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## An empirical study on Public Libraries of Kalimpong

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# **An empirical study on Public Libraries of Kalimpong**

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**Abstract:** *This paper is an attempt to examine the present status and position of Government and Government sponsored public libraries in the Kalimpong district of West Bengal in terms of their establishments, membership patterns, physical facilities, staff strength, their collections, organizations, services and computer facilities etc. A total of 30 structured questionnaires were distributed among the Public Libraries across this hilly area and all the questionnaires were duly obtained with a response rate of 100%. Based on the findings the study suggests some recommendations for building functional and sound public libraries for providing effective and efficient library services to the hill community.*

**Keywords:** *Public library, System and Services, Kalimpong, Hill Community, Library Survey.*

## **1. Introduction**

Throughout the evolution of the public library, it has maintained a position of trust and a standard of being open to people from all walks of life. Lawson, (2016). Public library is still considered the most recognized institutions of a society to acquire knowledge and understanding which helps an individual to be a good citizen in the society. Education of the individual is essential for the development of his mind and capacity to make sound and nature judgments and thus they play the role of an enlightened, responsible and well informed citizen. Thinking the importance of formal education, through schools, colleges and universities is of prime importance in this regard, the significance of “informal education” or “self-education” can’t be ruled out, because the process of education does not end with ones formal education only, rather real education starts at the point where formal education ends. The process of self-education is life-long which requires no classroom attendance and have the individuals to read whatever they like and at a time and place convenient to them. Public Library is that place wherever it operates tends to enrich the lives of people through access to ideas, information and entertainment available from books as well as from a variety of other resources. Today’s world is experiencing an exponential growth of information in every

sphere of development. Growth of information has also resulted number of literature coming in scatter, rising prices of reading materials, growing varied demand of users, inability of libraries to organize, preserve and handle them in the library. Public libraries irrespective of its location undoubtedly, striving to cope with the prevailing situation with its meagre resources and infrastructures which demand the committed efforts from all its stakeholders.

## **2. Kalimpong at a glance**

There are two spurs of the Himalayas in Darjeeling hill, West Bengal, one in the west running from north to south. On this spur the beautiful hill resort, “the queen of hill stations” called Darjeeling is situated. The other spur is in the east across the Teesta river. On the lower spur is Kalimpong, a small but attractive hill station. The word Kalimpong in Tibetan means “the stockade of Kings Ministers” form the two Tibetan words “Kalon” meaning Kings Ministers and “Pong” meaning stockade. Some scholars translate “Pong” as Assembly, in which case Kalimpong would mean “The Assembly of Kings Ministers”. It is also called “Kalibong” or the black spur by the hill people. “Kalibong” in local dialects stands for “Kaulim” a fibrous plant which grows in abundance in this region. The meaning that has found the most favour, however, is the Lepcha meaning of the name – “ridge where we play”. It is said that Lepcha tribesman used to organize field sports while not engaged in agricultural pursuits – hence the name. O’Malley (1907).

Situated at a height of 1,182 metres / 3,456 ft. and between the latitudes 26<sup>0</sup>51’ & 27<sup>0</sup>12’N and longitudes 88<sup>0</sup>28’ & 88<sup>0</sup>53’E Kalimpong was first known as the Dalingkot sub-division of Western Duars District and in 1866 it was transferred to Darjeeling District. The area of the sub-division is 1056.5 sq. km and is bounded in the north by Sikkim and in the east by Bhutan. Kalimpong is an area of mixed inhabitants consisting mainly of Nepalese, Lepchas, Bhutias, Tibetans, Marwaris, Beharis and Bengalis. Nepali is the “lingua franca” of these hill people. Most of the Nepalese follow Hindu religion the rest are Buddhists, Christians and Muslims.

Kalimpong has a very mild and temperate climate. During the summers the maximum temperature is about 27<sup>0</sup>C and the minimum about 17<sup>0</sup>C while in the winters the maximum temperature is around 17<sup>0</sup>C and the minimum about 6<sup>0</sup>C. The average rainfall is about 220 cm. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in the sub-division. There are a few tea estates, and most of these are situated in the foothills about the Duars. In the town areas the people are engaged in business or are engaged in government services.

The early education that prevailed in the native societies of the hill region of Kalimpong was very simple in nature and practical in character. The principal means of education for all the hill people was incidental and non-formal. Religious institutions have also played their roles as the agencies of education in the life of the native hill people. The indigenous institutions would be the only centres of learning for the native tribes after the advent of modern education to be brought by the Christian Missionaries and other Europeans. The real educational works were taken up in this region only during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, which could be possible only through the agency of government department and the Christian Missionaries of Swiss and Scottish Church. Successive government in West Bengal also took various developmental steps to improve the educational status of both the urban and rural people by establishing many schools at different places in the area. For a long time Kalimpong has had a very good reputation for being an excellent educational centre. One recent development that the Kalimpong subdivision of the Darjeeling hills has become the 21st district of West Bengal on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

The development of libraries in Kalimpong can be traced only after independence with the establishment of some Area libraries and some Feeder libraries during the period 1953-1960 by Education Department of Government of West Bengal. Those Area libraries are still running in some areas but some Feeder libraries does not existed now and some become Rural library later. After the establishment of Government Central Library, Kalimpong in 1961 these Area libraries and Feeder libraries were benefited by the mobile section of this library. The Sub-divisional library was established in January 1973. Most of the other Rural libraries were established mainly during the period of 1971-80 and recognized as Government Sponsored Library. Now there are total 23 Rural libraries, 4 Area libraries, 1 Town library, 1 Sub-divisional library and 1 Government Central library in the Kalimpong district.

### **3. Literature Review**

Many studies have been carried out earlier regarding the status and functioning of public libraries across the countries irrespective of geographical structures. Sengar, (1970), Samantaray, & Rath, (1978), Chandel, (1982), Naga, & Binwal, (1991), Adhikari, (1991), Roy, & Binwal, (1991), Barman (1994), Shafi, & Reyaz, (1997), Asundi, & Heitzman, (1999), Buragohain, (1999) etc. conducted the studies of public library system and services in different states of India. Kaula, (2004) discussed the present status of Public Libraries in Andhra Pradesh with the help of new communication technologies. Aabo, (2005) discuss the

role and value of public libraries in the digital age identifying the need to strengthen the public libraries' democratic role in the information society by furthering social inclusiveness and citizenship. Bandopadhyay, (2008) conducted a detail study of all the government and government sponsored public libraries across the state of West Bengal. The study depicted the present status of public libraries and calls for the revival of public library services to cope with the changing demand of users. Parvthamma, (2009) has carried a survey of the use of information resources and services in the public libraries of Bidar District, Karnataka State. Deswal, (2010) assessed the status of public libraries in Haryana. Obinyan & Oluwatoying, (2011) conducted a survey study on the use of information resources and services in community public libraries in Nigeria with particular reference to Edo State. Velmurugan, (2012) examines the performance of public library sources and services of Savakis branch library in Virudhunagar district.

#### **4. Objective of the study**

The primary objective of the present study is to assess the present status and functioning of Govt. and Government Sponsored Public Libraries in the Kalimpong District of West Bengal in terms of their establishments, membership patterns, physical facilities, staff strength, their collections, organizations, services and computer facilities etc..

#### **5. Methodology**

A descriptive survey method of research has been adopted especially self-made structured questionnaire and interview schedules in order to assess the present status and functioning of Govt. and Government sponsored Public Libraries in the Kalimpong district. A total of 30 structured questionnaires were distributed among the Public Libraries across the hilly areas and all the questionnaires were duly obtained with a response rate of 100%. Efforts were also made to physically visit the libraries to collect the required information.

#### **6. Results and Discussion**

To reveal the real situation, the Libraries are categorised separately as Central Library (CL), Sub-Divisional Library (SDL), Town Library (TL), Area Library (AL) and Rural Library (RL). Some of the findings of the study are discussed below;

##### **6.1. Physical facilities of the Library.**

The maximum numbers of the libraries have their own building. Only one rural library name Jaldhaka Hydel Project Rural Library is housed in a parent body's house. It is also reported that 2 (6.66%) are running in rented house. 24(80%) libraries have their own pucca building and 4(13.33%) libraries have the kuchha house. 23(76.66%) libraries have no electricity connection, so the availability of generator and other emergency light facility in case of power cut is found nil. Only 3(10%) of the libraries have telephone connection. 2(6.66%) of all the libraries have drinking water facility. 25(83.33%) of the libraries have no urinal facility. It is found that 6 (20%) mostly rural libraries are operating in a single room and rest 24(80%) libraries have more than one room. 84% of the total libraries have no separate hall facility for organising any programme, meetings etc.

## 6.2. Staff Position in the Library

The public libraries of Kalimpong are serving with shortage of staffs. It is found that altogether there is more than 15 posts of librarian, 23 junior library attendant and other posts is lying vacant in the libraries. Libraries are running with casual staffs appointed by regional authority since last many years. Regarding qualification of librarian/in-charge, one librarian with M.Lib.I.Sc. degree, three with B.Lib.I.Sc. degree and ten librarians with C.Lib.I.Sc degree are running the library across the region.

## 6.3. Table-2: Membership statements of the libraries.

No of members	CL		SDL		TL		AL		RL	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1-500	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	100%	23	100%
501-1000	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	-	-	-	-
1001-1500	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1500>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
No response	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 2 shows that 4(100%) Area libraries and 23(100%) Rural libraries have total membership between 1–500 members. Followed by 1(100%) Town library, 1(100%) Central library and 1(100%) Sub-divisional library have membership between 501–1000. It is also observed that 33% of all members are female members.



Table 4 shows that 4(100%) Area libraries and 20(86.95%) Rural libraries issue 1-10 numbers of books per day from the library. While 3(13.05%) Rural libraries, 1(100%) Town library, and 1(100%) Central library issues 11-20 numbers of books for home reading from their library. 1(100%) Sub-divisional library issues 21-30 numbers of books per day from the library. Hence majority of libraries responded that they issue 1-10 numbers of books per day from the library. It also found that 80% of the total libraries surveyed issue 2 books at a time to their readers for the duration of two weeks.

**6.6. Table-5: Classification of the documents**

Whether Books are classified	CL		SDL		TL		AL		RL	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yes	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	1	25%	5	21.74%
No	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	50%	14	60.87%
No Response	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	25%	4	17.39%

The above table shows that in only 5(21.74%) Rural libraries, in 1(25%) Area library, in 1(100%) Town library, in 1(100%) Sub-divisional library, and in 1(100%) Central library the books are classified. Books are not classified in 70% of all the libraries surveyed.

**6.7. Table-6: Maintaining Catalogue in the library**

Catalogue followed	CL		SDL		TL		AL		RL	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yes	1	100%	1	100%	-	-	-	-	-	-
No	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	75%	19	82.61%
No Response	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	25%	4	17.39%

Total 6 shows that only 1(100%) Central library and 1(100%) Sub-divisional library mentioned that they maintain catalogue in their library. But majority of Area and Rural libraries surveyed do not maintain any type of catalogue in their library.



**6.8. Table-7: Arrangement of books on the shelves.**

Arrangement of the Books	CL		SDL		TL		AL		RL	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Call No.	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	1	25%	4	17.39%
Accession No.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	8.69%
Author	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Title	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Broad Subject	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	75%	9	39.13%
Other (Serial No. 1,2,3)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	13.05%
No. Arrangement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	13.05%
No Response	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	8.69%

In the above table it is observed that 1(100%) Central library, 1(100%) Sub-divisional library, 1(100%) Town library, 1(25%) Area library and 4(17.39%) Rural libraries responded that they arrange books on shelves by call number. 2(8.69%) Rural libraries arrange books on the shelves by accession number. Maximum libraries 3(75%) Area libraries and 9(39.13%) Rural libraries arrange books on the shelves on broad subject. 3(13.05%) Rural libraries responded that they arranged books on shelves by serial number like 1,2,3..... and another 3(13.05%) Rural libraries responded that they do not follow any type of arrangement to shelve books in their libraries.

**6.91 Table-8: Various services provided by the library.**

Services Provided by the Library	CL		SDL		TL		AL		RL	
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
Lending	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	4	100%	23	100%
Reading	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	4	100%	23	100%
Children's	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	4	100%	8	34.78%
Neo-Literates	-	-	1	100%	-	-	2	50%	5	21.73%

Text Book	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	4	100%	13	56.52%
Career Guidance	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	4	100%	6	26.08%
Reference	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%	4	100%	23	100%
Com. Info.	-	-	1	100%	1	100%	4	100%	5	21.73%
Xerox	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Inter Lib. Loan	-	-	1	100%	-	-	-	-	2	8.69%
Bibliography	1	100%	1	100%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mobile to home	-	-	1	100%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mobile to libraries	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

(Multiple choice question)

The above table shows that the 1(100%) Sub-divisional library provides almost all the services except Xerox and mobile to libraries services. 1(100%) Central library provides lending, reading, children's, text book, career guidance, reference and bibliography service. 1(100%) Town libraries provide services like lending, reading, text book, career guidance and reference services and community information services to its users. All 4(100%) Area libraries surveyed provide lending, reading, reference, children's, text book, careers guidance, and community information services and in addition 2(50%) Area libraries provide neo-literates service to its users. All the Rural libraries 23(100%) surveyed provides lending of book, reading and reference services. 8(34.78%) Rural libraries provides children's services, 5(21.73%) provides neo-literates and community information services, 13(56.52%) provides text book services, 6(26.08%) provides career guidance services, and 2(8.69%) provides inter- library loan services.

**6.92. Table-9: Using computers in the library**

Computer used in the library	CL		SDL		TL		AL		RL	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yes	-	-	1	100%	1	100%	1	25%	4	17.39%

No	1	100%	-	-	-	-	3	75%	19	82.61%
No response	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The above table shows that 1(100%) Sub-divisional Library, 1(100%) Town library, 1(100%) Area library and 4(17.39%) rural libraries are using computer in their library. It is also found that Sub-divisional library, Kalimpong have acquired five computers gifted by Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF). KOHA Open Source Software is using by the libraries which is in its initial stage of operation. So there is hardly found any instance of library automation in the region.

## 7. Recommendations

Major recommendations which emerged out of the study are listed below:

1. The West Bengal Public Libraries Act, 1979 should be immediately amended to incorporate necessary provisions for public library services best suited to the hilly areas.
2. Library authorities at all level should give more attention to initiate a viable developmental plan for effective library services in the region.
3. Basic physical facilities like building location and structure, furniture, electricity, drinking water, urinal, telephone etc. should be properly planned and implemented accordingly.
4. Shortage of staffs should be filled up immediately for proper running of the libraries.
5. The existing grants for purchase of books and other purpose are found insufficient considering the rising cost of books and other materials and increasing demand of services. So the quantum of financial assistance should be increased and released regularly.
6. Proper collection development policy should be formulated and be followed.
7. Appropriate classification and catalogue code should be followed by each and every library to organize their collections.
8. Collection related to the local history, languages, occupations, health, education, government programs and schemes etc. should be emphasized to provide effective community information services to the people.

9. Computerization of libraries should be immediately initiated by the State Government to facilitate smooth functioning of libraries according to changing need of the day.
10. Local library and information network should be established connecting each and every public library for practising sharing of resources. This local network should eventually connect with the immediate district, state and national level network.
11. Training programmes at regular intervals especially hands on training of open source software should be organized to inspire and motivate library personnel to provide effective library services across the region.

## **8. Conclusion**

The Public library service in Kalimpong hills has its own scenario. The development of public libraries in the hilly areas of Kalimpong district has got momentum only after independence and especially after the enactment of West Bengal Public Libraries Act, 1979. Though many years have already gone after the enactment of the Public Library Act, the present status and conditions of the libraries and library staff are not so satisfactory. Due to the geographical and landscape structure most of the public libraries in this area are not properly located. So, that the users find it difficult to visit the library, as well as the concerning library staff are really feeling very uneasy and insecure. It is often found during the libraries survey that there is no coordination and proper guidance and direction in translating the objectives of the Act into reality. The Public library has to function accordingly to fulfil the need of the hilly people. The services of public library have to be redesigned using the development of information and communication technologies to make them more effective and responsive to the actual needs of the community it serve. The public library services in the form of community information services are most essential to achieve the developmental goals, improve the quality of life and preserve and make known the country's cultural heritage. The public library services in this tiny hill station of Kalimpong shouts attention from all corners to make public libraries more popular and to provide its services in an effective and efficient way in this hilly region.

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