



Active for Education

Room to Read India Trust **Annual Report 2016–2017**



Room to Read is made up of a global network of people getting active for education.



Our Vision and Mission

Room to Read believes that **World Change Starts with Educated Children®**. We envision a world in which all children can pursue a quality education, reach their full potential and contribute to their communities throughout the world.

To achieve this goal, we focus on two areas where we believe we can have the greatest impact: literacy and gender equality in education. We work in collaboration with communities and local governments across nine states of the country to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children, and support girls to complete secondary school with the life skills they will need to succeed in school and beyond.

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FROM THE COUNTRY DIRECTOR**An Active Year for Room to Read India**

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to present the 2016–17 Annual Report for Room to Read India.

For the past 13 years, Room to Read India has been working toward developing reading skills and habits among children through our Literacy Program and helping girls to succeed in school through our Girls' Education Program. This focus has enabled us to improve the lives of 3.3 million children. It's also allowed us to develop quantifiable results that help us continually evolve and improve our programs. Our investment in closely monitoring our Girls' Education and Literacy Programs has provided us with a unique understanding of what works best and how, specifically, to design programs that have the greatest impact.

To maximize this knowledge and significantly broaden our reach, we took a new, expanded approach this year. Equipped with clear evidence on the success of our models – and with funding support from agencies like the United States Agency for International Development and UNICEF – Room to Read embarked on a journey of close collaboration with government entities. Through the Room to Read Accelerator model, we worked with government counterparts in Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand to develop a modified version of our Literacy Program model and implemented it across 1,000 schools in these two states. Program implementation, in this case, was led and owned by the government, with Room to Read providing technical support.

This year we also consolidated our efforts toward improving the quality and impact of our programs. The worldwide standardized modules of the reading instruction, library establishment, teacher training and life skills education components of our program were contextualized to Indian requirements and implemented. Additionally, specific steps were taken to address local challenges we face in our work. For example, we looked for ways to improve the

home language to school language transition in the Sirohi district of Rajasthan by researching the issue of literacy acquisition in multilingual settings. We plan to use the research findings to resolve similar challenges in other states.

We also piloted a life skills assessment tool that will help us better measure the impact of our Girls' Education Program. This is the first time an effort has been made to empirically measure the effectiveness of life skills development programming. A two-year randomized control trial evaluation of the Girls' Education Program has been initiated in Ajmer and is being conducted by the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab.

Finally, our ongoing efforts to develop a strong organizational culture and supportive work environment received recognition for the third consecutive year: Room to Read India is proud to have been named one of the five best NGOs to work for in 2016 by the Great Place to Work Institute. We also have been recognized as the best "Corporate Social Responsibility Implementation Agency of the Year" in 2017 at the Corporate Social Responsibility Excellence Awards, which were held in Delhi in May.

Our initiatives throughout the year have led to increased visibility and acceptance among key stakeholders, including governments and donors. Governments, both state and central, are increasingly acknowledging Room to Read as a key resource in discussions around literacy and girls' education. Greater donor participation has led to a significant increase in in-country fundraising. With your continued support, we hope to build on our achievements and improve the lives of many more children in the years to come.

Warmly,

Sourav Banerjee



Literacy Program

Our Literacy Program enables primary grade children to become independent readers. It involves reading and writing instruction in grades 1 and 2, and school library interventions for students in grades 1 to 5, in the same schools. This comprehensive approach develops both reading skills and a habit of reading among the children.

Our Literacy Program in Action

STARTING A NEW FAMILY TRADITION OF LITERACY

Thirty-five-year-old Kusuma's eyes well up and tears roll down her cheeks as she writes her name for the first time. She hugs her 7-year-old teacher, her daughter, Anju.

Anju is a grade 2 student in one of Room to Read's Literacy Program partner schools, Girls' Primary School Nanoorkheda, Dehradun. Anju's parents, Kusuma and Ramachandran, are daily wage laborers who come from a remote village and are both illiterate. Anju is one of six children. With such a big family to be taken care of, girls' education is often neglected. In fact, Anju's elder sister has never been to school.

However, Anju insists on attending school regularly, although she often is late after helping her mother with household chores. Her teacher understands the family pressures and permits Anju to join school after morning prayers. This type of support has made the family, particularly Anju, appreciate the school. The library has played a particularly crucial role in helping Anju break the family tradition of illiteracy.

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Anju's teacher said, "Without Anju, grade 2 looks incomplete. She has learned all the lessons and helps other children in the grade learn too."

Anju takes an active part in library maintenance, as well, serving as a member of the Children's Library Management Committee. Anju says enthusiastically, "I love to read all the time!"

Anju's parents are proud of her progress. "She brings home library books and reads out loud for us," said Anju's mother. "I enjoy the stories she reads. It's a pleasure to see her reading."



FROM POCKET MONEY TO LASTING LEGACY

Bhushan's love for the library began the day he became an active member of the Child Library Management Committee, which looks after the working of the school library established by Room to Read, tracking book check-in and check-out, and helping to take care of the books and keep them organized.

In grade 5, Bhushan was actively involved in every activity of the CLMC and participated in every reading activity taken up by the class teacher. As Bhushan, along with 10 classmates, prepared for

Bhushan and his classmates graciously parted with the pocket money they had been saving for three years and bought 14 books worth 675 rupees for the library.

admission into secondary school, Bhushan realized that the library program would soon be coming to an end. Sad, but hopeful, he turned to his classmates: It was time to act!

Bhushan and his friends had been saving up pocket money for the village fair, but those plans quickly changed. "Every bit counts and we couldn't waste our pocket money on rides," he said. "The library had given us the freedom to think. Now it was our time to give back to the library."

Bhushan and his classmates graciously parted with the pocket money they had been saving for three years and bought 14 books worth 675 rupees for the library. Students, the library coach and teachers organized a book drive, attracting additional support from parents, villagers and the Gram Panchayat (village administration). In a major victory, the Gram Panchayat decided to allocate 3,000 rupees every year to support the school library.

Although Bhushan is sad to leave his school, he hopes his idea will set an example for other schools to follow. "This school will remain a crucial part of my life," he said.





NURTURING EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM (NELP)

This project is being implemented across 100 schools in the predominantly tribal Sirohi district of Rajasthan. The children of this region face a unique literacy challenge, as their home languages (Garasia and Marwari) are very different from the standard language of instruction (Hindi). With funding support from the Tata Trusts, United States Agency for International Development and the Centre for Microfinance, this project aims to address the multilingual challenge and devise a way to smoothly transition the children from their home language to the school language. The following specific steps were undertaken for this purpose:

- Deployment of a linguistic survey to develop a nuanced understanding of the language scenario in the region
- The collection of local words and folklore from native speakers

- Development of an oral language strategy to create space for children to use their home language in the classroom
- Creation of picture books based on local folklore in three languages — Adivasi Garasia, Marwari and Hindi — to transition children to Hindi
- Production of multilingual storybooks and conversation charts to encourage storytelling and conversation in the classroom
- Selected folklore have been printed in the form of a book, called 'Saras.' 'Saras' is an attempt to advance folklore to school system libraries where children, community members and teachers can access and enjoy their own stories.

A contextualized program design based on the above items has now been implemented in NELP project schools. The findings from this project will be helpful in addressing similar challenges in other states.

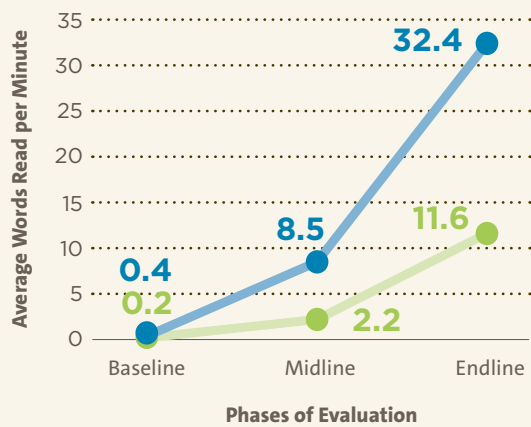
LITERACY PROGRAM IMPACT

Literacy Evaluation Data 2017: In 2015, Room to Read began a two-year impact evaluation of schools where our comprehensive Literacy Program was implemented. The sample-based assessment using the Early Grade Reading Assessment tool covered 25 project schools and 25 control schools from Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

The objective was to determine the impact of the program on children’s reading skills at the end of grade 1 (midline) and grade 2 (endline). The baseline assessment was conducted in August 2015, followed by the midline and endline assessments in March 2016 and March 2017, respectively. The following graphs show the results:

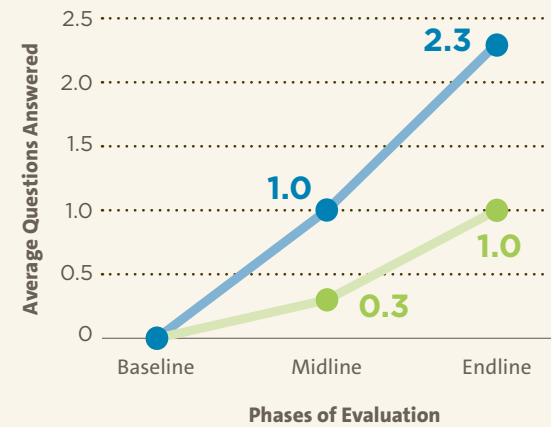
● Project ● Comparison

Oral Reading Fluency



Children from project schools read an average of **32 words per minute** while children from comparison schools could only read 12 words per minute.

Comprehension



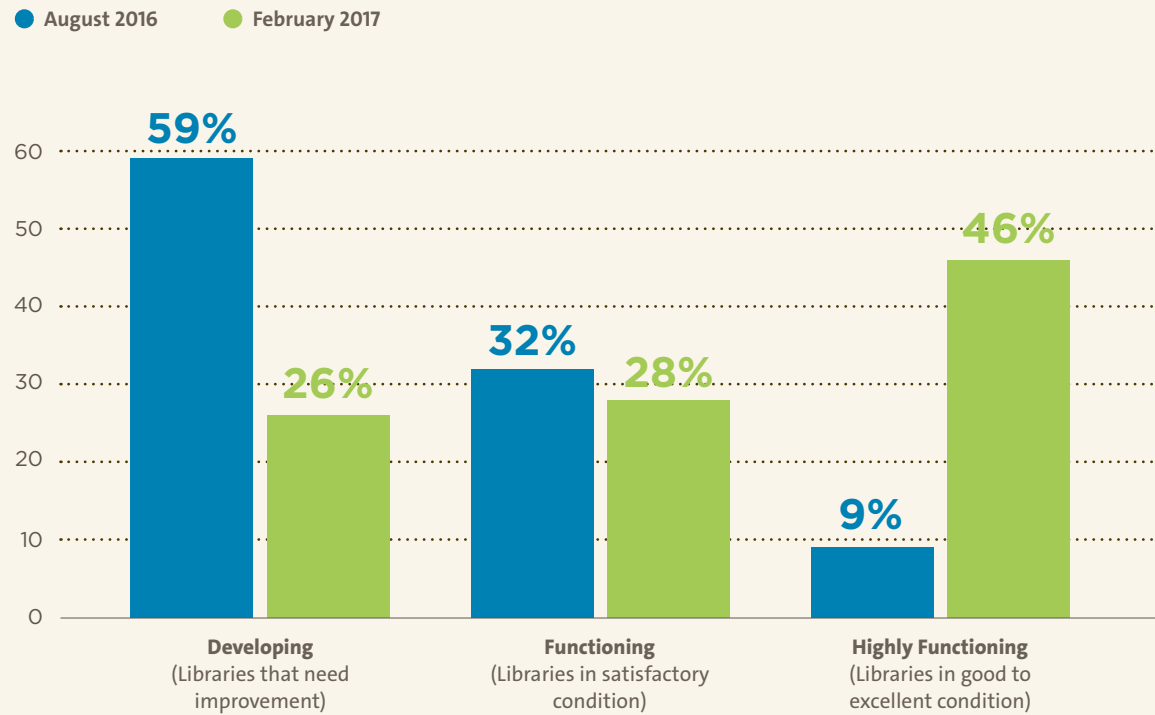
Children from project schools **could answer an average of 2.5 questions correctly (out of 5)**, compared to just 1.4 questions answered correctly by children from comparison schools.

Indicator	2016	Cumulative
Number of schools with literacy interventions	650	8,197
Number of teachers trained	3,357	38,803
Number of children benefited	272,296	3,360,147
Number of books provided to libraries	773,282	3,031,393
Number of original titles published	15	190

LIBRARY RATING SYSTEM

The **Library Rating System (LRS)** is a tool for monitoring the effectiveness of our school libraries. It evaluates the functioning of each

library against a set of 15 indicators. The LRS is used in all active libraries that are at least six months old.





Girls' Education Program



The program aims to ensure girls progress through higher secondary school and develop the necessary life skills to think critically and become self-reliant with the help of the life skills education and mentoring components of our program. In addition, adolescent girls in grades 6 to 12 are provided with specific material and academic support wherever necessary. From handling challenges such as early marriage proposals to managing time for studies, life skills lessons have enabled girls to think independently and achieve their goals.

Our Girls' Education Program in Action

TURNING STUMBLING BLOCKS INTO STEPPING STONES

Growing up, 14 year-old Eswaramma watched her uncles play hockey in the field, but every time she attempted to join in, she was met with chants of, "Girls can't play!" The discouraging voices only strengthened her resolve to break the stereotype and play the game.

"I made my own hockey stick with wood and began practicing to prove the point that girls can play," said Eswaramma, who was a Room to Read Girls' Education Program participant in 2012. Despite a lack of infrastructure and funds, "the hockey girl" traveled five kilometers every day to study in Gopalpet Zilla Parishath High School.

Her coach, Bollamani Kumar, spotted Eswaramma at a summer camp in 2014. "I was surprised to see her dribbling technique in pushing and stopping the ball," he said.

Eswaramma hails from Erragadda Thanda, a remote region of Telangana. Her parents, Bhadru and Shantamma, are daily wage laborers. "I belong to a community where girls get married early," explained Eswaramma. "My parents, too, started looking for a groom for me, but my goal was to play in the national tournament."

Through the Girls' Education Program, Eswaramma was able to acquire the life skills and resources to help put her on that path. When Jayamma, the social mobilizer for Eswaramma's school, noticed

Eswaramma playing hockey barefoot under the blazing sun, she got involved. "It was impossible to contain her passion for the game," said Jayamma. "In order to push her further, I approached the Village Revenue Officer for support and got her a hockey kit the next day."

But a lack of sports equipment was not Eswaramma's only challenge. The conservative undercurrent in the village hindered Eswaramma's ability to practice hockey with boys from her area. She also had to resist marriage proposals.

Her coach gives Room to Read the credit for equipping Eswaramma with the skills to negotiate and manage her daily life. "I can teach technical skills, but Room to Read taught Eswaramma how to take charge of a stressful situation and handle it diplomatically," said Bollamani.

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After a series of achievements at the district and state levels, Eswamma was selected for the All India Sub Junior Hockey Tournament. She was the first girl from her village to qualify for the National School Games Hockey Tournament in 2016. The entire village now celebrates her talent.

“We’re extremely proud of Eswamma,” said her father. “We want her to continue playing and train hard.”

That’s exactly what Eswamma plans to do. She said, “Has it been tough? Yes. Will people continue to discourage me? Maybe. But at this moment, all I know is that I’m only getting started to achieve my ultimate goal: to play for my country.”

FROM GIRLS’ EDUCATION PROGRAM SCHOLAR TO ROOM TO READ STAFFER

The journey from Amroha in Uttar Pradesh to New Delhi can be challenging; for Tarannum, this is especially true. Born into a family of five, Tarannum moved frequently as her father, a mason and the sole breadwinner, traveled in search of better work. The family would pack up and move back and forth between Amroha to Delhi every few months. Finally, the family decided to make Delhi their home.

“Our family shifted permanently to this city,” said Tarannum. “My sister and I were looking forward to rejoining school. But our brother objected. He had

Tarannum credits her social mobilizer, Taslim, for helping to transform her into the confident person she is today. She also appreciates Room to Read for covering her school fees for grades 10 and 12.

witnessed school girls being harassed on the streets, so he thought it was best for us to stay at home.”

It took a few months for a neighbor to convince Tarannum’s family to let the girls study. Once in school, Tarannum became a part of Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program. “I was able to attend life skill sessions with a few other girls in my school,” she said. “I learned to overcome my self-doubt and tackle unforeseen situations.”

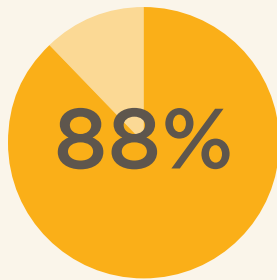
Tarannum credits her social mobilizer, Taslim, for helping to transform her into the confident person she is today. She also appreciates Room to Read for covering her school fees for grades 10 and 12. But Tarannum’s connection with Room to Read did not end when she graduated. Immediately after she

completed secondary school in 2015, she was offered a job as a Front Desk Executive at the Room to Read office in Delhi. Besides working with Room to Read India, she is also pursuing her bachelor's degree from Jamia Milia Islamia College in Delhi.

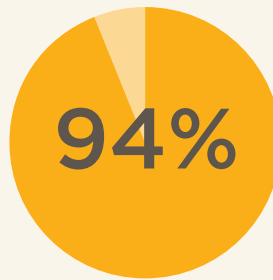
"My happiness knows no bounds," Tarannum exclaimed. "My wish is to support my parents financially and build the house that they've always dreamed of."

GIRLS' EDUCATION PROGRAM IMPACT

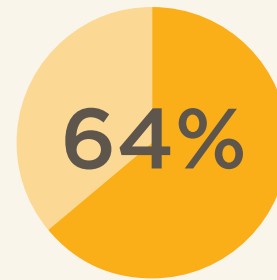
11,233 NUMBER OF GIRLS BENEFITED AS OF THE 31ST MARCH 2017



Percentage of girls enrolled in our program who **HAVE PASSED GRADE 10**



Percentage of girls who **ADVANCED ONE OR MORE GRADES** from the last school year (among girls who remained enrolled)



Percentage of girls **ENROLLED IN TERTIARY EDUCATION**

[Source: 2016 Global Results and Impact Report]

LIFE SKILLS ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Assessing life skills is a challenging task since such skills are subjective. Yet, these skills are a critical outcome of Room to Read's Girls' Education Program. Room to Read has now developed an assessment tool for better measuring key life skills. It includes a set of knowledge and attitude questions, which assess shifts in a girl's thinking on topics related to gender roles, marriage, career aspirations, and other topics, while also tracking acquisition of factual knowledge presented through the program curriculum. In addition, the tool assesses life skills participants on non-academic social and emotional skills, such as

self-confidence, expressing and managing emotions, critical thinking, decision-making, perseverance, communication, creative problem solving, and relationship-building. The tool will help in accurately interpreting the responses and mitigate response bias using anchoring vignettes, short stories and scenario-type questions. In short, it will help create evidence on the effectiveness of our life skills curriculum.

The tool was piloted across three countries during the year. This included pilot testing done with Girls' Education Program participants in Rajasthan and Delhi.

Room to Read Accelerator



The challenging issues of illiteracy and gender inequality require interventions that are easy to scale and cost-effective. Room to Read Accelerator assists organizations and governments in implementing and building capacity for effective programming in the areas of literacy and girls' education. The focus of the Accelerator model is to offer technical assistance and share our expertise and resources with partner organizations through the provision of training materials, workshops, periodic support and monitoring. This enables high-quality implementation and the replication of our work.

In India, two major Accelerator projects were implemented this year:

PROJECT 1: SCALING UP EARLY READING INTERVENTION (SERI)

This five-year project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development, aims to demonstrate an innovative model of scaling up literacy programs. Under this approach, the project rolled out the implementation of the Literacy Program in 1,004 schools across two districts; Balodabazar in Chhattisgarh (500 schools) and Champawat in Uttarakhand (504 schools). The implementation in both cases has been led by the respective governments, with Room to Read providing technical support. The instruction design, materials and training modules were contextualized for scaling up through a series of discussions and workshops with the respective government counterparts.

124,829 children were reached through the SERI project in 2016-17 and 3,447 teachers were trained.

PROJECT 2: INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EFFECTIVE EARLY GRADE LITERACY INTERVENTIONS IN CHHATTISGARH

This eight-month project funded by UNICEF will train all the Cluster Academic Center Coordinators (CACC) in the state of Chhattisgarh to strengthen institutional capacity for leading early grade reading programs across the state. A state resource group of master trainers will be identified and trained. In turn, they will further train the CACCs across the state. The CACCs will then train all the teachers across the state on early grade reading interventions through government funding. Room to Read will provide

technical assistance in developing the training modules and materials, and provide oversight during the training sessions. The implementation of the project will start in the 2017-2018 academic year.



Recognition

- Room to Read India was awarded the **Laadli Media and Advertising Award** for empowering the voices of adolescent girls benefiting from life skills education.
- Room to Read India was recognized as **one of the five best NGOs to work for in 2016 by the Great Places to Work Institute**, for the third year in a row.
- Room to Read India was awarded **second prize in the Short Film category of the All India Short Film, Still Photography and Poster Competition** at the 10th Foundation Day of the National Commission for Protection of Children’s Rights on the 5th of March, 2017 in New Delhi.
- **The Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity 2015-2016** (Northern region)





Events

Roshanara Dazzles Donors

Girls' Education Program alumna from Delhi, Roshanara, embarked on a five-day journey to share her experiences with Room to Read supporters. During the whirlwind tour, Roshanara spoke at the CMS Law Firm, BlackRock, Swarovski Foundation and Eaton's Girls' School in London. Audiences were impressed and inspired by Roshanara's determination to continue her studies in the face of cultural pressures to marry early and an entrenched belief that girls do not need an education. The visit culminated with Roshanara receiving a standing ovation after speaking at the Dolder Grand gala in Zurich – an event that raised more than 700,000 Swiss francs!

Talk Series: Literacy in Multilingual India

Room to Read India held a talk series titled 'Literacy in Multilingual India' to discuss and highlight literacy theories and constructs that need to be reconsidered and reviewed in our country.

In two one-day events, the speakers, Minati Panda, Linguistics Professor at the School of Social Sciences, JNU and Dr. Dhir Jhingran, Founder Director of the Language and Learning Foundation, New Delhi, shed light on literacy theories that have rarely been taken into account within the complex multilingual realities of India.

Financial Statement

April 2016 to March 2017 (figures in INR)

Support & Revenue	2016–17 (%)	2015–16 (%)	2016–17	2015–16
Project & General Fund	17.46%	16.10%	81,688,892	67,527,935
Grant Receipts				
Room to Read US	46.44%	67.87%	217,302,758	284,772,691
UN Agencies	0.02%	0.12%	101,476	520,977
USAID India	12.92%	2.14%	60,460,204	8,961,685
Corporations	16.27%	8.02%	76,123,817	33,627,572
Foundations	5.50%	4.04%	25,744,516	16,965,794
Donations (Individuals)	0.20%	0.16%	932,757	678,975
Investment Income	1.19%	1.55%	5,576,821	6,488,282
Total Support & Revenue	100%	100%	467,931,241	419,493,911
Operating & Administrative Expenses	2016–17 (%)	2015–16 (%)	2016–17	2015–16
Program Expenses				
Literacy Program	52.76%	48.61%	211,682,868	164,196,733
Girls' Education Program	18.10%	18.71%	72,614,772	63,201,034
Book Publishing Program	1.51%	2.48%	6,060,926	8,371,251
Indirect Expenses	25.75%	28.44%	103,307,455	96,082,069
Fundraising Expenses	1.88%	1.76%	7,532,828	5,953,933
Total Operating & Administrative Expenses	100%	100%	401,198,849	337,805,019
Bank & Cash Balances Including Deposits and Advances	100%	100%	66,732,393	81,688,892



Trustees and Leadership

Trustees

Geetha Murali, Trustee

Yashvinee Adarkar, Trustee

Room to Read India Private Limited; represented by
Apala Majumdar and **Pooja Vinayak Sharma**

Leadership Team

Sourav Banerjee, Country Director

Deepak Dogra, Program Operations Director

Saktibrata Sen, Literacy and Girls' Education Program
Director

Poornima Garg, Human Resources Director

Gagandeep Puri, Admin Manager

Padmanav Dutta, RM&E Manager

Sanjay Singh, Communications Manager

Arvind Singh, State Head, Chhattisgarh and Madhya
Pradesh

Swati Bhardwaj, State Head, Rajasthan

Pradeep Kumar, State Head, Uttarakhand

Rajesh Patel, State Head, Andhra Pradesh and Telan-
gana

Raja Sekhar, State Head, Maharashtra

Roopak Chauhan, State Head, Delhi

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Room to Read India Trust

D21 Corporate Park, Office No. 201E (B)
2nd floor, Sector – 21, Dwarka
Nr. Sector 8 Metro, New Delhi – 110075
T : +91 11 30491961
roomtoread.org

