

From Stacks to Services: A Study of Public Libraries in Malda District

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Abstract: Public libraries serve as essential institutions for promoting to lifelong learning, literacy and community development. In this research provides an inclusive assessment of the service delivery mechanisms of government sponsor public libraries in Malda District, West Bengal. The research examines key components, including physical infrastructure, collection strength, ICT facilities, staffing patterns, funding sources, automation status, and user services. A survey method served as the primary tool for data collection., covering selected district, sub-divisional, and rural public libraries. The data were collected through field observations, structured questionnaires, and interviews with library professionals. The findings reveal significant disparities in infrastructure development and service provision among urban and rural libraries. While some libraries demonstrate progress in collection development and basic ICT integration, many face challenges such as inadequate funding, shortage of trained staff, limited digital resources, and insufficient user awareness programs. The study highlights the urgent need for modernization, policy intervention, and sustainable financial support to strengthen public library services in the district of Malda, W.B. The research paper points out the with practical recommendations to improve infrastructure, enhance ICT adoption, strengthen human resources, and promote community engagement. These findings are intended to assist policymakers, library administrators, and researchers in formulating strategic plans, that promote sustainable growth of public libraries in this region.

Keywords: ICT Facilities, Library Services, Library Management Public Libraries, Malda District.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Public libraries are recognized as vital community institutions that facilitate access to information, promote literacy, support lifelong learning, and contribute to social inclusion. In India, the public library system operates through a hierarchical structure consisting of State Central Libraries, District Libraries, Sub-Divisional Libraries, and Rural/Village Libraries. These institutions serve as gateways to knowledge, particularly in semi-urban and rural regions where access to educational and informational resources may otherwise be limited (Sin, & Kim, 2008). With the rapid advancement of ICT, public libraries are undergoing significant transformation in terms of infrastructure, service delivery, and user engagement. Modern public libraries are expected to provide not only print-based collections but also digital resources, internet access, automated services, and community oriented programs. However, disparities in funding, staffing, infrastructure development, and technological adoption continue to affect the efficiency and performance of public libraries, especially in developing districts. Malda district, being a geographically diverse and socio-economically mixed region, presents a unique context

for examining the status of public library infrastructure and services. A systematic evaluation of these libraries is essential to understand existing strengths, identify gaps, and suggest policy level improvements (Rahman, 2020). This paper attempts to provide an inclusive assessment of the current infrastructure facilities and service mechanisms of public libraries in the district.

➤ Objectives:

- This study aims to accomplish the following objectives-
- To portrait the status of collection development and resource availability.
 - To evaluate ICT facilities of the library.
 - To identify major problems affecting the functioning of public libraries in the district.
 - To recommend effective strategies for improving library infrastructure and service delivery.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The fundamental objective of public libraries, as articulated by (IFLA, 2001), is to offer services and materials in diverse media that address the needs of the community, while ensuring equal access for everyone (UNESCO, 1994). Libraries are collections and structures, but they exist most of all for the community (Anglada, 2014). (Smith, 2019) in his guest editorial to discuss about the challenges faced by public libraries mentions ten challenges which are noteworthy to this study highlights a range of challenges faced by public libraries, such as increasing public mistrust in government, diminishing trust in reliable information, reduced civic participation, the weakening of the middle class, financial pressures driven by tax resistance and ROI expectations, declining reading habits and attention spans, lack of diversity, limited professional recognition, and the difficulties experienced in library education. According to Surbhi (2011), there have been numerous developments in North East India's public libraries over the past 20 years. The RRRLF plays a significant role in shaping the growth of public libraries including offers resources for funding and infrastructure. The creation of public library legislation offers resources for funding and infrastructure that are beneficial for the growth of public libraries. The present study explores the current status of public libraries in the digital environment, Murugan (2011) observes that the users come to the public library with needs for information to be obtained within the minimum possible time, and the library has to satisfy their information needs. User satisfaction with resources and services, as well as the issues faced by patrons of public libraries, highlight this paper. Dutch and Muddiman (2001) examined the influence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on the development of public libraries in the United Kingdom, focusing on national and local information policies, community networking, and public library policy. In their study, Joy et al. (2015) examined the broader role of public library services in rural communities, emphasizing the crucial responsibilities of federal, state, and local governments in transforming rural life through efficient library services. It highlights essential services such as social, political, and educational support, and recommends increased funding and training for library staff to enhance service delivery.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK

➤ Research Design

The present study adopts descriptive survey research design to investigate the current status of services and infrastructure in public libraries across the malda district.

➤ Population and Sample

The study population includes district-level, sub-divisional, and selected rural public libraries functioning in Malda District. A purposive or stratified sampling technique was used to be adopted to collect the data.

➤ Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected using multiple tools to ensure reliability and validity:

- ✓ Structured questionnaires to librarians and staff.
- ✓ Observation checklist for assessing physical infrastructure and ICT facilities.
- ✓ Interviews with Public Librarian and also library professionals or staff.
- ✓ Analysis of official records, annual reports, and statistical documents.

➤ Data Analysis

The data collected for the research study were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were processed and analyzed using MS-Excel to generate tables, percentages, and graphical representations. Qualitative data were interpreted through descriptive analysis to understand the conditions, challenges, and strategic recommendations of public libraries in the district.

➤ Significance of the Study:

This study is significant as it highlights the role of public libraries in Malda district as essential institutions that support social inclusion, equitable access to information, and lifelong learning opportunities for the community. By examining the contrast between the innovative urban initiatives like "Boibagan" and the severe staffing crisis affecting over forty rural libraries, the research highlights the urgent need for policy intervention to bridge the urban-rural knowledge divide. Furthermore, it documents the library's role in preserving cultural heritage through ancient manuscripts while also assessing its capacity to adapt to the digital age, particularly for marginalized Below Poverty Line populations. The findings serve not only as a baseline for measuring future progress in Malda but also as a replicable model for other districts grappling with similar challenges in revitalizing their public library systems.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data reveals significant gaps between the district's library infrastructure and its operational capacity.

Table 1 Public Library Details in Malda District, W.B.

Sl No	Name of The Public Library	Year of Established	Total No of Books	Total No of Computers	Total No of Registered Users
1	ABHIJAN SANGHA GRANTHAGAR	1975	8185	2	1276
2	AHIL NABIN SANGHA LIBRARY	1975	5733	Nil	458
3	BAMANGOLA GRAMIN GRANTHAGAR	1959	8846	Nil	571
4	BHARATI GRANTHAGAR	1928	5540	Nil	283
5	BHINGOLE NETAJI CLUB AND LIBRARY	1950	3901	Nil	244

6	BIRAMPUR KUSUK SAMITY RURAL LIBRARY	1981	6938	2	547
7	BIRNAGAR UDAYAN CLUB AND LIBRARY	1960	11216	Nil	105
8	BK TARUN SANGHA LIBRARY	1965	6122	Nil	370
9	CHARIANANTAPUR NAWJAWAN SANGHA PATHAGAR	1969	4833	Nil	810
10	ENAYETPUR YOUNG UNION LIBRARY	1937	8059	Nil	435
11	GAYESHBARI YOUNGMAN CLUB AND LIBRARY	1930	9206	Nil	536
12	GAZOLE SADHARAN JNNANAGAR	1961	13965	Nil	664
13	ILAM PIONEER RURAL LIBRARY	1972	2648	Nil	313
14	JALALPUR BIDHAN PATHAGAR	1963	5523	Nil	265
15	JOGDOLLA PALLY SAMITI PATHAGAR	1960	8729	Nil	194
16	KADAMTALA PUBLIC LIBRARY	1959	4930	Nil	310
17	KALYAN SANGHA SADHARON GRAMIN GRANTHAGAR	1984	5345	1	456
18	KANDARAN GRAMIN GRANTHAGAR	1978	5285	Nil	358
19	KENDPUKUR RURAL LIBRARY	1963	5936	Nil	413
20	KENDUA BRATIDAL GRAMIN GRANTHAGAR	1959	6400	1	930
21	KUMAR SIBAPADA MEMORIAL INSTITUTE	1937	5361	Nil	425
22	KUPADAHA JAGARANI SANGHA GRANTHAGAR	1965	5941	Nil	184
23	MAHESHPUR PALLY GRANTHAGAR	1963	5180	Nil	219
24	MOTHABARI MILAN SANGHA RURAL LIBRARY	1968	5402	2	758
25	NABAJIBAN PATHAGAR	1954	5630	Nil	354
26	NALAGOLA GRAMIN GRANTHAGAR	1982	4730	Nil	295
27	NARHATTA CLUB AND LIBRARY	1954	7211	Nil	973
28	NETAJI CLUB AND LIBRARY	1982	4167	Nil	155
29	NHALUKA RURAL LIBRARY	1968	10125	Nil	62
30	PASHCHIM MANGAL BARI GRAMIN UNNOYAN SAMITI LIBRARY	1980	6366	Nil	148
31	PIPLA PALLY SAMITI RURAL LIBRARY	1933	1981	2	142
32	PRAGATI SANGHA RURAL LIBRARY	1956	6768	Nil	1029
33	RAMAPROSAD GRAMIN PATHAGAR	1953	8777	Nil	491
34	RATUA RABINDRA PATHAGAR	1963	6981	2	892
35	SAHAPUR PRAGATI PATHAGAR	1975	6350	2	723
36	SAHID SUBODH SUKHIT PATHAGAR	1959	5578	Nil	423
37	SATTARI RURAL LIBRARY	1970	5078	2	1233
38	SHAKTI SANGHA LIBRARY	1970	7305	1	689
39	SUTI BIDROHI CLUB AND LIBRARY	1975	4772	Nil	614
40	DESHIKOTTAM BIDHUSHEKAR PURA GRANTHAGAR (HARISHCHANDRAPUR TOWN LIBRARY)	1974	21009	2	1810
41	OLD MALDA BANIBHABAN TOWN LIBRARY	1960	15223	2	1013
42	SAMSI BINAPANI TOWN LIBRARY	1968	11549	2	1504
43	SRIJANI TOWN LIBRARY	1947	12120	2	681

In the table 1 total 43 public library is there. The highest total number of Books is 21009.i.e Deshikottam Bidhushekar Pura Granthagar (Harishchandrapur Town Library). The highest total number of registered users is 1810 i.e. Deshikottam Bidhushekar Pura Granthagar

(Harishchandrapur Town Library). Out of the 43 public library 15 public library having a computer facility. The oldest public library is Bharati Granthagar (1928) located at VILL & PO - Bangitola, PS - Mothabari, Malda.

Table 2 Existing Librarian in Public Library at Malda District, W.B

Sl. No	Category	Position	Total Post	Vacant Post
1.	Male	33	105	66
2.	Female	6		
Total		39		

In table 2 shows that total 39 librarians at present working out of 105 public libraries. The study reveal that

40.95% vacancy are fillup, but 66 post are vacant. Out of 39 librarians 33 are male and 6 are female.

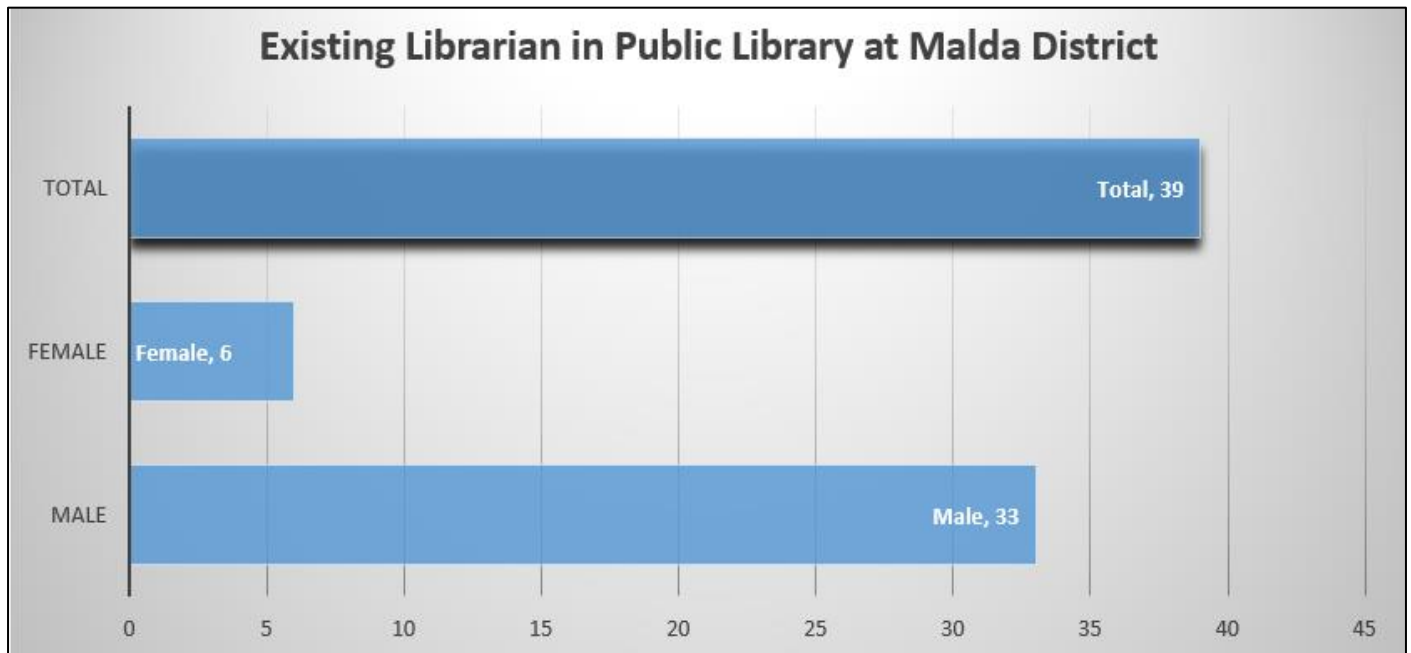


Fig 1 Existing Librarian in Public Library at Malda District, W.B

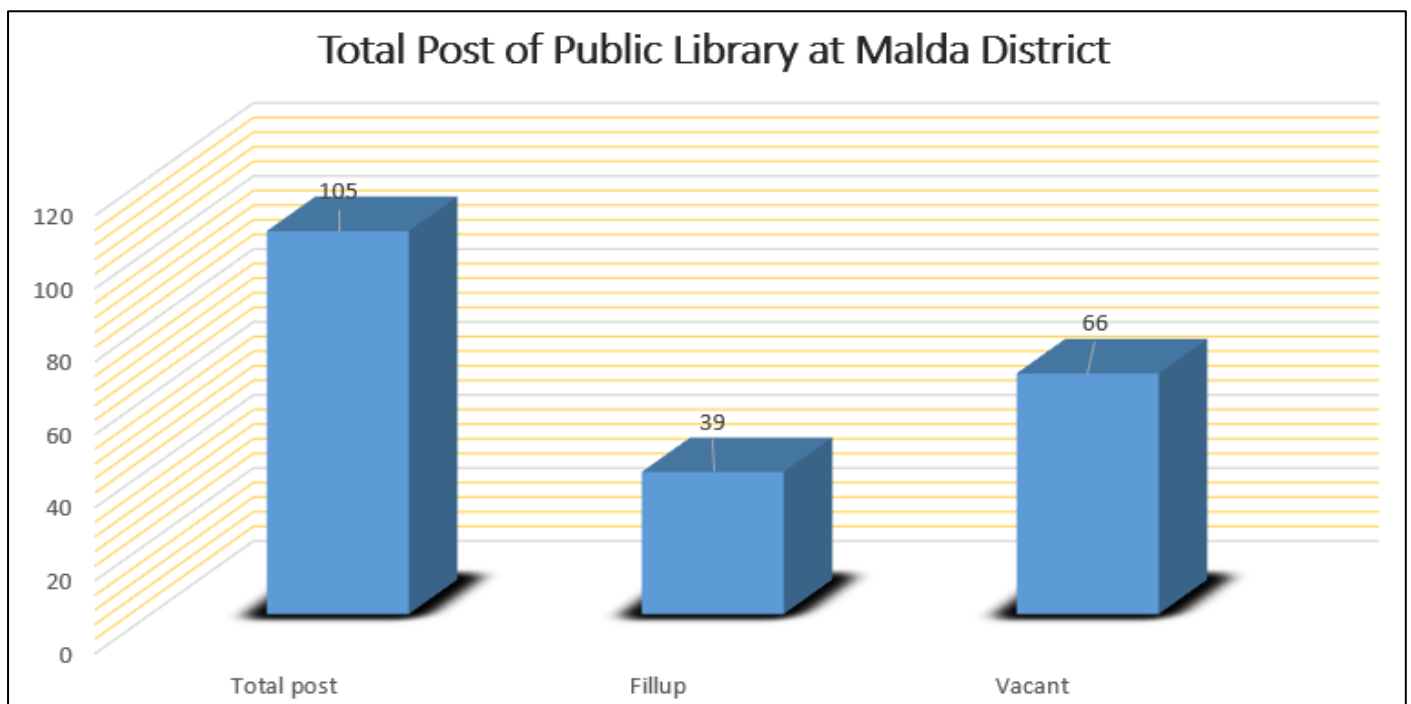


Fig 2 Total Post of Public Library at Malda District, W.B

V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research study is limited only on government recognized public libraries functioning in Malda District, West Bengal. The scope includes district-level, sub-divisional, and selected rural public libraries operating under the state public library system. Private libraries and school/college libraries are excluded. The findings are limited to the period of data collection. Some responses provided by library staff may involve subjective perceptions, which could influence the interpretation of service quality and performance indicators.

VI. MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Based on the specific context of Malda district and the broader challenges facing public libraries in Malda district, W.B. here are the major challenges faced by the public library.

➤ *Critical Shortage of Human Resources:*

Out of 105 sanctioned librarian posts in the district's public libraries, 66 are vacant. This means nearly 60% of positions are unfilled. This shortage has directly forced over 40% libraries to remain closed for extended periods, denying

rural populations access to services. The few available librarians are overburdened, often forced to manage multiple libraries, making it impossible to maintain regular hours or offer quality assistance to patrons.

➤ *Infrastructure and Maintenance Deficits:*

Beyond staffing, the physical infrastructure of many libraries, particularly in rural areas, is often inadequate. Many rural libraries operate in old, dilapidated buildings with poor lighting, inadequate ventilation, and a lack of basic furniture, making them uninviting to users. A lack of clean drinking water, functional toilets, and separate reading spaces is not adequate for using the library.

➤ *Financial Constraints:*

Libraries struggle to update their collections with new books, subscribe to current magazines and journals, or maintain their facilities due to limited financial allocations from the state or local bodies.

➤ *Collection Development and Relevance:*

Many libraries possess books that are old, worn out, or irrelevant to the current curriculum or competitive exam syllabus. Users often report a lack of new arrivals and contemporary titles. There is a constant need to balance collections in Bengali, English, and other local languages, as well as to acquire non-print materials for diverse learning preferences.

➤ *Declining User Engagement:*

The absence of regular events like storytelling sessions for children, book clubs, literacy classes, or career counselling workshops (beyond the initiatives at the District Library) limits their role as dynamic community centres.

VII. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the specific challenges identified at the Malda district public library, here are strategic recommendations tailored for different stakeholders (Government, Local Administration-DLO).

➤ *Human Resource Development:*

The staff crisis is the most paralyzing issue. Without a librarian or a library professional, libraries are the buildings are just empty shells. The recent recruitment of 29 librarians is a positive start, but only 19 are recruited. 10 post are still vacant. The government must prioritize a phased, time-bound recruitment drive to fill the remaining vacancies.

➤ *Infrastructure Modernization:*

Instead of trying to upgrade the library infrastructure, power supply in rural areas, install solar panels on key libraries to ensure fans, lights, and computers work consistently, creating a reliable study environment. Implement the proposed mobile library service immediately. A van can serve 5-6 remote villages per week, rotating book stocks and providing basic library services to areas without physical access.

➤ *Bridging the Digital Divide:*

Integrate public libraries with the government's Common Service Centres (CSC) scheme. This would allow rural library users to access and print online government forms, apply for jobs, and avail e-governance services, making the library a one-stop solution for information. Provide free Wi-Fi in all functioning libraries.

➤ *Financial Sustainability and Resource Mobilization:*

Encourage Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funding from local businesses (e.g., social workers, educational trusts) to adopt a library CSR funds could be used to renovate buildings, buy new books, or fund the mobile library. Create "Friends of the Library" groups in every community in malda district. These groups can organize local book donation drives, fundraising events, and volunteer for maintenance.

➤ *Community-Centric Programming:*

To change the perception of public libraries as "dusty" places, they must become vibrant community anchors. Mandate every functioning library to host at least one community event per week—storytelling for kids (Pathachakra), career counselling for youth, or health awareness camps. Malda has a rich historical heritage (Gour-Pandua). Libraries should curate local history sections, collecting manuscripts, photos, and documents about the region, making them cultural preservation centres.

➤ *Governance and Monitoring:*

Implement a simple mobile app or web dashboard where librarians must mark daily attendance and issue reports. This would help the District Library authority monitor which libraries are actually open in real-time. Allow local library committees (Panchayat level) to have a 50% say in the books purchased for their library, ensuring the collection matches the local community's reading tastes and needs.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The present study provides a comprehensive assessment of the library infrastructure facility and the range of service conditions of public libraries within Malda District, West Bengal. The study reveals that while the public library system continues to serve as an important knowledge and community resource center, its overall development remains uneven and constrained by structural, financial, and technological limitations. District-level libraries demonstrate comparatively better infrastructure, collection strength, and service delivery mechanisms. However, rural and sub-divisional libraries face significant challenges, including inadequate physical facilities, limited ICT infrastructure, a shortage of professional staff, and insufficient financial support. The predominance of manual operations and minimal automation indicates that modernization efforts are still at a preliminary stage. The study further highlights that public libraries in the district primarily provide traditional services such as book lending and reading room access, with limited expansion into digital services, community outreach programs, and information literacy initiatives. In the rapid pace of digital transformation and changing user

expectations, these limitations could undermine the long-term relevance and sustainability of these institutions. To strengthen the public library system in Malda district, a multi-dimensional development strategy is required. This includes enhanced financial allocation, phased implementation of library automation, expansion of ICT facilities, recruitment of professionally qualified library personnel, and promotion of community centered services. Policy-level support and decentralized administrative flexibility may further improve operational efficiency.

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