CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Among the great words pronounced by the people of the world, Book is also a word. Book stores the treasure of knowledge in itself which is essential in human life. In this transitory world the book is also continually pacing ahead along with the change of time. In the past many of our customs, traditions, and conventions were orally transmitted. In course of time the joint family system was broken to disjointed units and our forefathers took the refuge of books. They set down their ideas in papers and preserved them for the coming generations. Their spirit of collection and preservation of books is the beginning of what we call library today. It is the assembly of great writers and thinkers who perpetually flow their worldly wisdom frankly. It is the library that quenches the thirst of our inquisitiveness. There is no bound of knowledge. Library plays an important role in expanding the human knowledge. A studious mind is ever hungry of knowing more and more and the Library satiates it.

For over years libraries have become a most prestigious and precious possessions in our country. The libraries nourish and sustain a society and its culture. As a result, the Public Library an important Social Educational Institution born out of a genuine desire of lifelong self education of the people in our country.

A Public Library is a democratic institution which has to mean and serve the entire population of a community, with equality of access to all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Since its inception the UNESCO paid particular attention to the promotion of public libraries. The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto was first issued in 1949. This was revised in 1972 and 1994. The revised UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (UNESCO, 1994) defines ‘Public Library’ as “a living force of education, culture and information and as essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women; a local gateway of knowledge which provides a basic condition for lifelong learning,
independent decision making and cultural development of individual and social groups.”

William Ewart considered Public Library as that, “library which is funded by the people; supported by the people; and enjoyed by the people; and is established by law and maintained at public expense out of local rates and sometimes by state taxes.”

Information has been an essential ingredient for the progress of civilization and society. Lack of information transfer and effective means of communication is now widely recognized as being a limiting factor in socio-economic development of people. So, Community Information Service (CIS) is an age-old concept which took various forms in practice in different periods in different cultures and communities. However, the concept of CIS is specific and developed in post second world war era. Community Information was seen as necessary to combat deprivation by enabling people to ‘raise their living standards to the level of their rights in the law’. While defining Community Information it has two aspects. One is concerned with the nature of the information provided, that is, information in the community to help people with daily problem solving or in raising the quality of their lives; the other is concerned with the nature of the clientele served, namely those who belong to the lower socio-economic groups or are disadvantaged through an inability to obtain, understand, or act on information that affects their lives. As the situation prevails today it has become imperative for each and every public library to turn their attention to fulfill the information needs of the community through Community Information Service programs.

The area covered in this study is only the hill areas of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Nestled among the rolling mountains with the glistening Mt Kanchanjunga towering over the sky, Darjeeling fondly called “Queen of the Hills” has its own glory as a very beautiful hill station in India having rich biodiversity of international importance. This is the land of the muscatel flavoured Darjeeling Tea revered by connoisseurs across the globe and world heritage Darjeeling Himalayan Railway where the century old miniature steam engine still chugs uphill. Certainly Darjeeling in this post
modern era comprises of six T’s- Tea, Timber, Tourism, Toy Train, Tiger Hill, and Trekker’s Paradise.

India has a long history of public libraries spread over to several centuries of the past. The libraries have always been a vital part of the glorious ancient, medieval society to the present so called knowledge society. Since India became a sovereign country till now only eighteen states have enacted their Public Library Act and others are still uncovered by library legislation.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Public Libraries serve as a catalyst for socio-cultural and educational development by providing access to information and knowledge. Therefore, the public libraries are considered as effective tools to mould the character of the citizens, which has wider impact on societal as well as national development. In the propose research work researcher tries to investigate the present status and functioning of public library and community information services in the Darjeeling hill areas of West Bengal. After having a detailed study and preparation of tabular information, a careful analysis has been undertaken with a view to provide some suggestions for improvement. Despite the difference and uneven distribution of hill structure throughout in India the proposed model based on the outcome of the research work and the recommendations suggested by National Knowledge Commission to revitalize the libraries in the country, is believed to evolve a generalized model best suited to present environment for the development and promotion of public library and community information services especially for the hilly areas in the country.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The development of libraries in Darjeeling 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 the Government of West Bengal. These Area libraries are still running in some areas as rural libraries. But the feeder libraries are not in existence now and some became rural library. The Government of West Bengal has
taken up a project of setting up in phases around 1500 Community Library & Information Centers (CLIC) in such villages where there are no public libraries. In Darjeeling hill area only eight such CLIC centers has been established by the government. But the establishment and functioning of such centers are not upto the level of satisfaction. All these centers are found almost failure to deliver their actual responsibilities. Proper supervision, management and control by the concerned authority are required to ensure the smooth functioning of these CLIC centers. Besides the existing Government agencies, Panchayati Raj Institutions and Public Libraries, there are other Semi-Government/Autonomous agencies, Voluntary Organizations who played a crucial role for providing community information services in Darjeeling hill-divisions spanning many years. Even a few international agencies like Indian Red Cross Society are active in providing health and sanitation related information to the people. Some other existing organizations or research institution those actively providing various helps to the common people are Citrus Dieback Research Station, Kalimpong; Darjeeling Tea Research Center; Darjeeling AIDS Control Center; Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection (FOSEP); Hill Social Welfare Society; Spices Boards; Glen Foundation, Kalimpong etc. Owing to the topographical, demographic, climatic, and other factors, the establishment and functioning of public libraries seem different compared to other plain areas of the state. Though there is no separate framework or any other guideline to identify all those and to make provision for establishing and promoting public library and community information services in the region, even in the West Bengal Public Libraries Act which was enacted in 1979. So, the public libraries and community information services across Darjeeling hilly areas are still to be studied and the issues brought to notice.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The scope of the present study primarily confines to the Public Library and Community Information Services in the hilly areas (three hill subdivisions) of Darjeeling District of West Bengal. However, little effort has been made to gather some facts about present status of public library and community information services in some other hilly areas (other than three
hill subdivisions of Darjeeling district) in India, so that the findings will be helpful to determine future developmental plan.

The present study mainly covers the geographical locations of libraries, their buildings, space and physical facilities, user’s information needs, information resource base development (collection development), services, manpower, finance, governance, membership pattern, automation, technical scenario and the language imbalance. However, the other aspects concerning the community information services through public libraries owing to their geographical landscape and coverage are also included in the present study.

This study includes in its ambit one district library, one central library, two sub-divisional libraries and almost all the town, area and rural public libraries of Darjeeling hill areas. In addition the information needs, opinion and attitudes of the user community and the staff of these public libraries has also been covered in the present study.

The present study also considers the functioning of different Semi-Government/Autonomous Agencies, Research Centers, Non-Government Organizations/Associations, Corporate Agencies and even few international agencies providing community information services to the hill people besides Government Agencies and Public Libraries in the region.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

One of the primary objectives of the present study, among other things, is to investigate the present status and functioning of the public library and community information services in the hilly areas of Darjeeling, West Bengal. This study, however, would aim to meet the following objectives;

1. To ascertain the genesis and growth of public libraries in this hilly region.

2. To find out the present scenario of public library and community information services in terms of their organizations, resources, user’s information needs, manpower, language imbalance,
finance, governance, space and physical facilities, automation, services and such other relevant factors and evaluation of their effectiveness which is vital for formulation of viable developmental plans for public library and community information services in this hilly areas.

3. To identify the role played by various agencies such as State Government, Local Self Government, Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) and other Semi-Government/Autonomous Organizations, Non-Government Organizations/Associations, Voluntary Organizations and even a few international agencies in promotion and development of public library and community information services in the region.

4. To identify the various factors (viz. geographical, organizational, personnel, financial, technological etc.) that ultimately result to existing gap between expected roles and actual performance.

5. To investigate the different kind of information needed by the people and how far they are supported by the community information services through public libraries in the region.

6. To undertake a feasibility study of Hill Area Public Library Networking for effective resource sharing and easy accessibility of required information by user community in the region.

7. To propose a suitable generalized model for public library and community information services especially for the hilly areas in the light of the findings of the Study.

1.6 Hypothesis

Hypothesis becomes the basis for fruitful investigation in every research. For the purpose of present study I have formulated the following hypothesis so as to prevent the possibilities of unnecessary search:
Public Library and Community Information Services in the hilly regions of Darjeeling are in a state of somber due to the poor supervision and allocation of funds by their respective authorities.

The Public Libraries, Government Agencies, Non-Government and Voluntary Organizations providing community information services in the region, owing to their meagre resources and unsound infrastructure, are not in a position to provide almost all modern services to the community.

Owing to the geographical and other factors there is hardly found any co-ordination between the functioning of Government Agencies, Public Libraries, Semi-Government/Autonomous Agencies, Non-Government and Voluntary Organizations regarding community information services in the region.

1.7 Literature Review

Review of literature is a crucial element in any field of research. The primary purpose of literature review is to provide an overview of the significant pieces of relevant literature that have been published on a particular topic. Literature review seeks to provide the background to and justification for the research undertaken. It helps to increase the researcher’s breadth of knowledge of the particular subject area. Though, a very few studies on Public Library and Community Information Services especially in the hilly areas in India have been undertaken and most of these studies seem to have been done only on the whole conventional system and services of public libraries of a particular state or district covering the hilly areas too. Some of these studies that may deserve mention here are;

The study of Public Libraries made by Debasish Pradhan (2008) has attempted to assess the functioning of public library systems in the whole district of Darjeeling of West Bengal. His studied is focused mainly on the issues of marketing of information by public libraries. This study reveals that, due to various factors the public libraries in the region are not at all successful in promoting libraries in serving information to the public. The study also suggests that there is a strong need of application of marketing principles by the public libraries to cater the information needs of the people in the region.
Another study worth mentioning here is carried out by Amit Bandopadhyay (2008) to evaluate the public library services in the different district of west Bengal. The study highlighted the present scenario of public library system and services and made some suggestion for improvement of library services in the state. The study also stressed the need of an integrated network of public libraries to provide effective library services and all round information services to the people in the state.

Biplab Chakraborty and Ashoke Basu (1999) have studied the information seeking behavior of Totos, a small marginal sub-himalayan tribal community of North Bengal. They find that the Totos a primitive tribe in Totopara are socio-economically backward due to their isolate character, illiteracy and ignorance. The study confirms that there is a demand of community information services by this community and also explored the efficiency of the library services to cater the information needs of the sub-hilly tribal community.

Parthasarathi Mukhopadhyay (2006) has attempted to develop an integrated, web-enabled, multilingual open source software solution for public library based community information services in rural part of West Bengal. The study discusses the nature and scope of community information services and identifies categories and sub-categories of community information for organizing community information resources. The study also analyses the thrust areas for community information services and provides a detail methodology that can be utilized by public libraries in the state.

Dinesh Chandra Goswami (1996) in his study of the libraries and librarianship in Uttarkhand observes that the region is different from other areas of plains in respect of topography, demography, culture, economy, education, library facility and quality of library services. He summarises the poor status of all types of library like only district public library and their branch level block libraries, academic libraries and special libraries providing various services to the people. The study also stressed that there is an urgent need of establishment of new libraries and proper maintenance and improvement of existing libraries in the region.

S K Sharma and Vinod Kumar (1992) have expressed that there is an urgent need of a National Library Policy which draw upon the status of
information services in the countries and are at the same level of socio-economic and political development. The study also suggested certain guidelines for consideration at appropriate level of library system and services in Garhwal Himalayan Region.

“Information communication, library and community development” edited by Dr. B Ramesh Babu and Dr. S Gopal Krishnan (2004) is a two vaolume festschrift in honour of Prof. C P Vashishth. The festschrift includes 76 papers on various themes. Some articles are related with the rural development, such as information support for rural development, community information, public libraries as community information centers and their role in rural development, community information sources and library services for rural people, user community and their needs etc.

“Information support for rural development” (2004) edited by Amitava Chatterjee et. al. and published by IASLIC Kolkata is a seminar volume of XXI National Seminar of IASLIC, which relates to various aspects of information and knowledge requirements for rural development. The volume has significant articles on contemporary issues of rural development, community information services through rural libraries etc.

Mumtaz Ali Anwar (1996) has observed that the community information service in public libraries in the Klang Valley of Malaysia is almost non-existence. The study is based on the information seeking behavior of Community Based Organizations (CBO) in the region. The study has recommended a program of action which include making a professional commitment to CIS, setting up of a CIS working group, developing guidelines for setting up CIS, to study information needs and develop a prototype CIS model and designing a staff development program to provide CIS.

Analysis of all these literature reviewed above shows that the public library services wherever it operates has been an integral part of socio-economic development of a nation. Despite considering the various differential factors like geographical, demographic, climatic and other factor, public libraries especially in the hilly areas has played an important role for the development of the hill community as a whole. Some of this literature reviewed suggested policies, guidelines, information & retrieval model and
other measures for the promotion and strengthening of public library and community information services to the people in the hilly region. In Darjeeling district only one study undertaken by Debasish Pradhan has dealt with the marketing of information by the public libraries in the district as a whole. However, the study seems to be not the comprehensive one. The study does not focus on the hilly areas. So, still there is a need of more studies to assess the present status of Public Library and Community Information services especially in the hilly areas of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Therefore an effort has been made in this study to assess the same.

1.8 Research Methodology

Research method is the foundation of any research project carried out for a systematic study of the problem. It provides guidelines and channelizes the available information of the given subject in a structured manner. It provides scientific thought to available resources and relevant data for the research problems. Research findings can be drawn on the basis of a systematic method of research. Thus it is very vital to follow certain methodology to carry out the research problem.

The present research is carried out with the following methods;

1.8.1 Questionnaire Method

Four types of questionnaires are designed to collect data and circulated to the selected respondents as:

1) to collect data and other necessary information relating to the research topic, a structured questionnaire was designed and circulated to the Librarian/in charge of each and every Public Libraries in the region. (*Appendix -3*)

2) to collect data and other information relating to the research topic another questionnaire was designed and circulated to the
selected user of the libraries of different categories within the region to gather valuable information. *(Appendix -4).*

3) to make the study more effective another structured questionnaire was designed and circulated to the selected non-user of the libraries of different categories within the region to collect valuable information. *(Appendix -5).*

4) to collect data and other information relating to the community information activities, one more structured questionnaire was designed and circulated to various non-governmental organisations engage in providing community information services in the region. *(Appendix -6).*

1.8.2 Interview Method

To obtain the best result on the establishment, functioning, services, organization, administration and development of public libraries in the region, Semi Structured Method of Interview was conducted to the selected library users, library personals, non-user, social workers, intellectuals, senior citizens and members associated with various non-governments, voluntary organizations in the hilly areas of Darjeeling District of West Bengal.

1.8.3 Observation Method

The researcher carried out observation method in order to assess the present status of the functioning of the Public Libraries in the region. Photographs, pictures and illustrations have been included to supplement the study.

In addition to the above methodologies, the researcher explored and made use of some documentary/primary sources of information such as annual report of the library, monthly reports, government circulars and statistics, various library records, and reports of various non-government/voluntary organizations to gather valuable information for the purpose.
1.8.4 Data Analysis

Data collected are tabulated and analyzed to give the ground reality of the work with the help of tables, charts when necessary with appropriate interpretation to derive the findings from the study. Problems have been sorted out. Some suggestion for recommendation has been provided for effective developmental plan in future. Based on the findings of the present study and following the recommendations of National Knowledge Commission to revitalize the libraries in the country, a sincere attempt has been made to propose and design a suitable generalized model for public library and community information services for the hilly areas in the country. References has been made according to American Psychological Association style manual 6th Edition.

1.9 Scheme of the Work

The present research problem is analyzed and interpreted in an organized way based on different approaches including findings, suggestions, conclusion and finally a proposed model in the following seven chapters:

Chapter 1 of the present study is an introductory deals with the introduction proper, significance of the present study, statement of the problem undertaken, objectives, scope, hypotheses and methodology adopted, literature reviewed, scheme of the study to clarify the research work.

Chapter 2 of this study provides an insight of Darjeeling district of West Bengal especially the hilly areas of the district. It covers in brief the physical description of the district like position and boundaries, geology, rivers, climate and weather, temperature etc; historical background; demographic profile, cultural background; religion; languages; economy like tea, agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, floriculture etc; flora and fauna; timber; tourism and education to provide various information of the district.

Chapter 3 of the present study is allocated for defining the public library, its aim and objectives, functions, importance; its role in socio-economic
development, cultural development, lifelong learning, promotion of literacy, adult education etc. The chapter deals in brief the historical development of public libraries in India and also in West Bengal as well as various initiatives taken by the government and professional association for the development of public library system in the state. The chapter also illustrate the concept of community, community information services, CIS and public libraries, CIS and government departments / agencies and CIS and non-government / voluntary organizations etc.

Chapter 4 of this study depicts the genesis and growth of public library system and community information services in the hilly areas of Darjeeling district of West Bengal.

Chapter 5 provides an insight into the existing status of Public Libraries in Darjeeling hilly areas in terms of their establishment and sponsorization, buildings, space and physical facilities, collection development, organizations and preservation of documents, management, governance, activities and services, manpower, finance, membership statement, automation, technical scenario, user's information needs, community information services provided by the libraries etc. The chapter also throws light on the library awareness among the user and non-users of the public library across the region.

Chapter 6 of this study consists of the findings of the study; various problems encountered by the libraries, offer suggestions for improvement.

Chapter 7 reflect a concluding view of the whole gamut of the study.

Chapter 8 provides a proposed model for establishing public library and community information services in the hilly areas.

1.91 Conclusion

From the time immemorial, libraries are the reservoir of knowledge. Public library is considered as a social institution devoted to serve the
society in education, information, inspiration and recreation. It has been one of the best means of communication that all the community within a society can have free access to its services. The public library wherever it operates can support a positive societal development by creating an informal, open learning, inspiration and meeting place that encourage the public to personal development and societal commitment. Information is needed by people for survival and development. The existence of society largely depends on information inputs. The public library has to provide, besides other services, community information service (CIS) in order to cater the information need of the society. There is a tremendous growth in its infrastructures and its services to cope with the changing demand of the society. In Darjeeling hilly areas the public libraries with its various services has been an important resource for the development of hill community since long time and on the light of these facts it is quite essential to comprise the study of the present status of public library and community information services to have an authentic insight of this research work.

Figure 1 Study Area (Hilly Areas of Darjeeling District)

* Map not to scale
References


