SPACE PROBLEM AND INFRASTRUCTURAL FACILITIES IN WEST BENGAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Public library is a place where wide range of people acquire knowledge through various information resources as well as with the help of several activities. From the pre-historic time to the modern time, public library has been playing a great role for socio-economic development of the nation. At present, significantly, the state of West Bengal has a strong public library system. However, before enactment of Library Legislation in West Bengal in 1979, total number of public libraries were 762, which have since increased almost three times. The present study covered twenty one public libraries in Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Apart from a district library, in Murshidabad, three more categories of public libraries namely, town libraries, sub-divisional libraries and rural libraries also exist there. The study examines available infrastructural facilities across all levels of public libraries in Murshidabad district. Data for the present study has been collected through questionnaire. Findings indicate that urgent attention is needed to improve the infrastructure of libraries particularly those in rural areas.

INTRODUCTION

The public library is essential to every community in a nation. It has a greater responsibility for the development and maintenance of a society by serving the individual access to a wide range of information, knowledge, ideas and opinions [1]. ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science defined Public library as:

…Any library which provides general library services without charge to all residents of a given community, district or region. Supported by public or private funds, the public library makes its basic collections and basic services available to the population of its legal service area without charges to individual users, but may impose charges on users outside its legal services area. Products and services beyond the library's basic services may or may not be provided to the public at large and may or may not be provided individual charges. Earlier, a library accessible to all residents of a given community, but not generally free, as distinguished from a private library [2].

In the words of Mc Colvin, a public library ' is provided by the local authority, the town, or county council, entirely or mostly at its own expense; governed and administered by the authority or a committee, wholly or largely appointed by itself; available free of any charge to all who live in the area; and offering a wide selection of materials chosen to embrace as completely as possible the varied interests of the individual and the community, free from bias or religion, political or other motives' [3].

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Ramasamy [4] stated that "the design of the building should be functional rather than monumental providing facilities for open access, scope for future growth, provision of reading rooms around the stock-room and allowing natural light and air to spread the building to the extent possible. Library should be located in its own building at the central part of the town/area with sufficient seating capacity to accommodate the ever growing readership". While UNESCO [1] manifesto pointed out that a public library "requires well situated library buildings, good reading and study facilities, as well as relevant technologies and sufficient opening hours convenient to the users". Therefore, public library needs well situated building, provided with reading rooms, seminar room, sufficient furniture and facilities like drinking water, toilet/washroom, parking, etc. for effective efficient services to the user communities. The objective of the present study is to examine space problem and infrastructural facilities in Murshidabad district located in West Bengal state of India.

MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT

The state of West Bengal in India is the fourth most populated state which covers 88,752 sq. km area [5]. According to 2011, Census, the population of Murshidabad is slightly more than 91 million spread over 19 districts [6]. It has a great significance in the 'Indian History' as in 1757 the British army defeated *Siraj–ud–Daula* in the Battle of Plassey, after which the entire nation was brought under the British control. Even after the conquest of Bengal by the Britishers, Murshidabad remained for some time the seat of administration. Murshidabad district comprised of five sub-divisions namely Baharampur, Domkol, Lalbag, Kandi and Jangipur and 27 blocks. The local language is Bengali and at official level both Bengali and English are in use. Predominant population of this district is Muslim comprising of 66.28% of the total population. Literacy rate of the district is 66.59% with male and female ratio as 69.95% & 63.09% respectively [7]. Here, large number of people associated with agriculture for their livelihood.

West Bengal has well-developed public library system. Now 2474 libraries in all categories are smoothly functioning either under the control of the Government or Sponsored by the Government. Apart from these, 7 public libraries are running by the Non-Government Organizations which are aided by the Govt. under the Directorate of Library Services, West Bengal [8]. However, in Murshidabad district, there are a total 160 public libraries. In this district four categories of public libraries are running e.g. 1 district library, situated in Baharampur city, 6 town libraries, 3 sub-divisional libraries and 150 rural libraries.

Data for the present study has been collected through questionnaire. One of the investigators has personally visited each library and questionnaire was distributed among the staff of the library. Although, the questionnaire was designed to be exhaustive, some areas that might have been proved quite interesting have not been covered in sufficient detail due to the lack of information. This was mainly in case of various events being organized by surveyed libraries. Behaviour of library staff was quite good and supportive.

The study has been covered 21 public libraries in Murshidabad district with all level. Apart from a district library, there are three town libraries, two sub-divisional libraries and fifteen rural libraries have surveyed. It was observed that the district library, town library, and sub-divisional library have separate children sections, reading room sections, circulation sections, career guidance sections, reference sections, newspaper reading sections, etc. It is worthy to point out here that, these libraries are also providing services to children, students, youth generation, professionals, homemakers, etc. While most of the rural library does not have separate career guidance sections, reference sections, newspaper reading sections etc. due to the lack of infrastructure.

Table 1: Selected Public Libraries in Murshidabad District, West Bengal

S. No.	Name of Public Libraries	Status/Degree of the Library	Year of Established	Total Library Collection
1.	Murshidabad District Library	District Library (DL1)	1955	53816
2.	Beldanga Prasanna Kumar Main Town Library	Town Library (TL1)	1920	15759
3.	Ramendra Sundar Smriti Pathagar Shahar Granthagar	Town Library (TL2)	1937	17878
4.	Lalgola M.N. Academy Public Town Library	Town Library (TL3)	1913	18083
5.	Bandhab Samiti Lalbagh Sub-divisional Library	Sub-divisional Library (SDL1)	1919	12204
6.	Kandi Acharyay Ramendra Sundar Sub-divisional Library	Sub-divisional Library (SDL2)	1963	13631
7.	Trimohini Progressive Union Rural Library	Rural Library (RL1)	1969	6379
8.	Sarbodaya Sangha Rural Library	Rural Library (RL2)	1967	2984
9.	Netajee Pathagar	Rural Library (RL3)	1948	4836
10.	Kalitala Shridurga Library	Rural Library (RL4)	1951	3569
11.	Sargachhi Ramkrishna Mission Library	Rural Library (RL5)	1897	6893
12.	Kazisaha Nazrul Library	Rural Library (RL6)	1967	5276
13.	Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi Shahar Granthagar	Rural Library (RL7)	1998	5012
14.	Bankim Chandra library	Rural Library (RL8)	1905	7223
15.	Raghunath Club Govt. Sponsored Rural Library	Rural Library (RL9)	1971	5509
16.	Raghunathpur Deshbandhu Pathagar	Rural Library (RL10)	1961	6615
17.	Benadaha Siraj Smriti Pathagar	Rural Library (RL11)	1978	5340
18.	Jitpur Public Library	Rural Library (RL12)	1978	6292
19.	Pashla B.K.M. Library	Rural Library (R13)	1960	5335
20.	Saraswati Library	Rural Library (RL14)	1910	7013
21.	Mangal Jan Rural Library	Rural Library (RL15)	1976	5773

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following are the main objectives of this study:

- To examine the available infrastructural facilities across all levels.

- To ascertain the staff strength across all levels.

- To what extent services are suffered due to lesser staff strength.

- To highlight space problem.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Structure of Building

It was noted that all the libraries under study are having their own buildings located in easily accessible areas. These libraries are having pucca buildings. However, libraries in rural areas are located in old buildings which need lot of repairing work. On being asked, library staff of these libraries has revealed that due to lack of financial support, construction is

not possible. Nevertheless, it is not a constraint and a large number of people from all segments of the society. It was also stressed by the library staff that material matters more than building. Emphasis is being given to provide interesting material and hence people visit library with enthusiasm. Buildings in district, town and sub-libraries are better in comparison to rural libraries. However, more number of people in terms of population ratio visits rural libraries.

Area Occupied by the Public Libraries

IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines (2001) stated that "the library should have adequate space to implement full range of services" [1]. While Gautam [9] pointed out that "Planning of space in libraries is necessary for systematic organization of reading material in print and non-print as such not only physical but also digital space is required by library at remote locations for placement and hosting of digital data for its accessibility". According to UNESCO [1], the appropriate standard space is 56 sq. m. (600 sq. ft.) per one thousand. Figure 1 display that the largest are is occupied by district library with 3000 *sq. ft.* one town library has covered around 1650 *sq. ft.* area and another two are 1208/770 *sq. ft.* area in the respective town like Beldanga, Lalgola and Kandi. Two sub-divisional libraries have covered 850 and 1800 *sq. ft.* in two sub-divisional area like Lalbagh and Kandi sub-division. Apart from this, it is also observed that most of the rural libraries have average 500-900 *sq. ft.* Only 1 rural library has covered 180 *sq. ft.* area. It shows that except three libraries like Ramendra Sundar Smriti Pathagar Shahar Granthagar, Murshidabad District Library and Raghunath Club Govt. Sponsored Rural Library, all public libraries in Murshidabad district have followed the UNESCO Guidelines 2001.

Fig. 1: District Library of Murshidabad

Table 2: Ratio between Library Area and per Members

S. No.	Name of Public Libraries	Degree of Library	Library Area (*sq. ft.*)	Total No. of Members	Ratio	Rank
1.	Netajee Pathagar	RL3	*800*	362	2.20	1
2.	Kazisaha Nazrul Library	RL6	*850*	434	1.95	2
3.	Kalitala Shridurga Library	RL4	*570*	320	1.78	3
4.	Raghunathpur Deshbandhu Pathagar	RL10	*700*	447	1.56	4
5.	Trimohini Progressive Union Rural Library	RL1	*624*	473	1.31	5
6.	Bankim Chandra library	RL8	*740*	572	1.29	6
7.	Benadaha Siraj Smriti Pathagar	RL11	*450*	353	1.27	7
8.	Beldanga Prasanna Kumar Main Town Library	TL1	*1650*	1342	1.22	8
9.	Mangal Jan Rural Library	RL15	*712*	614	1.15	9
10.	Saraswati Library	RL14	*546*	500	1.09	10
11.	Bandhab Samiti Lalbagh Sub-divisional Library	SDL1	*850*	817	1.04	11
12.	Jitpur Public Library	RL12	*700*	711	0.98	12
13.	Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi Shahar Granthagar	RL7	*560*	583	0.96	13
14.	Pashla B.K.M. Library	RL13	*534*	557	0.95	14
15.	Lalgola M.N. Academy Public Town Library	TL3	*1200*	1333	0.90	15
16.	Sarbodaya Sangha Rural Library	RL2	*180*	212	0.84	16
17.	Kandi Acharyay Ramendra Sundar Sub-divisional Library	SDL2	*1800*	2160	0.83	17
18.	Sargachhi Ramkrishna Mission Library	RL5	*800*	987	0.81	18
19.	Ramendra Sundar Smriti Pathagar Shahar Granthagar	TL2	*1208*	3006	0.40	19
20.	Murshidabad District Library	DL1	*3000*	7692	0.39	20
21.	Raghunath Club Govt. Sponsored Rural Library	RL9	*670*	1284	0.52	21

Availability of Reading Room

District library has three well organized reading rooms for general user. Besides that, the library has separate reading rooms for children as well as women. Furthermore, three and two reading rooms are available in each town libraries and sub-divisional libraries. However, many rural libraries are functioning with one reading room. It therefore reveals that a significant improvement is needed across all levels of public libraries in Murshidabad

district. Reading rooms are packed particularly during evening hours. Sometime people go back without consulting library material due to non-availability of reading space.

Furniture Strength

Furniture in all the libraries is sufficient as has been observed by the investigators. District library has more than 165 chairs and tables, 22 book shelves, 4 magazine display racks, 2 new book display stands, 80 almirah (including wooden and steel), and 7 computer tables. Whereas, town libraries and sub-divisional libraries have 130 chairs and table on an average, besides 44 book shelves, 1 magazine display rack, 1 new book display stand, 34 almirah and 3 computer tables. Notably, rural libraries have 43 chairs and tables on an average besides 11 book shelves, 6 almirah. However, only two rural libraries have computer table.

Table 3: Furniture Strength of the Public Libraries

S. No.	Types of Libraries	Total No. of Libraries	Chairs & Tables	Book Shelves	Magazine Display Racks	Newspaper Stands	New Book Display Stands	Almirah	Computer Table
1.	District Libraries	1	150	22	4	3	2	80	7
2.	Town Libraries	3	48	42	1	1	-	35	3
3.	Sub-divisional Libraries	2	44	45	1	1	-	32	3
4.	Rural Libraries	15	23	11	-	-	-	6	0.50

*(Note: * Denote average number of furniture of the libraries selected for the study)*

Ratio between Members and Reading Room Seat

There are two rural libraries in West Bengal without any reading room. Notably, all the district library, town libraries, sub-divisional libraries, and rural libraries have inadequate seating arrangement (See Table 4).

Electricity, Drinking Water and Toilet Facilities

The investigators observed that district library, town libraries, sub-divisional libraries, and rural libraries have proper lighting with ceiling fans facilities for their users. Ontario Public Library Guidelines [10] remarked that every public library "need for non-assignable space is reduced where the library shares washrooms, mechanical areas etc. with another tenant in one building". The result shows that district library, town libraries, and sub-divisional libraries have provision of drinking water and separate wash rooms for male and female users. However, only district library has purified and cold water facilities for summer season while town libraries and sub-divisional libraries have no purified water machine, but they have tube-well facilities. Notably, rural libraries do not have wash rooms for female members.

Staff Strength

It is irony that only three libraries are having regular staff members. Rest all libraries have temporary staff members. For the last many years no selection committees have been held to appoint professional staff in West Bengal Public Library System. Furthermore, regular staff members have complained that they are overburdened with the workload due to shortage of staff. Staff Strength in public libraries of Murshidabad District is shown in table 5.

PROBLEMS FACED BY THE LIBRARIANS

The investigators have asked various questions to all the librarians of district library, town libraries, sub-divisional libraries, and rural

libraries regarding the major barriers for better services to their user communities. Most of the librarians encountered a number of problems for operating their public libraries in Murshidabad district. Some notable, problems are as follows:

- All the public librarians have pointed out that they have been facing the problem of insufficient number of professional staff for maintaining library system and services.

- Majority of the librarians were not satisfied both with the library building and library space. Especially most of the rural libraries are attached with clubs or they are far from the town/area. The distance thus hampers the frequent access of users to the libraries.

- Most of the libraries do not have proper drinking water facilities as well as toilet facilities for women.

- The quality and the type of furniture in most of the libraries is not conducive to users' needs.

- The library buildings in rural areas are confined to only one or two rooms that are used for multiple purposes, including stacks and reading areas. Therefore, they are unable to provide reading room facilities for their users.

- Most of the librarians in rural libraries were found wanting proper space to organise some important activities, so peculiar to public libraries.

Table 4: Ratio between Members and Reading Room Seat

S. No.	Degree of Library	Total No. of Seating Arrangement	Total No. of Members	Ratio
1.	DL1	140	7692	0.01
2.	TL1	65	1342	0.04
3.	TL2	60	3006	0.01
4.	TL3	25	1333	0.01
5.	SDL1	35	817	0.04
6.	SDL2	28	2160	0.01
7.	RL1	12	473	0.02
8.	RL2	-	212	-
9.	RL3	20	362	0.05
10.	RL4	15	320	0.04
11.	RL5	15	987	0.01
12.	RL6	-	434	-
13.	RL7	22	583	0.03
14.	RL8	30	572	0.05
15.	RL9	35	1284	0.02
16.	RL10	10	447	0.04
17.	RL11	12	353	0.03
18.	RL12	27	711	0.03
19.	RL13	17	557	0.03
20.	RL14	25	500	0.05
21.	RL15	42	614	0.06

Table 5: Staff Strength of Public Libraries

S. No.	Degree of Library	Total No. of Existing Staff	Total No. of Sanctioned Staff	Total No. of Vacant Staff
1.	DL1	4	10	6
2.	TL1	2	4	2
3.	TL2	2	4	2
4.	TL3	2	4	2
5.	SDL1	2	4	2
6.	SDL2	1	4	3
7.	RL1	-	2	2
8.	RL2	2	2	-
9.	RL3	1	2	1
10.	RL4	2	2	-
11.	RL5	2	2	-
12.	RL6	-	2	2
13.	RL7	1	2	1
14.	RL8	1	2	1
15.	RL9	2	2	-
16.	RL10	1	2	1
17.	RL11	1	2	1
18.	RL12	-	2	2
19.	RL13	1	2	1
20.	RL14	1	2	1
21.	RL15	1	2	1
	Total	29	60	31

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All the libraries have some common problems i.e. inadequate staff, lack of proper building, dampness especially in rainy season etc. As far as infrastructural facilities are concerned, district libraries are relatively better as comparison to town, sub-divisional and rural libraries. Unfortunately, rural libraries come at the bottom. However, an important finding of the present study is that a large number of people are not only becoming members of the public library but they also visit regularly across all the segments of the society for motivating them. Furthermore, there is a substantial rise in the number of rural library users/visitors, male as well as female; children as well as adults in comparison to district, town and sub-divisional libraries. Rural libraries in West Bengal are always packed for the purpose of reading. Notably, children enjoy library environment more than other category of users. Youth consider these libraries as the best places for career-building.

Hence, urgent attention is needed by the government of West Bengal for improvement of public libraries in the state particularly those located in rural areas. Political leaders of the state should realize that literacy is a key to the development of West Bengal. Significantly, public libraries play crucial role in bringing literacy across all the segments of society.

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