MLISc, MPhil, PhD]

Librarian and Faculty

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