# Problems and Prospects for Public Libraries in India: with Reference to West Bengal

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**Structured Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This paper reflects the image of Public Libraries in West Bengal. It highlights the present condition of Public Libraries. From the early period to present it has witnessed tremendous development in India. Due to a number of factors like increasing information, the explosion of knowledge resources & changes in people's approach all are contributing factors to modernize Public libraries.

**Design / Methodology:** According to the study, public libraries are unable to reach the common people in the state due to the prevailing problems and their prospects. Moreover, the study discusses the challenges facing public libraries in today's technological era and highlights the state's current status of services provided by public libraries.

**Findings:** This paper represent the various development stages taken place in Public Libraries from early period to present day & what are the major contributions toward public libraries by different person.

**Utility:** By encounter various problems, public libraries in West Bengal try to provide its valuable services in the area of literacy and development. To adapt technology in this digitization era public libraries can reach the highest number of users.

**Keywords:** Problems, Prospects, Public Library, Libraries in India,

## Introduction

Indians refer to their country as Bharat, or the Republic of India. In terms of population and area, it is the seventh most populous country in the world (Clémentin-Ojha, 2014). Bay of Bengal borders it on the east, Indian Ocean on the west, and Arabian Sea on the south. There are over 7500 kilometres of coastline in India. In the west, it is surrounded by Pakistan; in the north and east, by China, Nepal, and Bhutan; and in the east, it is surrounded by Bangladesh and Myanmar.  Indian public libraries predate the country's development of education without

a doubt. Garrison, D. (2003). It is widely believed that public libraries are the People's Universities.

Various stages of development have taken place in India since the early period to the present day. It has been very important for India to search for wisdom and knowledge since ancient times. A stone pillar found in India contains inscriptions from the time of King Asoka (300 BC). There might be a case for considering these inscriptions as the first open libraries in history. In those days, well-known teachers supervised students at Ashrams in India. Teachers and students could use the manuscripts as well as visitors could view them. Numbers of teachers are employed at the Vidyapeeth to teach the students (Goad, 2017). Various manuscripts and other materials were collected by these educational institutions to help with their everyday routines and teaching. A lot of care was taken in keeping and preserving. Different streams of education and culture used reading materials associated with many subjects to transmit knowledge. Due to their careful maintenance and widespread use, they can be compared to modern libraries. Muslims ruled India most of the time during the Medieval Period. Mughal Period is also known historically as this period. In addition to social and political changes, there were also changes in education and library systems during this time (Kleinberger, 2016). As far as educational, literary, and library activities are concerned, the Mughal period was the golden age of Indian history. Delhi was annexed to the Kabul kingdom by Babur, the king of Kabul. A Mughal Imperial Library was established by him in 1526. In addition to inheriting manuscripts from his father, Babur passed them on to the next generations (Abu, 2018). Indian culture was greatly cherished by the British, who were committed to uplifting it. While the British Empire was still in power, a number of academic institutions were established by the East India Company and Christian missionaries (Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain, & Ireland, 1835). It was established in 1784 by the Bengal Royal Asiatic Society, 1804 by the Bombay Royal Asiatic Society, and 1835 by the Calcutta Public Library. These libraries served not only to enlighten the community, but also to lay the foundation for public libraries for Indians (Audunson, 2005).

A major contribution to the library movement was made by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwar III of Baroda, who was the ruler of Baroda at the time (Lee, 2010). It is attributed to him as the father of the Indian Library Movement. As he visited American libraries during his 1906 visit, he was very impressed by the services these libraries provided for social, economic, and educational development. In addition, he invited a student-assistant of Charles A. Cutter,

William Alanson Borden, to speak with him as the YMI Librarian. His ministers were asked to implement his idea immediately by establishing a library in a taluka town as an experiment. There have been public libraries in India since 1910 (Malik, 2013). On 4 January 1924, Dr. S R Ranganathan was appointed University Librarian at the University of Madras. It was he who prepared the 1930 model public library bill, which was revised in 1957 and 1972. Furthermore, he spearheaded efforts in Indian states to legislate library legislation. During his lifetime, he contributed greatly to the development of Indian libraries.

**Public Libraries after Independence: Growth and Development**

During the years following India's independence in 1947, public libraries in the country grew rapidly. The central and state governments have invested heavily in library services to promote education development (Wani, 2008). Several social and adult education programs have been implemented by the provincial and federal governments since 1910, leading to the enactment of library laws and grant-in-aid guidelines. This led to the inclusion of public libraries in the education budget. A Model Public Libraries Act was developed by the Public Libraries Working Group of the Planning Commission in 1964 (Kandhasamy, et. al., 2021). We sent a model bill to every state and UT without a public library law with the following recommendations:

- State governments are also responsible for public libraries in addition to the federal government. To effectively implement these programs, the ministry of education should create a directorate of libraries, a state library advisory council, and new agencies.

- Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland, and Mysore should have central libraries.

- Library buildings should be provided to states without adequate state central libraries.

- It is a good idea to have a section for children in the central library of the state.

- A new building should be constructed for each of the 100 district libraries currently in existence.

- 2,500 new block libraries are needed to cover 75% of the country's blocks, which are the primary feeding centers for the rural reading community.

- For such libraries in rural as well as urban areas that rely on subscriptions and donations, a grant in aid of ten million rupees will be provided.

- A reopening of the Delhi University Institute of Library Science should be considered. The Institute was established in 1958-59 by the Ministry of Education, and then closed in 1962. In order to meet the demands of the future, state libraries should establish such institutes.

- An allocation of Rs.10, 000 will be given to all national and state library associations in the current year for the purpose of holding seminars, conducting surveys, and producing library literature.

- It is necessary to develop a book production program.

- The Library Act draft needs to be produced.

Within the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education, the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation was established in 1972 (Reddy, 2008). The Foundation also supported public library services in addition to promoting library movements. Under the supervision of an Under Secretary, the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education established a library section in 1979. A public library development program has been implemented by the Indian government. (Chaurasia, & Singh, 2020). In 1984, the Planning Commission formed an Action Group on Modernizing Library Services and Informatics. During the chairmanship of D. P. Chattopadhyay, a national policy on library and information services was conceived in 1985. The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, has established a High Level Committee on Libraries (Balaji, et. al., 2018). The National Knowledge Commission recommended on May 4, 2012, that libraries and information science be given sustained attention in 18-4/2009_lib (Pt). The National Mission on Libraries (NML) formed a committee of four working groups to formulate a scheme for improving library services for the public based on their recommendations. Scheme components consist of four parts.

1. Creation of National Virtual Library of India (NVLI)

2. Setting up of NML Model Libraries

3. Quantitative & Qualitative Survey of Libraries

4. Capacity Building

NVLI is an open-access database of digital resources about and generated from India. It aims to facilitate a comprehensive exchange of information about the country. The network will also connect 629 public libraries throughout the states. As part of the Qualitative &

Quantitative Survey of Libraries, we will survey 5000 libraries in India to prepare a baseline data set. Efforts are being made to enhance the professional competence of librarians as part of the Capacity Building Project.

**Objective of the Study**

West Bengal Public Libraries were evaluated for the purpose of this study. Public libraries in the West Bengal District are being evaluated in terms of their public library systems, staff structures, and collections. The purpose of this study is to present a systematic approach to evaluating the status and development of public libraries in the West Bengal district. Using the survey, analysis, and interpretation of the data, a unique model of public library development was developed for West Bengal. The study will attempt to focus on the following objectives in light of the theme of the problem:

1. To evaluate the current state of the West Bengal Public Library.

2. To determine the structure of the staff and its strength at present.

3. Analyze public library resources and collections for strengths and weaknesses.

4. To examine the building and other amenities is necessary.

**Methodology**

For analysis and interpretation, the author used the data on the website of DMEELS about public libraries in west Bengal, as well as the data gathered by him personally through a questionnaire from district public libraries. As of now, only 45 public libraries are listed on the DMEELS website, even though there are many public libraries. To put it another way, 45 public libraries have been registered and assisted by DMEELS so far. West Bengal is the only part of the study that was examined. A questionnaire completed personally by the author and collected from many public libraries has been analyzed to get the results under different objectives with the help of DMEELS' website.

**Data Analysis**

Three tables are given below i.e. Table-1: On the basis of Location, Building and Staff, Table-2: Based on location, collection, newspaper and magazine type and Table-3: Based on location and services:

**Table-1:** On the Basis of Location, Building and Staff:

| S. No. | Name of the library | Location | Building | Staff |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | State Central Library | Ultadanga, Kolkata | Own | 4 |
| 2 | Kolkata Metropolitan Library | Ballygang Park Road, Kolkata | Own | 2 |
| 3 | Uttarpara Joykrishna Public Library | Uttarpara, Dist: Hoogly, | No | - |
| 4 | North Bengal State Library | Coochbehar | Own | 4 |
| 5 | Taki Govt. District Library | Taki | No | - |
| 6 | Deshbandhu Govt. Disrict Library | Darjeeling | Own | 2 |
| 7 | Govt. District Library | Karnojora | Own | 2 |
| 8 | North 24-Parganas Govt. District Library | Barasat | Own | 2 |
| 9 | Mati Sathi- Addl. Govt. District Library | Himachal vihar, Matigara | Own | 2 |
| 10 | Govt. Central Library | Kalimpong | No | 2 |
| 11 | Central Library | Banipur | Own | 0 |
| 12 | Sidhu-Kanhu Birsa Govt. Town Library | Purulia | No | 2 |
| 13 | Digha Govt. Town Library | Purba Medinipur | Own | 0 |
| 14 | Ramkrishna Sarada Mission Ashram Library | C.I.T. Road, Kolkata | No | 0 |
| 15 | Ramkrishna Mission Ashram Central Library | Narendrapur | Own | 2 |
| 16 | Ramkrishna Mission Janashiksha Library, Belur Math | Belur Math, Dist.: Howrah | No | - |
| 17 | Ramkrishna Mission Student Home Library, Belghoria | Belghoria, Kolkata | No | 2 |
| 18 | Krittibas Memorial Community Hall-cum-Museum Library | Fulia Boyra, Dist.: Nadia, | Own | 2 |
| 19 | Rammohan Library and Free Reading Room | Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road, Kolkata | No | - |
| 20 | Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Library | Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road, | Rented | 0 |
| 21 | Bankura District Library | Bankura | Rented | 2 |
| 22 | Birbhum District Library | Suri, Dist.: Birbhum | Own | 4 |
| 23 | North Bengal State Library | Coochbehar | Own | 2 |
| 24 | District Library | Balurghat | Own | 2 |
| 25 | Deshbandhu Govt. Disrict Library | H.D.Lama Road, P.O.+Dist.: Darjeeling | Own | 2 |
| 26 | Hooghly District Central Library | Cinsurah, Dist.: Hooghly, | No | - |
| 27 | Howrah District Central Library | M.G. Road, P.O.- Howrah, Dist. : Howrah | Own | 7 |
| 28 | District Library, Jalpaiguri | Jalpaiguri, Dist.: Jalpaiguri | Own | 2 |
| 29 | Kolkata Metropolitan Library | Ballygang Park Road, Kolkata | No | - |
| 30 | District Library, Malda | Malda, Dist.: Malda | No | - |
| 31 | District Library, Murshidabad | Berhampore, Dist.: Murshidabad | Own | 0 |
| 32 | Nadia District Library | Ghurni, Krishnagar, | No | - |
| 33 | Taki Govt. District Library | Taki, Dist.: North 24 Parganas | Own | 5 |
| 34 | North 24-Parganas Govt. District Library | Barasat, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, | No | 0 |
| 35 | Ramkrishna Mission Boy's Home District Library | Rahara, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, Kolkata | Own | 4 |
| 36 | District Library, Asansol | Asansol, Dist.: Burdwan, | Own | 2 |
| 37 | City Central Library | Durgapur, Dist.: Burdwan, | Own | 2 |
| 38 | District Library, Midnapur | Midnapore, Dist.: Paschim Medinipur, | No | - |
| 39 | Burdwan Udaychand District Library | Burdwan, Dist.: Burdwan, | Own | 2 |
| 40 | District Library, Tamluk | Tamluk, Dist. : Purba Medinipur, | Own | 3 |
| 41 | District Library, Purulia | B. T. Sarkar Road, Purulia, | No | 2 |
| 42 | Mati Sathi- Addl. Govt. District Library | Dist.: Purulia | Own | 2 |
| 43 | Additional District Library, Siliguri | Himachal vihar, Matigara, Siliguri, Darjeeling | No | - |
| 44 | District Library, South 24 Parganas | Court More, Siliguri, Dist.: Darjeeling, | No | - |
| 45 | Uttar Dinajpur Govt. District Library | Karnojora, Dist.: Uttar Dinajpur | Own | 0 |

**Table-2:** Based on Location, Collection, Newspaper and Magazine Type

| S. No. | Name of the library | Location | Collection | Daily Newspapers | Magazines |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | State Central Library | Ultadanga, Kolkata | 25254 | 10 | 30 |
| 2 | Kolkata Metropolitan Library | Ballygang Park Road, Kolkata | 6219 | 7 | 12 |
| 3 | Uttarpara Joykrishna Public Library | Uttarpara, Dist: Hoogly, | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 4 | North Bengal State Library | Coochbehar | 38800 | 12 | 20 |
| 5 | Taki Govt. District Library | Taki | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 6 | Deshbandhu Govt. Disrict Library | Darjeeling | 33320 | 7 | 30 |
| 7 | Govt. District Library | Karnojora | 15000 | 12 | 25 |
| 8 | North 24-Parganas Govt. District Library | Barasat | 8362 | 5 | 15 |
| 9 | Mati Sathi- Addl. Govt. District Library | Himachal vihar, Matigara | 13000 | 8 | 7 |
| 10 | Govt. Central Library | Kalimpong | 11400 | 10 | 20 |
| 11 | Central Library | Banipur | 7000 | 6 | 15 |
| 12 | Sidhu-Kanhu Birsa Govt. Town Library | Purulia | 10000 | 5 | 10 |
| 13 | Digha Govt. Town Library | Purba Medinipur | 22611 | 9 | 29 |
| 14 | Ramkrishna Sarada Mission Ashram Library | C.I.T. Road, Kolkata | 7000 | 4 | Not Available |
| 15 | Ramkrishna Mission Ashram Central Library | Narendrapur | 4708 | 8 | 15 |
| 16 | Ramkrishna Mission Janashiksha Library, Belur Math | Belur Math, Dist.: Howrah | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 17 | Ramkrishna Mission Student Home Library, Belghoria | Belghoria, Kolkata | 11780 | 12 | 21 |
| 18 | Krittibas Memorial Community Hall-cum-Museum Library | Fulia Boyra, Dist.: Nadia, | 6000 | 5 | 8 |
| 19 | Rammohan Library and Free Reading Room | Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road, Kolkata | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 20 | Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Library | Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road, | 10000 | 9 | 13 |
| 21 | Bankura District Library | Bankura | 6129 | 5 | 18 |
| 22 | Birbhum District Library | Suri, Dist.: Birbhum | 30962 | 10 | 35 |
| 23 | North Bengal State Library | Coochbehar | 4010 | 6 | 29 |
| 24 | District Library | Balurghat | 4000 | 7 | 12 |
| 25 | Deshbandhu Govt. Disrict Library | H.D.Lama Road, P.O.+Dist.: Darjeeling | 11792 | 10 | 11 |
| 26 | Hooghly District Central Library | Cinsurah, Dist.: Hooghly, | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 27 | Howrah District Central Library | M.G. Road, P.O.-Howrah, Dist. : Howrah | 43215 | 10 | 20 |
| 28 | District Library, Jalpaiguri | Jalpaiguri, Dist.: Jalpaiguri | 8961 | 5 | 4 |
| 29 | Kolkata Metropolitan Library | Ballygang Park Road, Kolkata | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 30 | District Library, Malda | Malda, Dist.: Malda | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 31 | District Library, Murshidabad | Berhampore, Dist.: Murshidabad | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 32 | Nadia District Library | Ghurni, Krishnagar, | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 33 | Taki Govt. District Library | Taki, Dist.: North 24 Parganas | 8863 | 3 | 11 |
| 34 | North 24-Parganas Govt. District Library | Barasat, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, | 5000 | Not Available | Not Available |
| 35 | Ramkrishna Mission Boy's Home District Library | Rahara, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, Kolkata | 19369 | 12 | 28 |
| 36 | District Library, Asansol | Asansol, Dist.: Burdwan, | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 37 | City Central Library | Durgapur, Dist.: Burdwan, | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 38 | District Library, Midnapur | Midnapore, Dist.: Paschim Medinipur, | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 39 | Burdwan Udaychand District Library | Burdwan, Dist.: Burdwan, | 5675 | 6 | 20 |
| 40 | District Library, Tamluk | Tamluk, Dist. : Purba Medinipur, | 20513 | 9 | 34 |
| 41 | District Library, Purulia | B. T. Sarkar Road, Purulia, | 10000 | 7 | 20 |
| 42 | Mati Sathi- Addl. Govt. District Library | Dist.: Purulia | 1700 | 7 | 30 |
| 43 | Additional District Library, Siliguri | Himachal vihar, Matigara, Siliguri, Darjeeling | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 44 | District Library, South 24 Parganas | Court More, Siliguri, Dist.: Darjeeling, | Not Available | Not Available | Not Available |
| 45 | Uttar Dinajpur Govt. District Library | Karnojora, Dist.: Uttar Dinajpur | 16467 | 12 | 18 |

**Table-3:** Based on Location and Services

| S. No. | Name of the library | Location | Lending Facility | Children Section | Internet Facility | Text-Book section |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | State Central Library | Ultadanga, Kolkata | Yes | Yes | NA | Yes |
| 2 | Kolkata Metropolitan Library | Ballygang Park Road, Kolkata | Yes | Yes | NA | Yes |
| 3 | Uttarpara Joykrishna Public Library | Uttarpara, Dist: Hoogly, | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 4 | North Bengal State Library | Coochbehar | Yes | Yes | NA | Yes |
| 5 | Taki Govt. District Library | Taki | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 6 | Deshbandhu Govt. Disrict Library | Darjeeling | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 7 | Govt. District Library | Karnojora | Yes | Yes | NA | Yes |
| 8 | North 24-Parganas Govt. District Library | Barasat | Yes | No | NA | Yes |
| 9 | Mati Sathi- Addl. Govt. District Library | Himachal vihar, Matigara | Yes | Yes | NA | No |
| 10 | Govt. Central Library | Kalimpong | Yes | No | NA | No |
| 11 | Central Library | Banipur | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 12 | Sidhu-Kanhu Birsa Govt. Town Library | Purulia | NA | No | NA | No |
| 13 | Digha Govt. Town Library | Purba Medinipur | Yes | Yes | NA | NA |
| 14 | Ramkrishna Sarada Mission Ashram Library | C.I.T. Road, Kolkata | Yes | Yes | NA | NA |
| 15 | Ramkrishna Mission Ashram Central Library | Narendrapur | Yes | NA | NA | Yes |
| 16 | Ramkrishna Mission Janashiksha Library, Belur Math | Belur Math, Dist.: Howrah | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 17 | Ramkrishna Mission Student Home Library, Belghoria | Belghoria, Kolkata | NA | No | NA | No |
| 18 | Krittibas Memorial Community Hall-cum-Museum Library | Fulia Boyra, Dist.: Nadia, | NA | No | NA | No |
| 19 | Rammohan Library and Free Reading Room | Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road, Kolkata | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 20 | Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Library | Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road, | Yes | No | NA | No |
| 21 | Bankura District Library | Bankura | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 22 | Birbhum District Library | Suri, Dist.: Birbhum | Yes | Yes | NA | No |
| 23 | North Bengal State Library | Coochbehar | Yes | No | NA | No |
| 24 | District Library | Balurghat | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 25 | Deshbandhu Govt. Disrict Library | H.D.Lama Road, P.O.+Dist.: Darjeeling | Yes | No | NA | No |
| 26 | Hooghly District Central Library | Cinsurah, Dist.: Hooghly, | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 27 | Howrah District Central Library | M.G. Road, P.O.- Howrah, Dist. : Howrah | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 28 | District Library, Jalpaiguri | Jalpaiguri, Dist.: Jalpaiguri | Yes | Yes | NA | Yes |
| 29 | Kolkata Metropolitan Library | Ballygang Park Road, Kolkata | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 30 | District Library, Malda | Malda, Dist.: Malda | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 31 | District Library, Murshidabad | Berhampore, Dist.: Murshidabad | Yes | No | No | No |
| 32 | Nadia District Library | Ghurni, Krishnagar, | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 33 | Taki Govt. District Library | Taki, Dist.: North 24 Parganas | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 34 | North 24-Parganas Govt. District Library | Barasat, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 35 | Ramkrishna Mission Boy's Home District Library | Rahara, Dist.: North 24 Parganas, Kolkata | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 36 | District Library, Asansol | Asansol, Dist.: Burdwan, | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| 37 | City Central Library | Durgapur, Dist.: Burdwan, | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| 38 | District Library, Midnapur | Midnapore, Dist.: Paschim Medinipur, | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| 39 | Burdwan Udaychand District Library | Burdwan, Dist.: Burdwan, | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 40 | District Library, Tamluk | Tamluk, Dist. : Purba Medinipur, | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 41 | District Library, Purulia | B. T. Sarkar Road, Purulia, | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| 42 | Mati Sathi- Addl. Govt. District Library | Dist.: Purulia | Yes | No | No | No |
| 43 | Additional District Library, Siliguri | Himachal vihar, Matigara, Siliguri, Darjeeling | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 44 | District Library, South 24 Parganas | Court More, Siliguri, Dist.: Darjeeling, | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| 45 | Uttar Dinajpur Govt. District Library | Karnojora, Dist.: Uttar Dinajpur | Yes | No | No | No |

**Table-1: On the Basis of Location, Building and Staff**

Using data collected from district public libraries, it was determined that only 58% are providing their services in their own buildings, and the rest are renting buildings or utilizing other means. Among district public libraries, 18.42% have four or more staff members for library services, while 81.58% have three or less staff members.

**Table-2: Based on Location, Collection, Newspaper and Magazine Type**

According to the records available, 22.86% of public libraries have a book collection of 20,000 or more, and 77.14% have a collection of fewer than 20,000.

According to the records available, 29.41% of public libraries subscribe to 10 or more newspapers daily, and the rest subscribe to less than 10 newspapers.

In the district public libraries, 51.52 percent subscribe to 20 or more magazines regularly, and 48.48 percent subscribe to less than 20 magazines.

**Table-3: Based on Location and Services:**

In accordance with the available records, 100% of public libraries have been providing regular lending services to their users.

According to records available, 55.56% of public libraries have maintained a children's section, and the remaining 44.44% don't.

According to the data available, 5.26% of public libraries offer Internet facilities to their users, while the remaining 94.74% don't.

A textbook section is maintained by 54.28% of district public libraries, while a textbook section is not maintained by 45.72% of district public libraries.

**Public Library System in West Bengal: Problems and Prospects**

The state of West Bengal has so many problems in developing, modernizing, and operating its public library services. State library services have been identified as experiencing the following problems in their practical and smooth operation:

1. **The Library Staff:** There is a very critical constraint in the way public libraries are run in west Bengal in that they have very limited or no professional librarians, resulting in negligible conditions for the libraries. Public libraries are never provided with permanent library professionals by the Government authorities.

   **Table-1** illustrates clearly the staff statuses in the different public libraries across West Bengal. There is an imbalance in the appointment of library staff members as well. Most of the employees mentioned above are on temporary or on contract basis, which needs to be regularized, and they are not library professionals. A number of public libraries are operating without professional library staff, which prevents them from reaching the public. The most interesting thing is that some public libraries are not functioning in the true sense of the library, and their staff has been transferred to other departments. The state's public libraries are suffering from a lack of funding. It is therefore imperative that the government provide the necessary trained personnel to these public libraries for them to function effectively, as well as implement the library legislation strictly in the state.

2. **Collection:** The collection is considered to be the heart of the library activity since it is one of the most important components. There are quite a few public libraries in west Bengal that have very little collection of different reading materials, which make these libraries incapable of serving the real needs of the people. Even among the libraries, there is a huge imbalance in the collection. The government should make sure that the libraries have enough reading materials to serve the users' needs, and there is also an independent scope and prospect for the modernization and automation of library services in the state. With the availability of Open Source Software for library automation in the present age, there is an immense prospect for modernizing and automating library services.

3. **Availability of Infrastructure:** The state of west Bengal lacks the necessary infrastructure, including buildings, furniture, IT accessories, etc., to ensure smooth operation of public libraries. Several public libraries don't have the minimal infrastructure to run their libraries due to the lack of these facilities. Public libraries cannot be developed without infrastructural facilities from the authorities. West Bengal does not have many public libraries and they are mostly operated in rented buildings. This is very interesting.

4. **Advertisement and People's Attitude are Indifferent:** It is not well understood by the general public how important library services are. Because of this, indifferent attitudes among the general public have also contributed to the problem of extending library services to them. There is still a lack of knowledge about library services and a lack of understanding of its importance among the general population. By advertising public libraries and their services, there is a great potential for creating awareness among different sections of the people about library services and their importance.

5. **Inability to Read Regularly:** Public libraries have been struggling to provide services due to a lack of reading habits. Reading is being lost among the young generations of today due to a lack of time. There has been a decline in the number of people visiting public libraries. The public libraries authorities should organize various programs to encourage regular reading habits among the common people.

6. **The Library as a Center for Community Information:** In India, prominent library leaders have stressed the importance of libraries transforming from collection-driven institutions to service-driven institutions. Since several years ago, libraries have also understood that they can serve as community information centers. In 1986, the National Policy on Library and Information Systems (NAPLIS) reported that village libraries should operate local information centers, thereby integrating public health, adult education, and local self-government.

**Conclusion**

In spite of the rising global economic status of the country, investing in public library services can make a huge difference in achieving social development and education goals. It is time to take wise action regarding several issues surrounding public libraries in the country; if appropriate action is not taken, this opportunity may pass us by. With state and national governments, ruling coalitions, and elected officials coming and going, the National Knowledge Commission may not be able to fulfill its potential. Library movements in India and in West Bengal have gained some much-needed momentum, but they need to be maintained. Therefore, from the discussion above, it is clear that public libraries are facing a number of challenges. Therefore, public libraries in India, particularly those in west Bengal, need to adapt to the challenges that are arising so that they will be able to make their mark in society. Otherwise, they may lose their significance and identity one day. In order to build a vibrant, sustainable society based on knowledge, it is time to think and act to disseminate the

required knowledge. Authority, Librarians, Politicians, and the common people play a key role in strengthening public library services in the state to reach the general public.

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