

# Challenges in Front of West Bengal Public Rural Libraries: An Overview

Shankar Das

*Student, Mlis, Department of Library and Information Science, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut(UP)*

**Abstract-** A public library is a vital source of information, programs, and community engagement for people across the country. A public library, often called the heart of a community. Among public libraries rural library is one such library which operates in villages. Rural public libraries are important academic and socio-cultural institution for rural people. A rural library functions as rural people's informational, educational and recreational needs. But the importance of rural libraries as the hub of local information ecosystem is frequently underestimated. This paper will focus on the challenges in front of public rural libraries in digital era and provide some solution to the challenges faced by the public rural libraries of West Bengal.

**Keywords:** Public Rural Library, Internet, West Bengal

## INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO, a public library serves as the local gateway to knowledge, providing the foundation for lifelong learning, independent decision-making, cultural development, and social cohesion within a community. As defined by the UNESCO manifesto, a public library is established under the mandate of law and fully supported by public funds. It offers all its services free of cost and opens its doors for free and equal use by all community members, regardless of age, gender, religion, language, or educational background. The primary functions of a public library have remained constant throughout history – to collect, preserve, and disseminate knowledge for the benefit of society. In the words of Olanlokun and Salisu (1993), public libraries are libraries set up to provide free but traditional service to everyone. A public library serves the community and is generally referred to as a layman's library or university. Rural libraries provide informal education to all the villagers irrespective of gender, age, caste and create. Rural libraries are just like the concept of democracy, library of the people, by the people and for the people. Since

the public rural library operates in remote areas and villages, preserving and developing it is very important as it acts as a development and information centre for all poor people.

## PUBLIC LIBRARY SCENARIO IN WEST BENGAL

The public libraries in West Bengal are under the Directorate of Library Services, Department of Mass Education Extension. There is a Minister in charge of Library services. This public library system in the state of West Bengal consists of four levels. At the highest level there is the State Central Library. In the next level there are district libraries, generally one per district. Next to that level we find Town libraries and at the lowest level there are Rural or Primary unit libraries. In addition to these we also have Community libraries cum Information Centre (CLIC) to provide library/information services at the village level where there is no government or government sponsored library. In addition to these there are non-sponsored public libraries run by Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). Presently there are 2480 Public Libraries in West Bengal out of which, there are 13 Govt. Public Libraries, 2460 Govt. Sponsored Public Libraries and 7 Govt. Aided Public Libraries. Out of 2473 Govt. and Govt. sponsored Libraries there are 1 State Central Library, 1 Special Library (i.e. Uttarpara Jaikrishna Public Library), 26 District Libraries, 236 Town/Sub division Libraries and 2209 Rural Libraries/ Primary Unit Libraries. But most of the rural libraries are not functional due to shortage of librarians.

## OBJECTIVES OF PUBLIC RURAL LIBRARIES

The objectives of public rural libraries are to provide free reading services, develop reading habits among

villages, provide reference services, create the scope for healthy cultural exercise as a cultural and continuing education centre, encourage inter-library exchange by opening branches of libraries, provide trained and efficient library staff, as a centre for sharing, sustaining and strengthening the knowledge base of the people in general and students in particular also improves the quality of rural life.

#### FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC RURAL LIBRARIES

Public rural libraries plays an important role in development of rural areas, it also acts as important information centre. The functions of public rural libraries are - it provide information and activities which will help community members acquire the skill, knowledge and confidence to participate more fully in community affairs, provides information and activities about health and agricultural techniques, business etc, to assist community to improve their economic situation, it also strengthen a community's involvement in and appreciation of local and national culture, to eradicate illiteracy by providing audiovisual and illustrated reading materials, to provide government information, such as government schemes, welfare schemes for below poverty lines, to provide agricultural information such as crops, fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, weather forecasts, credit, societies agricultural equipment's, soil testing, water supply and irrigation, to provide information about animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries, to provide information about funding agencies for housing, commerce, agriculture and industries, to provide information on career opportunities for the students.

#### CHALLENGES IN DIGITAL ERA

At present public rural libraries are facing multiple challenges. The challenges which the public rural libraries of West Bengal are facing are most of the rural libraries are not functional due to shortage of librarians and staff, bad infrastructure, challenges of book production, limited and outdated materials, no internet connectivity.

Ali Ayub(2015) have found that most of public library of West Bengal lacks proper infrastructure, political instability, illiteracy and low level education, lack of skilled professional, inadequate management support and finance.

#### CONCLUSION

The public rural libraries are information hub it acts as community centre for all villagers. In present time all the public libraries should be upgraded with proper infrastructure, book collections, inter connectivity among rural libraries. The Govt. of West Bengal should recruit new skilled librarians as soon as possible and makes each and every rural library operational, regular financial aids should be given. The work of librarian has also become diverse with advancement of technology. The librarian must provide right information, references, career guidance, organize book fairs. If India as a nation wants to be developed we must develop our villages first, so the libraries must be supported. Public rural libraries aim to make the rural people literate, connect with worldwide information. When farmers will be educated by keeping with upgraded with new farming techniques, health they will produce more and it will definitely boost our economy. So, public libraries are now need of hour and it must just not like a museum of old reading materials. It must be regularly upgraded.

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