

RESTRUCTURING THE PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM AND SERVICES IN BIHAR: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Public libraries are important organisations which serve as an intellectual catalyst for overall development of a society by providing access to knowledge and information. Public libraries are established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organisation. The present study aims to explore the public library system and services in Bihar in view of present-day information needs. The main purpose of this study has been to investigate the problems, seek answers and find solutions to revive the condition of public libraries in the State, with the help of a structured questionnaire for data collection. This analytical study is a modest attempt to explore the ways of the development of public libraries under the provisions of Bihar State Public Library Act 2008.

Keywords: public library system, public library services, information needs, public library legislation

INTRODUCTION

A Public library is a multipurpose organisation which serves as an intellectual catalyst for socio-economic growth by providing access to knowledge resources for learning, research and recreation. Since knowledge and information are the key assets for overall development of any society. Not only, socio-economic and scientific growth, but human values like freedom, prosperity and development of mankind also can only be achieved through free and unlimited access to knowledge and information. It can be globally witnessed that the societies which have less access to knowledge are less privileged in comparison to the societies that have fast access. To bridge this gap, libraries especially the public libraries can play a vital role by providing free access to the knowledge resources to the entire community, regardless of age, sex, race, colour, creed, nationality, language, or social status. They serve as social equalisers by welcoming everybody, enabling people to strive to be free from the chains of illiteracy, poverty, and discrimination. They are one of the most important welfare organizations, which can serve the educational, social, economic, cultural and intellectual needs of a society. Even in today's information age, the role of libraries is still very important. With the advent of internet and digital technology, there is abundance of information on internet, which often poses difficulty in finding authentic and accurate information. In such a situation, libraries prove to be the best platform to access quality information. To keep pace with these new challenges, libraries are undergoing transformation and are now offering several electronic resources along with traditional information resources.

However, all these transformation and objectives cannot be achieved only through individual efforts. They need planning in the form of laws, rules, and principles to ensure its smooth

functionality. Such laws are framed with a statutory provision by the Government to provide a clear mandate for the establishment and maintenance of Public Library system at different levels having a nation-wide provision for 'free and equal services to all members of the community. In fact, a public library is an organisation established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organisation.

In India, federal political system has been adopted, where the division of power between the Union Government and the State Governments has been clearly defined under the Constitution. The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution provides three lists, i.e. the Union List, the State List and the Concurrent List. As 'Libraries' come under the State List, State Governments are liable to make policies for establishing and maintaining public libraries. During Colonial period, the public libraries were set up in various ways, through philanthropy, voluntary initiative, as legacy of independence struggle, through governmental efforts, or as part of educational/cultural activity. After 1947, when the State governments took this responsibility upon themselves, the growth pattern of libraries started varying from one state to another. Some states were more enlightened in developing public library system, while most of the governments preferred to support whatever existed at that point of time. Since India is a country known for its diversity in all aspects of life like, culture, language, education, and infrastructure. This diversity can be seen in the organizational patterns of public libraries also. Out of 28 states and 8 Union Territories, till now only 19 States have adopted statutory system, under which the affairs of the public libraries are looked after under the law enacted by the state. Such laws provide definite provisions for regular funding for proper maintenance of public libraries in the state. However, there is no uniformity among these legislations because every state has adopted varying approach, mostly to accommodate the systems that were already in vogue. The states without library acts have their own administrative measures to develop libraries.

In Bihar also, 'The Bihar State Public Library and Information Centre Act, 2008' was enacted in 2008 and amended in 2012 with the aim to establish, regulate, control and supervision of systematic development of libraries in the state. But still, the public libraries in Bihar are in a state of despair. Bihar is lagging far behind other states of India in the network of public libraries. It took almost 60 years to enact library legislation in Bihar, but the problem remains same.

The present study has been done to analyze the public library system and services in view of present-day information needs. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the problems, seek answers and find solutions to revive the condition of public libraries in the State. This analytical study is a modest attempt to explore the ways of the development of public libraries under the provisions of Bihar State Public Library Act 2008.

STATUS OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN BIHAR

Bihar is the state known for its rich history in education, as some of the ancient renowned universities of the world were situated in Nalanda, Vikramshila and Odantapuri. However, at present Bihar is lagging far behind in education. According to 2011 Census, The State's literacy rate was the lowest of all states. While education and libraries have always been intertwined, it is said that "there is direct correlation between the minimal expenditure on libraries and low literacy rate. In Kerala, where literacy rate is more than 95%, over 3% of education budget is spent on libraries. In Bihar, the ratio of the education budget that goes into the libraries is only 0.01 %" (Mishra 2012).

In British era, few good libraries like the Gaya Public Library, Hitaishi Public Library,

Patna, the famous library of national importance Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, Sinha Library Patna, etc. were set-up for the use of public. During the first five-year plan, funds were sanctioned for the development of public library system comprising of state central library, district library, and block library. The old Sinha Library was declared as **State Central Library** and 12 existing privately managed libraries in districts were taken over as district central library. Some new libraries were established in other districts.

As per old records there were 1 state central library, 6 divisional libraries, 19 District central libraries, 13 sub-divisional libraries, 328 block libraries and over 4000 village libraries in Bihar. But unbelievably, only few libraries are left now.

According to a recent report submitted by the MLA Sudama Prasad, the then Bihar Vidhan Sabha Library Committee (2022), there were 540 public libraries in the State in 1950s but only 51 are functional now. The Directorate of Libraries and Information Centre, Patna has classified 50 public libraries which are aided by the State Government.

Table 1: Classified Public Libraries in Bihar

Sl. No.	Category	No.
1.	State Central Library	01
2.	Government Library	02
3.	Divisional Library	06
4.	District Central Library	19
5.	Sub-divisional Library	10
6.	Special Library	12

(Source: Directorate, Libraries and Information Centre, Patna)

In Bihar, there are 9 divisions, 101 sub-divisions and 38 districts, out of which 6 divisions have Divisional Public Libraries; only 10 sub-divisions have Sub divisional Libraries, and only 19 districts have District Central Libraries.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shrinath Sahai (1973) provides a careful study of the development of public libraries as an important social institution in India from ancient to modern period. R. S. P. Singh (1988) highlights the status of public libraries on different levels of state, divisional, district, sub-divisional, block and village and their administrative structure. K. Ramakrishna Rao (1961) states “that library development presupposes a suitable social and literary setting which unfortunately, India cannot provide today.”

M. Esperanza (1991), based on her case study of eight libraries of Patna, finds that during the pre-independence period, the influence of libraries was greatly felt in state, but today, a closure

look into the functions of these libraries presents a poor picture due to lack of cooperation from the state government and its meagre financial aid for the development of the public libraries.

Z. A. Wani (2006) gives an insight into the historical growth of public library system in India from ancient to present times. U.M. Thakur (2006) described the growth and development of libraries in Bihar since 1914 and during the Five-Year Plans. P.S.G. Kumar (2011) provides an overview of the history of development of libraries and library legislation in Bihar and Jharkhand.

Kaushal Kishor Chaudhary (2014) discusses the present condition of public libraries in Bihar. Mayank Yuvraj and Ambrish Kumar Maurya (2014) explore the status of public libraries of Varanasi and found that the financial deficit and lack of computers, infrastructure and staff have stagnated the development of public libraries. These libraries continue to stand the same way as they stood 60 years before.

Syed Faizan Raza & Ali Fraz Rezvi (2023) throw light to various libraries of Medieval Bihar which are now lost. According to the report submitted by the MLA Sudama Prasad, the-then Bihar Vidhan Sabha Library Committee (2022), there were 540 public libraries in the State in 1950s but now only 51 are functional.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To unearth the current status of public libraries in the State.
2. To understand the role and importance of public libraries in today's information age.
3. To understand the administrative framework of public libraries in Bihar.
4. To find out the problems that hinders the proper development of public libraries in State.
5. To come up with some important suggestions to improve and strengthens the public library system in Bihar.

METHODOLOGY

The present study started with a literature search to explore information relevant to the research and was followed by data collection from libraries by interviews and questionnaires. Since the public libraries of Bihar are geographically spread out on a large area, it was not possible to evaluate each library. Therefore, convenience sampling method was applied and selected public libraries were taken to study. 1 State Public Library, 1 District Public Library, 1 Sub divisional Library, and 3 Special Libraries, all the six located in Patna, were chosen as sample area. The Librarians were interviewed and total 300 questionnaires were distributed to the users who were present at the library. However, only 220 valid responses were considered for study.

Table 2 enlists the public libraries selected for study. Radhika Sinha Institute and Sachchidananda Sinha Library, Sinha Library Road, Patna was founded in 1924 by the Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha, the interim president of the Constituent Assembly. In 1955, it was declared as the State Library. However, it was run by the library trust till last year. Now the State Government has taken possession of this library. Other four libraries, except Maulana Mazharul Haque Library, have been from pre-independence period. Gopal Narayan Library has a rare collection of manuscripts and art pieces of Mughal Period. Maulana Mazharul Haque Library too, has a historical importance. The other five libraries receive grants from the government.

Table 2: List of Public Libraries Selected for Study

S. No.	Name of Public Library	Establishment Year	Category	Authority
1	Radhika Sinha Institute and Sachchidanand Sinha Library, Sinha Library Road, Patna	1924	State Central Library	State Government
2	Bihar Hitaishi District Central Library, Patna City	1882	District Central Library	Local Body
3	Tribhuvan Sub-divisional Library, Bikram (Danapur)	1940	Sub-divisional Library	Local Body
4	Gopal Narayan Public Library, Bharatpura (Patna)	1912	Special Library	Society/N.G.O./Trust
5	Maulana Mazharul Haque Library, Kurzi, (Patna)	1975	Special Library	Society/N.G.O./Trust
6	Gait Public Library, Gardanibagh (Patna)	1916	Special Library	Society/N.G.O./Trust

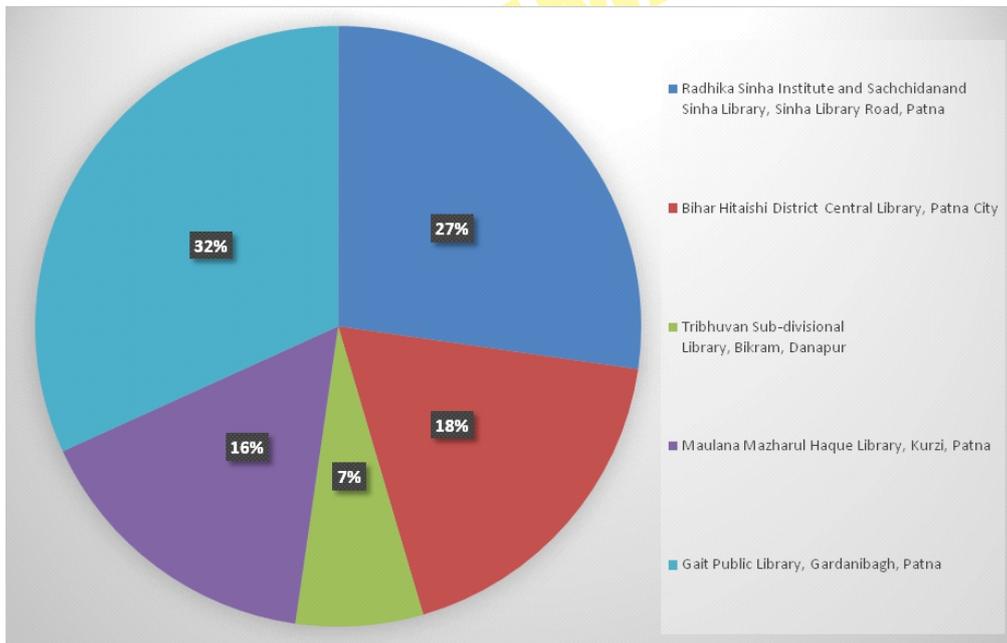


Fig. 1: Percentage of Responses

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Based on the interviews with librarians and 220 valid responses collected from the users, the results have been analyzed and discussed in two parts. The first part is a general description of libraries, while the second is based on the responses of the users.

A. General Description of Libraries

Table no. 3 gives a description of the area possessed by the libraries and their ownership. This information reveals that all these libraries are situated in their own land. The Radhika Sinha Institute and Sachchidananda Sinha Library, designated as the State Public Library, are located at a very prominent place of Patna in large premises of 99316.8 Sq. ft. Likewise, other libraries also have sufficient land to develop their infrastructure. Although, the librarian/ library staff of Gopal Narayan Public Library, Bharatpura (Patna) and Maulana Mazharul Haque Library, Kurzi, (Patna) couldn't give the exact information about the area of library, it was observed that they also have adequate space.

However, it was also found that all the six libraries have infrastructural issues. Due to crunch of funds and lack of support from the State Government/ Library Management, they are run in old buildings with so many difficulties.

Table 3: Area of Library

Sl.No	Name of Public Library	Area (Sq.Ft)	Possession
1	Sinha Library	99316.8	Own
2	Hitaishi Library	20415	Own
3	Tribhuvan Library	16344	Own
4	Gopal Narayan Library	NA	Own
5	M. M. Haque Library	NA	Own
6	Gait Public Library	130680	Own

Table 4 presents an overview about the collection of the selected libraries, methods of organisation like cataloguing, classification, access system and the human resources to maintain the libraries. 3 out of 6 libraries are using standard classification scheme (DDC) for organising their collection. The rest three are still using accession number for book arrangement. Two libraries maintain their catalogue by AACR2, while one library, i.e. M.M. Haque Library is more advanced by using library software 'E-Granthalaya' for cataloguing. The Sinha Library has a huge collection of 2 lakh books which are maintained as per standard classification and cataloguing scheme. Four libraries have adopted close access system for their resources, while one has open access system, and another has applied mixed system for access to the documents.

Regarding the manpower of the libraries, it can be observed that only Sinha Library has the adequate strength of staff. Other libraries are facing shortage of trained staff.

Table 4: Library Collection and Organisation

S.No.	Name of Public Library	Collection	Manpower	Classification	Cataloguing	Access
1	Sinha Library	2,00,000	27	DDC	AACR2	Closed
2	Bihar Hitaishi Library	55,000	4	DDC	AACR2	Closed
3	Tribhuvan Library	5000	3	By Accession Number	By Accession Register	Closed
4	Gopal Narayan Library	25,000	5	By Accession Number	By Accession Register	Mixed
5	M.M. Haque Library	42,335	3	DDC	E-Granthalay	Open
6	Gait Public Library	50,000	3	By Accession Number	By Accession Register	Closed

To maintain any institution, adequate funds are the main requirement. However, these days public libraries are struggling to survive due to the crisis of sufficient funding. Table 5 shows the main sources of funding to public libraries. Since the Bihar Government has not levied any library cess, public libraries are given aid from the State Library Fund. But these aids are not sufficient to meet the actual expenses. The four out of six libraries mainly depend upon the self-generated funds, like from membership fees, or by lending premises for social activities. The three special libraries are run by their society or trusts. No NGOs or Corporates has provided any support to the public libraries in recent years. Only Hitaishi Public Library has got some support under CSR policy.

Table 5: Sources of Funding

Source of Funding	Sinha Library	Hitaishi Library	Tribhuvan Library	Gopal Narayan Library	M.M. Haque Library	Gait Public Library
Government Aided	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Endowments/ Donations	No	No	No	No	No	No
Under CSR	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Self-Generated	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Society/ Trust	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

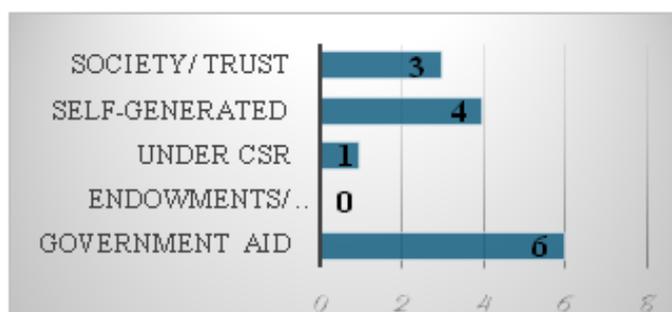


Fig. 2: Sources of Funding

Table 6 gives the details of services and facilities provided by public libraries. It shows that 3 out of 6 libraries have no catalogue for users. 4 libraries provide reprography service to the users, while reference service is provided by only three libraries. No library has provision of inter library loan, which shows absence of library networking. 5 libraries provide displays of new arrivals except Gopal Narayan Library, whereas circulation service is available in all the six libraries. These days' computers and internet services are an essential requirement, however only the State Library and the Hitaishi District Central Library have the facility for users, but they also do not have any e-resources. 2 out of 6 provide some extension services. It was observed that though all the six have reading rooms for users, they are not sufficient in respect of daily visitors. Only 3 libraries have conference halls.

Table 6: Library Services and Facilities

Name of Public Library	Catalogue	Reprography	Reference Service	ILL	New Arrival	Circulation	Computers/Internet	E-Resources	Extension Services	Reading Room	Conference/Seminar Hall
Sinha Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Hitaishi Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tribhuvan Library	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Gopal Narayan Library	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
M. M. Haque Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Gait Public Library	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No

Different reports say that the public libraries in Bihar are in miserable condition. The researcher has tried to find out the main problems behind such a situation. Table 7 reveals that the financial problem is the main factor faced by all the libraries. The government has classified 50 libraries, which are given financial aid. However, in the survey, it was found that this aid is so minimal to maintain the libraries. Library staff is also underpaid. Though no library has a space problem, they cannot develop their infrastructure without proper financial support. In the absence of proper recruitment policy and service conditions, majority of libraries are facing a shortage of staff. Technological development of libraries is also hindered due to less funding. 4 libraries expressed their agony about administrative ignorance.

Table 7: Problems in Library Development

Problems	Sinha Library	Hitaishi Library	Tribhuvan Library	Gopal Narayan Library	M.M. Haque Library	Gait Public Library
Financial Problems	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Space Problems	No	No	No	No	No	No
Manpower Problems	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Technological Problems	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Infrastructural Problems	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Environmental Problems	No	No	No	No	No	No
Administrative Problems	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

B. Information Based on the Users' Responses

Based on the responses of the library users, it is revealed that the age of 73% users is between 16 to 25 years. 18% were between 26 to 35 years, while the number of users above 35 was very less. Table 8 depicts age-wise description of the users. Table 9 shows that 65% of the users were male and 35% were female.

Table 8: Age-wise description of the Respondents

Age Group	Number	Percentage
16-25 years	160	73
26-35 years	40	18
36-45 years	5	2
46-55 years	2	0.9
56-65 years	7	3
66- Above	6	3
Total	220	100

Table 9: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	143	65
Female	77	35
Total	220	100

Table 10 gives details about the status of users. It has been depicted by Fig. 3 which shows that most of the users, i.e. 93%, were students. Only 7% in total were either professionals and researchers or senior citizens.

Table 10: Status of the Users

Status	Number	Percentage
Students	204	93
Professionals	3	1
Senior Citizens	6	3
Activists	2	1
Researchers	5	2
Total	220	100

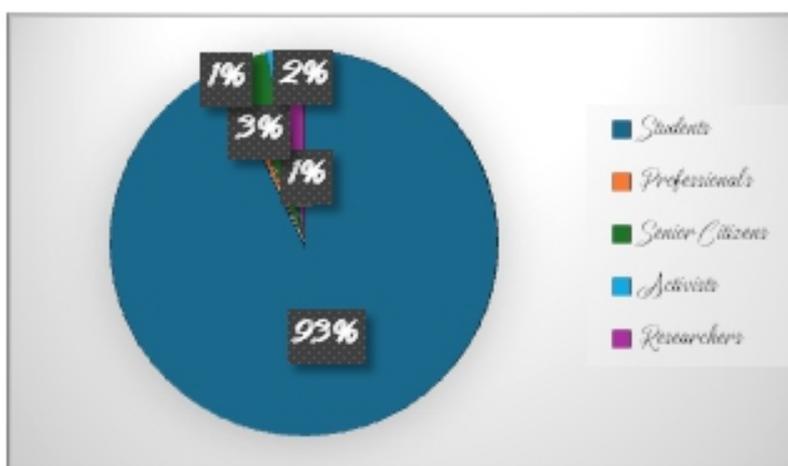


Fig. 3: Status of Users

In Table 11, the frequency of visits to the libraries has been shown. Fig. 4 reveals that 70% of the users come almost every day to study in the library. 14% visit the library twice a week, while 11% come once a week. The percentage of monthly visitors was 2%, while rarely visitors were 3%.

Table 11: Frequency of Visit

Frequency	Number	Percentage
Every day	154	70
Once a week	25	11
Twice a week	30	14
Monthly	5	2
Rarely	6	3
Total	220	100

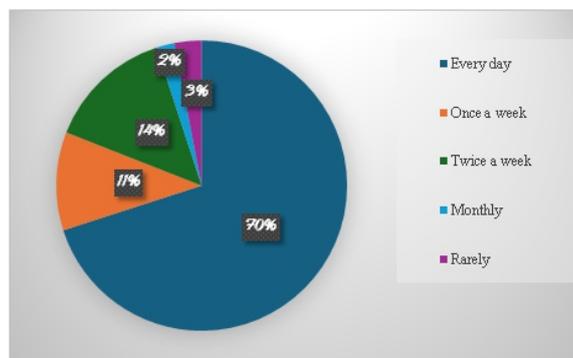


Fig. 4: Frequency of Visit

The data showing purposes of visiting library reveals the information needs of the users as well as the usage of various resources of the library. Table 12 presents the users' perception of using library resources. As shown in Fig. 5, books and Study materials for competitive examinations are heavily used. 73% of users visit the library for academic preparations, 68% comes to borrow books as well, while 50% visit library to avail computer/ internet services also. Almost 93% of users accepted that they use the library for enhancement of their knowledge.

Table 12: Purpose of Using Library

Purpose of using library	Number	Percentage
Newspaper/Magazine reading	50	23
Use of Textbook	180	82
Borrowing of Books	150	68
Use of Reference Books	70	32
Story and Novel reading	80	36
Competitive Examination Preparation	200	91
Enhancement of knowledge	204	93
Academic preparations	160	73
Use of Computer/ Internet	110	50

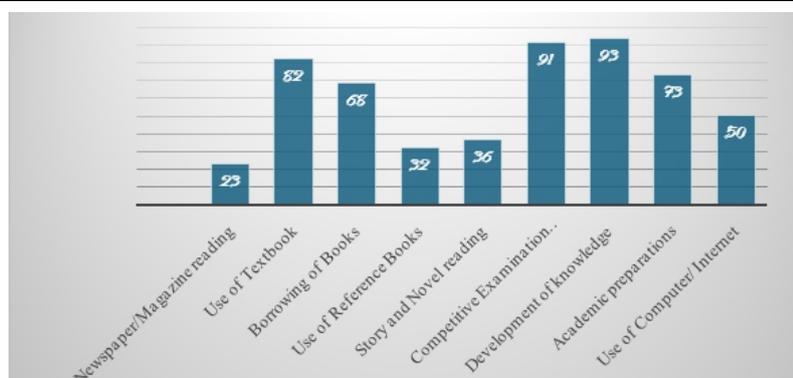


Fig. 5: Purpose of Using Libraries in Percentage

Table 13 reveals the user's satisfaction with the services as well as facilities provided by the libraries. While majority of users were satisfied with the location of the library, about 57% users showed their dissatisfaction with the reading rooms & seating capacity of the libraries. Only 45% users were happy with the library collection, while 57% users feel satisfied with book lending services. 60% users found the reference service either good or satisfactory, but 51% were not happy with the reprography service. On the availability of computer and internet, 55% users were unsatisfied. Also, regarding basic facilities like cleanliness, drinking water or washrooms, 56% library users showed their dissatisfaction.

Table 13: Satisfaction Level of Users

Facilities & Services	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor
Location of the Library	62	64	76	12	6
	28%	29%	35%	5%	3%
Reading Room	--	45	50	95	30
	--	20%	23%	43%	14%
Seating Capacity	--	33	59	92	36
	--	15%	27%	42%	16%
Library Collection	20	24	56	72	48
	9%	11%	25%	33%	22%
Book Lending	--	70	56	65	29
	--	32%	25%	30%	13%
Reference Service	12	55	65	54	34
	5%	25%	30%	25%	15%
Reprography Service	24	38	46	54	58
	11%	17%	21%	25%	26%
Computers/ Internet	4	46	48	102	20
	2%	21%	22%	46%	9%
Basic Facilities, like, Cleanliness, Drinking Water, Washroom etc.	--	20	76	88	36
	--	9%	35%	40%	16%

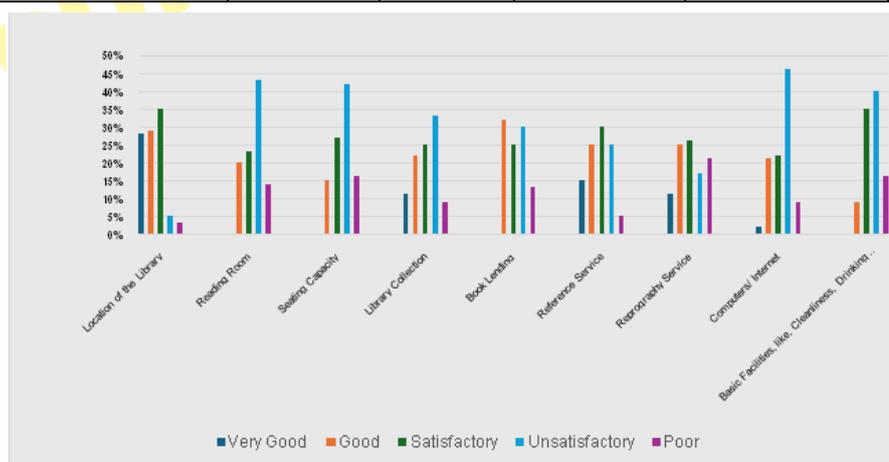


Fig. 6: Satisfaction Level of Users with Library Facilities and Services

Table 14 presents the users' opinion on the factors affecting the overall development of public libraries. It can be seen in Fig. 7 that majority of users think that financial crisis, lack of government support, poor technological infrastructure, shortage of efficient staff are the main reasons behind the poor status of public libraries. While asking about people's apathy towards public libraries, 38% of users realize that somehow it also affects the public libraries growth. On the other hand, 43% don't think the same.

Table 14: Factors Affecting the Overall Development of Public Libraries

Factors	Yes	No	Can't Say
Lack of Funds	187	11	22
Lack of Government Support	143	24	53
Lack of efficient Staff	117	77	26
Lack of Technological Infrastructure	176	35	9
People's Apathy toward Public Libraries	84	96	40

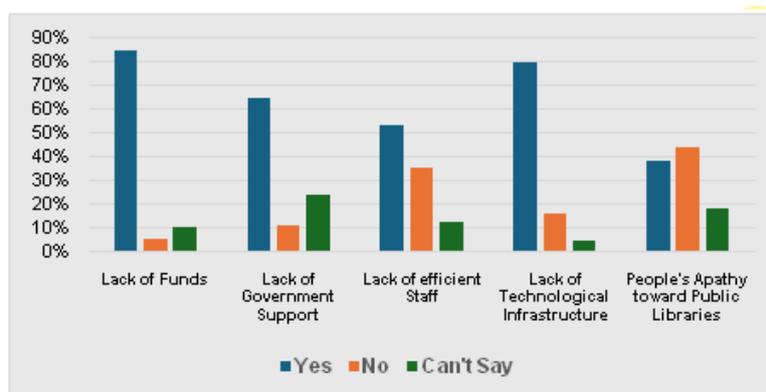


Fig. 7: Factors Affecting Overall Development of Public Libraries

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study presents the dismal condition of public libraries in Bihar. Most of the public libraries are very old and were established in the colonial India with the donation of books, funds and land too by the philanthropists. Despite having sufficient space as well as a good collection, libraries lack basic infrastructure, like a state-of-the-art building, sufficient seating arrangements, etc. The old collection of these libraries needs to be preserved. Even after the enactment of library legislation in the state, libraries are not getting sufficient funds for development. Due to financial uncertainty, efficient library professionals do not like to work in public libraries. Consequently, libraries are poorly managed and organized. In this technological era, poor ICT infrastructure of public libraries is a big reason behind digital divide in the states like Bihar. Users study in public libraries with the purpose of shaping their career. Unfortunately, libraries fail to cater to their needs, which indirectly affect the State's development also.

The State Government should take some concrete steps to strengthen the public library system in Bihar. The budgetary allocation for the libraries must be enough to develop modern

facilities as well as to preserve the historical legacy. Policies and plans should be made and implemented properly to promote ICT infrastructure in all libraries, so that a network of libraries can be developed from the State level to village level. Proper recruitment policy and service conditions must be developed for public libraries, too. Various agencies like RRRLF and Companies should be contacted for grants or for CSR funding. Recently, the State Government has shown interest in developing the panchayat level libraries run by 'Jeevika Didis'. Renovation of Sinha Library's building has also been proposed. However, there are many more steps to go to revive the lives of libraries of historical importance.

CONCLUSION

Public libraries are the essential welfare organizations, which fulfill the educational, social, economic, cultural and intellectual needs of a society. Despite having a glorious past, Bihar is losing its legacy of public libraries. The present study reveals the dismal condition of public library system in the state. Inadequate funding and the apathy of State Government have been the main reason behind this downtrend. It has been seventeen years of enacting public library legislation in the State, but no concrete step has been taken for public library development. Now-a-days, public library system requires a complete transformation to lessen the digital divide, which needs not only a huge investment but also a firm administrative set up.

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