



ICT in Rural libraries of West Bengal: A case study of Jalpaiguri District India

Ali Ayub

Mphil Student of Calcutta University, West Bengal, INDIA

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Abstract

In this world of advanced technology the libraries have seen a massive change in their housekeeping operation and other work culture. This advancement in technology has not only provided easy access to knowledge but also turn the whole world into a global village. But without the latest technologies the traditional rural libraries are facing huge challenges in providing proper information to the user. The rural libraries in India are facing acute financial problems, lack of trained personal, lack proper infrastructure etc. thus the rural libraries has turned into museums for preservation of books. Even the school and college libraries of the rural region are more advanced than public rural libraries.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), E-resources, rural libraries, rural development.

Introduction

In present era Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are used for libraries housekeeping operation. This application of Information and Communication Technologies also improve the services in rural libraries. The new technologies provide an unprecedented freedom from traditional restraint of time and space. Digital technologies traditionally are thought of as improving access. According the user needs information format is now available both print and electronically. Information and Communication Technologies totally change the library environment or services according to the information society. Though the urban area getting the ICT facilities but in rural area they are not. In India with the increase in the literacy rate above 74% there is a need and demand for gaining knowledge and information from all the section of the society. Highly modernized and technically advanced libraries are present in India. But this modernized technological has not lighted the flame in the libraries of rural India. According to census report (2011), nearly 70 percent population lives in rural areas. But the urban areas the libraries provide almost recent and the latest information with the help of technology whereas the rural libraries are lagging far behind in terms of providing information due to lack of technical equipments like computers, internet etc.

Literature Review

Whole economic development depends on the basis of rural development and for process of development is depends on the ingredient of information¹.

As rural communities are farming communities, they will benefited if information on how to improve their farms and technique will provide².

Now not only books are kept in libraries, it works as community education centre with the facilities of non formal education media. For effective adult education rural libraries could be best place³.

Smith has reviewed the services of the public libraries in literacy education⁴. Public libraries in U.S.A. were selected for this study. The important observation of the study revealed that i. public libraries in rural communities are less involved than urban or suburban communities, ii. public libraries act as literacy education centre, iii. public libraries that have a wide range of non-print materials and equipment are more active in literacy education than libraries with limited non-print resources.

Khan has studied the function of public libraries in literacy and adult education in terms of information services, educational, and cultural functions in India⁵.

Hanif Uddin has emphasised the role of rural libraries in each and every village of Bangladesh⁶. These are: i. To inform the rural people for better health, water supply and sanitation, ii. To aware about government policies, iii. To help better crops, iv. To inform about environmental pollution. The study explored the inter linkages between libraries and rural development and also highlighted some rural aspects of the country.

Deshpande has described the role of public libraries in developing countries and highlighted the characteristics of public libraries and their services⁷.

The centres providing library services specially information relating to job and career opportunities, essential data are needed for regional planning and information pertaining to

developmental activities being carried out by village Panchayats (E-District Project). For various types of Allowance payments, Certificate (including Caste Certificate), License, and Land Deed issue etc⁸.

Dhanavandan, Esmail and Mani studied the awareness of information and communication tools among the library professionals in Tamil Nadu⁹. The study reveals that ICT is the most helpful media for library professionals.

Parthasarathi Mukhopadhyay discussed about software framework for public library based web enable multilingual community information services by utilising open standard and open source software¹⁰.

Brahma and Singh analyze Problems and Prospects of Modernization of Public Library Services in the Modern Era¹¹.

Public libraries indirectly provide economic support that they accelerate the economic development for our whole communities¹².

The role of mobile libraries reflects that perceived demand of the local communities where there are service stations¹³.

R.Sultana recommend that rural libraries of West Bengal should maintain collections and other services for rural communities which aware them from farming to career opportunities.

Bordchart studied that without literate and numerate society none of the thousand projects can be executed. Thus rural dwellers need educational support, the need of rural libraries.

Methodology

For this study the following methodologies are used for collection of data. These are: i. Secondary data from the website of Dept. of Mass Education Extension and Library services, Govt. of West Bengal. ii. Telephonic conversation with the staff of respective rural libraries. iii. Interview of some staff of rural libraries. iv. Few statistical tools like sampling, percentage etc are used.

Role of Rural libraries

There are following some important role of rural libraries: i. Rural libraries provide transfer of information of the earlier generations to the present ones for progress of rural community. ii. Rural libraries act as community centre where informal education can be provided.

Rural libraries help in adult education. iii. Rural libraries act as an information bank where rural community gets relevant resources. iv. To make the rural people aware about government policies. v. Rural libraries should provide information to the

rural people about farming and other techniques. vi. It should act as an institution for educating people.

ICT applications in libraries: i. Generate or originate of information is shifting from writing or typing to word processing, text editing, character recognition etc. ii. Preserving or storing of information in manuscript or in paper print media is shifting to e-publishing, magnetic storage etc. iii. Classification, cataloguing, indexing technique of processing of information has changed into electronic data processing, Artificial Intelligence, Expert system. iv. Cataloguing or indexing technique for information retrieval is shifting into database management system. v. Physical weeding technique for destroy or removing of information has changed into magnetic eraser, optical eraser etc. vi. Information is available in both electronic and print format.

Rural libraries in West Bengal (WB): I want to concentrate on the usage or implementation of ICT in rural libraries of West Bengal basically concentrating in Jalpaiguri district. WB is divided into 19 districts though one more district is formed, but still I will consider the 19 districts of WB. Table 1 shows 19 districts of WB with their respective rural libraries out of total public libraries.

Table-1
District wise Public libraries in West Bengal⁽¹⁷⁾

Districts of wb	Total public libraries	Rural libraries
Bankura	130	119
Birbhum	124	110
Burdwan	212	163
Coochbehar	109	100
Daksin dinajpur	57	49
Darjeeling	99	91
Hoogly	158	121
Howrah	136	99
Jalpaiguri	110	87
Kolkata	96	0
Maldah	105	92
Murshidabad	145	131
Nadia	110	89
North 24 parganas	221	99
Paschim medinipur	158	130
Purba medinipur	121	106
Purulia	117	111
South 24 parganas	156	107
Uttar dinajpur	54	46

Source: Dept. of mass education extension and library services

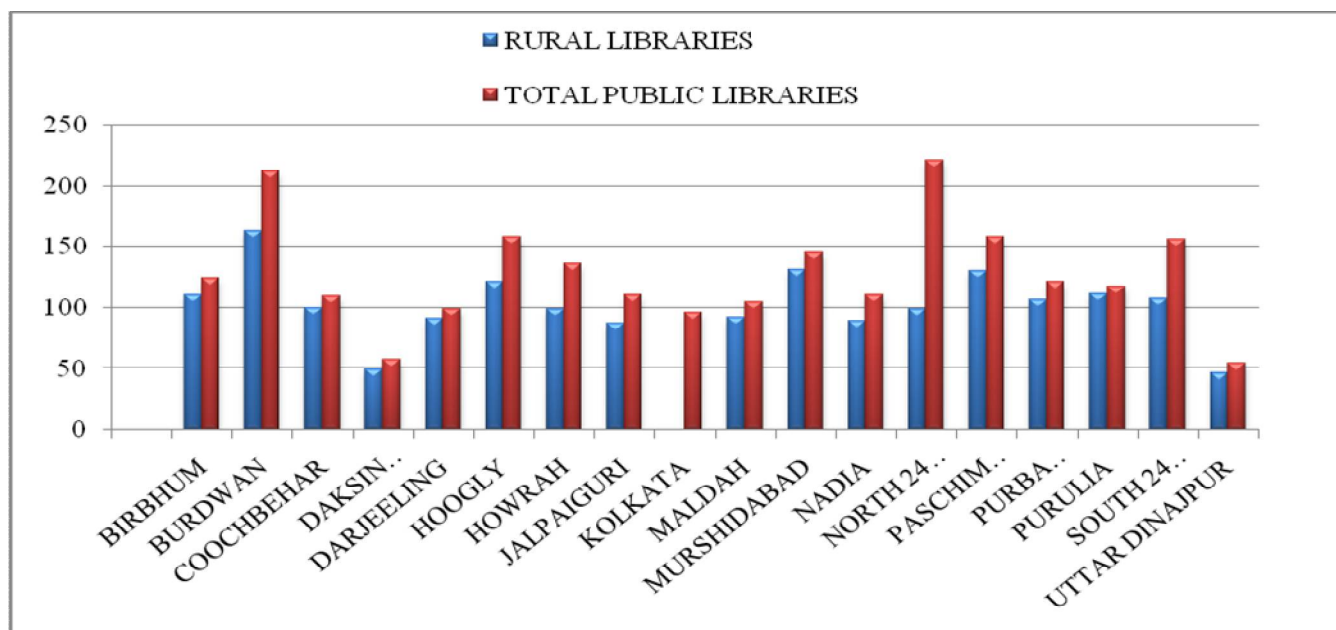


Figure-1
Bar diagram of Rural and Public libraries

The bar diagram has been prepared using the data present in table-2 showing the number of public libraries with their respective rural counterparts. Only the district of Kolkata does not have any rural library as it a fully urban district of West Bengal.

In table-3 below the rural libraries are further divided into electrified and non-electrified parts. Here in this table we can see the poor condition of the rural libraries in districts of West Bengal. In this modern era when electrification in a primary and basic need of a family or an institution, there these libraries lack this basic facility. Thus rural libraries fail to attract users or knowledge seekers as a proper environment is needed to facilitate them. Lack of electrification results in absence of Information and Communication Technologies and others like lights, fans, modern equipments like computer, internet etc. Districts like Murshidabad, Purulia and Paschim Medinipur has more than 30 rural libraries that do not have any electric connection. And the worst condition is that of Uttar Dinajpur which has 32% of its rural libraries without electricity.

The bar diagram (figure-2) has been prepared using the data present in table-3 in shows the non electric rural libraries marked in red. It can be seen that as the number of rural libraries increased the number of non electric has decreased i.e. a district that is more aware of rural libraries has provided better facilities to it. Like the district of Birbhum, Burdwan, Coochbehar and Howrah have the least number of libraries without electric connection. These districts have also developed faster than the others due to their emphasis on every sector.

Some Rural libraries in Jalpaiguri District

In this paper I will concentrate in the district of Jalpaiguri with the main focus on 11 rural libraries in detail. In table-3 we can see that the name of 11 rural libraries with their respective address, year of establishment and collection of books.

Table-2
Status of electrification in rural libraries

Districts of west bengal	Rural libraries	
	Electrified	Not electrified
Bankura	96	23
Birbhum	106	4
Burdwan	161	2
Coochbehar	97	3
Daksin dinajpur	39	10
Darjeeling	75	16
Hoogly	115	6
Howrah	92	7
Jalpaiguri	73	14
Kolkata	0	0
Maldah	65	27
Murshidabad	100	31
Nadia	82	7
North 24 parganas	87	12
Paschim medinipur	94	36
Purba medinipur	77	29
Purulia	75	36
South 24 parganas	93	14
Uttar dinajpur	31	15

Source: Dept. of mass education extension and library services, Govt. of West Bengal.

In figure-3 which has been prepared using the data present in table-4, we can see that the pie chart is made on the number of collection of books in the 11 libraries of Jalpaiguri. In terms of collection of books Ramkrishna Granthagar and Sonapur Club

cum Library have the highest collection with 3800 and 3732 books respectively though more or less each library are in poor condition.

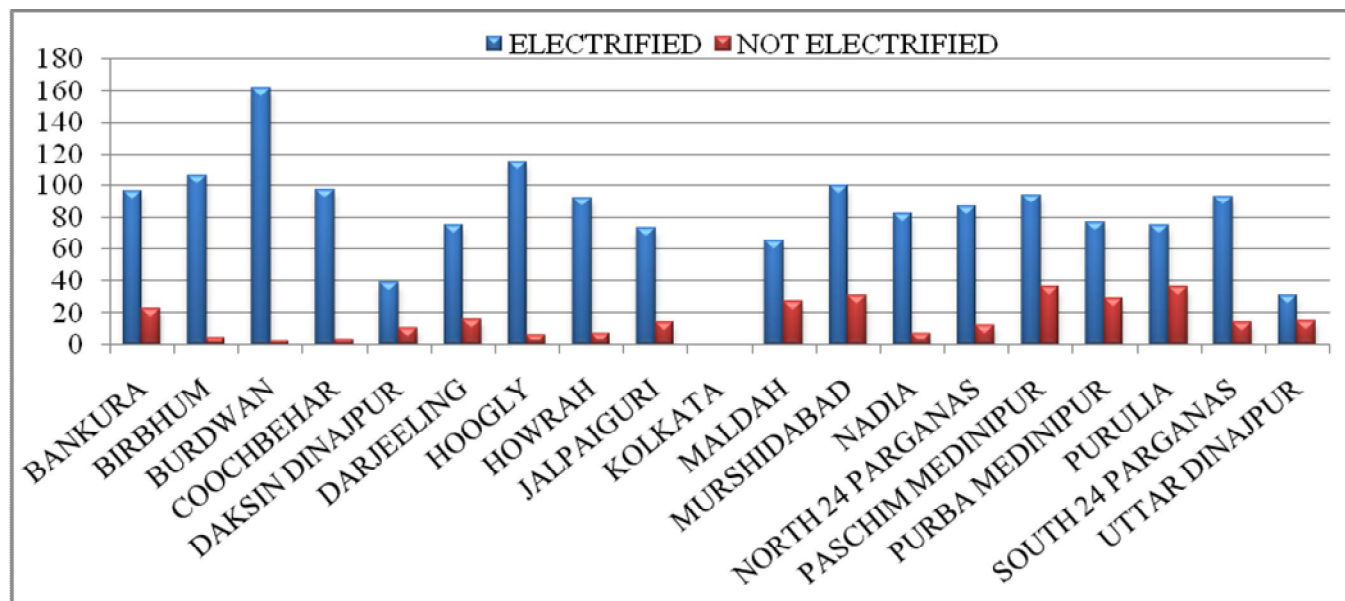


Figure-2
Level of electrification

Table-3
Some Rural libraries in Jalpaiguri District

Sl. No.	Name of Library	Address	Name of Librarian	Estd. year	Total collection
1	Tarun Sangha Library(TSL)	Vill. + P. O. - Khagenhat, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 735204	Sunil Ch. Ray	1978	2387
2	Milan Mandir Pathagar(MMP)	Vill. + P.O. - Bhotpatti, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 735305	Swapan Kr. Das	1969	2750
3	Peoples Club Library(PCL)	Vill. - Uttar Dhupjhora, P.O. - Batabari, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 735206	Birendra Nath Ray	1977	3012
4	Suhrid Sangha Pathagar(SSP)	Haspatal Para, P.O. - BairatiguriDhupguri, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 735210	Kamal Kr. Dutta	1963	2046
5	Thakur Path Club O Pathagar(TPCOP)	Vill. - Thakurpath, P.O. - Gosaerhat, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 735210	Purna Chandra Ray	1976	2805
6	Sonapur Club-cum Library(SCL)	Vill. - Sonapur, P.O. - Panchkolguri, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 736121	Kumud Ranjan Ray	1957	3732
7	Uday Sangha Pathagar(USP)	Vill. - Shalbari, P.O. - Jurapani, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 735210	Arun Kr. Ghosh	1969	3150
8	Milan Sangha Library(MSL)	Baruapara, P.O. - Kadobari, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 735101	Subrata Joarder	1971	2189
9	Milani Pathagar(MP)	Vill. - Bhangamali, P.O. - Chaulhat, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 73138	Dulal Chakraborty	1963	2324
10	Ramkrishna Granthagar(RG)	Vill + P. O. - Bhatibari, Dist.: Jalpaiguri, Pin. - 736121	Dilip Kr. Das	1954	3800
11	Dr. B R Ambedkar Smriti Pathagar(BRASP)	Sahapara, P.O. - Kharijaberubari, Dist.: Jalpaiguri	Paramita Ghose Dastidar	1980	1960

Source: Dept. of mass education extension and library services, Govt. of West Bengal.

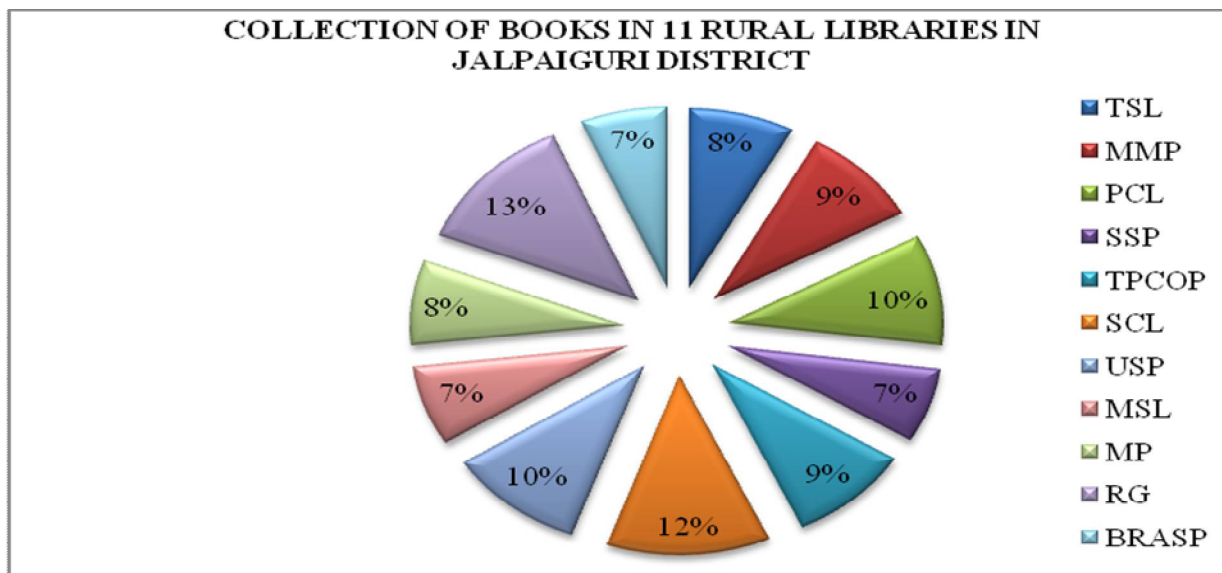


Figure-3
Percentage of collection of books

Table-4
Availability of IT

Sl. No.	Name of Library	No. of Computer	Name of Library software(if any)	E-resources/Digital materials	Internet connection Yes(Y)/ No(N)
1	Tarun Sangha Library (TSL)	-	-	-	N
2	Milan Mandir Pathagar (MMP)	-	-	-	N
3	Peoples Club Library (PCL)	1	-	-	N
4	Suhrid Sangha Pathagar (SSP)	-	-	-	N
5	Thakur Path Club O Pathagar (TPCOP)	-	-	-	N
6	Sonapur Club-cum Library (SCL)	1	-	Free E-resources through online	Y
7	Uday Sangha Pathagar (USP)	1	-	Free E-resources through online	Y
8	Milan Sangha Library (MSL)	-	-	-	N
9	Milani Pathagar (MP)	-	-	-	N
10	Ramkrishna Granthagar (RG)	1	-	Free E-resources through online	Y
11	Dr. B R Ambedkar Smriti Pathagar (BRASP)	-	-	-	N

Source: Dept. of mass education extension and library services, Govt. of West Bengal

Application of Information Technologies in Rural libraries: In the above table data has been collected with regards to the use of computers and other technology to provide information. The table shows those have computer also have the access to internet services and thus could provide free e-resources to its users. Out of 11 rural libraries 4 libraries have computer and 3 libraries have internet facilities i.e. 36% of rural libraries have computer facilities and 27% of them have both computer and internet facilities. It can also be seen that no rural library have any advanced library software for maintenance of library services. Lastly it could be observed that out of these 11 rural

libraries none of them posses more than 1 computer for the user. This implies that the user did not get access to computer and internet services in rural libraries.

Difficulties present in the implementation of IT in Rural libraries: Yes(Y) / No (N): On the basis of the observation of the 11 rural libraries has been marked on the basis of the 9 points that are needed to provide the better ICT facilities in the libraries. And on the basis data collected it can be seen that none of the libraries posses all the 9 points to qualify for better services. This table shows the different problems exist in the

library services of Jalpaiguri district. Out of total of 87 rural libraries of Jalpaiguri district only a sample of 11 libraries have been selected to observe the problems and challenges of rural libraries. This sample tries to reflect the extent of implementation of ICT in rural libraries of Jalpaiguri district.

Thus we can say that after the enlargement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) libraries get new opportunities in a new dimension to explore the library services. Through these ICT technologies libraries can bridge the gap of digital divide.

Conclusion

Though the Govt. of West Bengal is providing better facilities, initiating programmes, pouring funds etc for the development of a region but still the rural libraries are not getting enough attention in regard to its advancement. To connect the rural people by using ICTs and provide them their requisite information has been the major challenge today. Some of the

vital issues that obstruct the Information and Communication Technologies are as under: Lack of proper infrastructure, Political instability, Illiteracy and low level education, Lack of skilled professional, Inadequate Management support and Finance, Passive role of rural information centres, Insufficiency of proper books and documents in local languages fail to attract the native people of the area.

Thus rural libraries should be given more emphasis not only as a place to gain knowledge but also as an institution that will provide knowledge beyond its collection of books and articles. It should work as a provider of information to the rural life such as the farmer i.e. the type of farming that should be done in the respective area, modern techniques, creating awareness etc. The policy makers should see the tremendous potentiality of rural libraries in bridging the gap of digital divide. Thus rural libraries should act as for the development of the user and provide all the requisite information to him.

Table-5
Problems of IT implementation in rural libraries

Problems	TSL	MMP	PCL	SSP	TPCOP	SCL	USP	MSL	MP	RG	BRASP
Absence of IT training facility	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Burden of work	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Insufficiency of library staff	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Absence of promotional reward	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
Shortfall of IT skilled	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Financial issues	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Existing staff not interactive	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Inadequacy of engrossment in learning IT	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Negligence's of higher authority	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y

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