

# Digital Reference Service for Senior Citizen Patrons in Public Libraries of Siliguri Sub-division, West Bengal: Prospects and Possibilities

Aleena Rai

Student, IGNOU

E-Mail: aleenabhu@gmail.com

Sourav Majumder

Library Assistant, Inspiria Knowledge Campus, Siliguri, Darjeeling, WB

E-Mail: souravfeb.mazumder24@gmail.com

and

Tapan Barui

Assistant Professor, DLIS, University of North Bengal

E-Mail: tapanbarui13@gmail.com

*Digital Reference Service is a well known library service rendered by modern library and information centre. Public libraries are meant for public service for a particular area. Public library system can be modernized by digital reference service. Senior citizens are very valuable users any kind of libraries. Their needs are vital for their survivals. The present study is an attempt to explore the digital reference service for senior citizen of public libraries in Siliguri sub-division, West Bengal. The study is ended with some recommendations for library professionals and policy makers to glorify the public library system through digital reference service.*

**Keywords:** Digital Reference Service, Senior Citizen, Public library, Senior Citizens Law

## 1. Introduction:

The public library is a social institution which plays different roles on information needs of the users. It also plays a key role in the life of an individual or community. It is emphasized to meet the educational, recreational and information and other needs of human being in daily life. There is a core relationship between society and public libraries that public libraries are the gateways to knowledge, provides life-long learning, independent decision-making, information literacy and cultural development of the social group. Public libraries and librarians also provide free access of information to entire society and all can easily access the information which is for self education available in the library. The elder people are special users of a library they need some special care from the librarians' side. Public libraries can serve its senior citizen patrons better providing information through digital reference service.

### 1.1 Digital Reference Service:

Digital reference or Virtual reference or E-reference service is becoming popular among the users group in public libraries. Digital reference service is a kind of reference service implied electronically in real time.

According to Wikipedia " **Digital reference** (or **virtual reference**) is a service by which a library reference service is conducted online, and the reference transaction is a computer-mediated communication". Patrons use computers and other advanced networking technologies like smart phones or tabs to communicate with reference librarians or staff, without being physically present. Digital reference service can be done by chat, videoconferencing, e-mail or instant messaging etc. In recent times, plenty of libraries are acquiring question-answer process through websites, blogs and links etc.; it is better known as "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ).

### 1.1.1 Different types of digital reference service:

Reference sources are available in both print and digital form. Some of the sources were only available in print form but now users can reach them through e-way. Digital Reference Service nothing but the advancement of traditional reference services through information communication technology. As days passed, new technologies are dominating the whole world and the impact of it reflects on library services. There are mainly two types of DRS, one is asynchronous another is synchronous digital reference service. The popular DRS are E-mail reference service, website or blog, Ask Service, Chat based Reference Service, Digital Robots, Cooperative digital reference service, Web based reference services etc.

### 1.2 Public Library Scenario in Siliguri sub-division, WB.:

Siliguri subdivision is an important part of Darjeeling district for its strategic location and it is a gateway of four countries and seven states. Public libraries of the Siliguri-subdivision form a sub-network of three tiers West Bengal Public Library System. There are 28 Govt. Sponsored Public Libraries which includes one Additional District Library; 4 Town/Sub-Divisional/Upgraded Town libraries; 23 Rural/Primary Unit/Area Library.

Apart from this there is a Govt. library named '*Matisathi*'. Collection of Additional District Library, Sub-Divisional Library and Rural library are approximately 40000, 25000 and 5000 respectively. Users of the libraries vary from 25 to 5 per days depending on the nature of the libraries. Among the 28 libraries 2 libraries were approved as model library.

### 1.3 Senior Citizen and Their Crisis:

The old aged population in India is quite increasing and old aged persons facing number of problems. Aging is a biological process and nobody can escape from it. The number of old age homes is also increasing and most of the parents are now deciding to live in old age homes rather than living with their children. Such issues like, as lack of care, ignorance, economic support are being emasculated. In our society we assign different views on aging. As we believe senior citizens are the knowledge house but in real situation still it is darkening. But situation has been radically changed; old persons are becoming burden to their children. There are few major problems faced by the senior citizens; Physiological, Psychological, Social, Emotional and Financial etc.

1. Old age is a period of physical decline. Old aged persons get number of troubles with their health. Lack of nutrition, health check up, environmental conditions, weather conditions are the main reasons for their physical spill.
2. Psychological issue is one of the biggest problems faced the senior citizens. Mental disorder is the general thing that happens to senior citizens. Simple dementia and psychosis with cerebral arteriosclerosis are the mental disorder factors.
3. Emotional problem is like psychological issue. Generation gap, ignorance from the children and loss of spouse are the key factors of emotional problems faced by the senior citizens.
4. Social problems affect the life of old aged

people. Old persons start losing social roles and they get separated from others. They are isolated by the health issues and become lonely.

5. Financial support is the other key factor which affect very much. Those who retired from their jobs or services are usually inadequate to meet the current economic situation. The hardest thing when children live separately, the old aged persons get more unhappiness and start having depression which leads them to slow death.

#### **1.4 Laws, Govt. Policies for Senior Citizens:**

Ageing is a natural process in human life. It brings number of problems and challenges which are caused by the changes in their body, mind, thought process. To resolve the constraints, there are number of laws, acts and policies have been made in constitution of India. Article 41 of Directive Principles of State Policy has particular relevance to Old Age Social Security. On the other hand, The National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) was announced in January 1999 to support and ensure financial, food security, health care, shelter and other needs of older persons. Some of the key policies are given below.

##### **1.4.1 Nodal Union Ministry Responsible for the Senior Citizens: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment:**

It includes National Policy on Older Persons, The Implementation Strategy, Inter-Ministerial Committee, Concessions and facilities, National Council for Senior Citizens etc.

##### **1.4.2 Legal Rights:**

In the Constitution of India, it is also mentioned what kind of legal rights can be propounded. Legal Rights for old person consists Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 which means that old persons can't be neglected by their sons or daughters. Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 gives a statutory recognition to the well established normal

obligation of a Hindu child to maintain his aged parents. Another act is Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007. As per the records, 21 states have been notified to privilege this act.

##### **1.4.3 Personal Law:**

There are Muslim Law, Christian and Parsi Law for the old persons. This law implies children have a duty to maintain their aged parents.

##### **1.4.4 Privileges and Benefits:**

- Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme is based on below poverty level.
- The Unorganized Worker's Social Security Act, 2008 provides unorganized workers on matters relating to life and disability cover, health, old age protection.
- Post Retirement Benefits for Employees of Central Government provides insurance schemes, General Provident Fund and Incentives, Deposit Linked Insurance Revised Scheme etc.
- National Pension System (NPS) is a voluntary, defined contribution retirement savings scheme.
- Insurance Schemes compile Health and Pension, Varishtha Mediciclaim for Senior Citizens, Group Medical Insurance Scheme, LIC Jeevan Akshay, Aviva New Pension Elite etc.
- Reverse Mortgage is basically done by giving loans various banks.
- Health Security issues are the vital sides of old aged persons. 'Health Services to Central Government Employees' provides comprehensive health care facilities for the Central Govt. Employees and pensioners.
- Transportation: Concessions and other facilities are also availed by different states.
- Old Age Homes in India provides homes for free of cost.

### 1.4.5 Miscellaneous schemes and facilities

- Department of Telecommunications has made special provisions for senior citizens who apply for a new telephone connection.
- 'Sanskrit Pandits above the age of 55 years', 'Learning Opportunities and Second Careers' are the schemes also available for the senior citizens.

## 2 Methodology

The present study has been conducted on the elder population living in Siliguri sub-division under Darjeeling district, West Bengal. A non-probability sample of 150 older people was taken through snowball sampling method from household survey. Data was collected from different communities after taking the consent of the study participant. The researchers made a fix selection criterion that participant should be aged 60 and above. Descriptive research method involves in collecting data. Interview schedule method was used to collect the data. A structure interview schedule was employed for this purpose. Several visits were taken to collect the data. The researchers took face to face interviews from respondents. Besides, the quantity research measures of data collection, on-site observation were also the part of the study.

## 3. Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To assess the social and health problems among the elderly people across different socio-economic groups
2. To identify the felt needs of the elder people with specific reference to their age
3. To understand the means of communications of the senior citizen
4. To identify the prospects of digital reference services for the betterment of senior citizen

## 4. Scope of the Study

The present study is confined with Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district, West Bengal. People over the age 60 years are included in the study. All

the 28 libraries in Siliguri sub-division have been surveyed for the study.

## 5. Data presentation and Interpretation

**Table 1: Data regarding Gender of the respondents**

Sex	No.	%
Male	107	72
Female	43	28
Total	150	100%

Table 1 shows that the present study consists 150 samples, there are 72% male and 28% female senior citizen respondents.

**Table 2: Data regarding type of home where the respondents live**

Type of home	No.	%
Independent House	82	55
Rented house	47	31
Apartment	21	14
Gated Society	0	-
Others	0	-
Total	150	100%

In the above table 2, the number shows that 55% of respondents live in their own house.

**Table 3: Data regarding Family set up of the respondents**

Living with	No.	%
No one	0	-
My spouse	51	34
My son and/or daughter	75	50
Extended family of son/daughter	24	16
Total	150	100%

The above table shows that the senior citizen lives with their children mostly.

**Table 4: Data regarding children's company**

Living with	No.	%
With me	96	64
Outside India	6	4
Different city	5	3.33
Same city but different locality	24	16
Same Locality	19	12.66
Total	150	100%

The table shows that most of the senior citizen lives with their children. The children look after their parents.

**Table 5: Data regarding companionship and company of likeminded people**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	21	14
Somewhat	75	50
Highly	54	36
Total	150	100%

From the Table no 5, it is clear that 50% respondents think that for their peace of mind and happiness, likeminded people has a great role.

**Table 6: Data regarding Opportunities for social interactions and events**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	3	2
Somewhat	84	56
Highly	63	42
Total	150	100%

Table 6 shows that respondents have the opportunities to social interaction moderately.

**Table 7: Data regarding Opportunities for religious/spiritual activities**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	-	-
Somewhat	54	36
Highly	96	64
Total	150	100%

Table 7 shows that respondents have the opportunities religious/spiritual activities highly.

**Table 8: Data regarding local travel**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	55	37
Somewhat	62	41
Highly	33	22
Total	150	100%

Table 8 shows that respondents have the opportunities to local travel moderately.

**Table 9: Data regarding Security at home**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	-	
Somewhat	111	74
Highly	39	26
Total	150	100%

Table 9 shows that respondents have security problem moderately.

**Table 10: Data regarding Medical support**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	32	21
Somewhat	96	64
Highly	22	15
Total	150	100%

Table 10 shows that respondents need medical support moderately.

**Table 11: Data regarding Emergency assistance when needed**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	23	15
Somewhat	58	39
Highly	69	46
Total	150	100%

Table 11 shows that respondents need medical emergency assistance highly.

**Table 12: Data regarding Reliable home maintenance & repair services**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	30	20
Somewhat	81	54
Highly	39	26
Total	150	100%

Table 12 shows that respondents can rely on home maintenance and repair fellows moderately.

**Table 13: Data regarding outside tasks**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	25	17
Somewhat	112	74
Highly	13	9
Total	150	100%

Table 13 shows that respondents can rely on fellows for outside task moderately.

**Table 14: Data regarding dependable person to escort / accompany on visits**

Type	No.	%
Not at all	31	21
Somewhat	83	55
Highly	36	24
Total	150	100%

Table 14 shows that respondents can rely on fellows to escort / accompany on visits moderately.

**Table 15: Data regarding communication media used for close family not staying in the same house**

Communication media	No.	%
Mobile	143	95
Laptop/Computer	-	
Landline	7	5
Tablet	-	
Total	150	100%

Table 15 shows that respondents use mobile phone for close family not staying in the same house.

**Table 16: Data regarding type of mobile phone used**

Type of mobile cell phone	No.	%
iPhone	4	3
Android	45	30
Windows	-	-
Not a smart phone	101	67
Total	150	100%

Table 16 shows that 67% respondents use ordinary mobile phone.

**Table 17: Data regarding favourite apps on Smartphone**

Favourite App	No.	%
Dont use smartphone	101	67
Rarely use app	23	16
Email	7	4
Whatsapp	19	13
Total	150	100%

Table 17 shows that 67% respondents use ordinary mobile phone but 30% use Smartphone they have rarely favourite apps.

**Table 18: Data regarding phone call expectations**

Frequency	No.	%
Once a week	18	12
Once a day	69	46
Any number of times	57	38
Once a month	6	4
Total	150	100%

Table 18 shows that 46% respondents expect phone calls from their near and dear at least once a day.

**Table 19: Data regarding library use**

Response	No.	%
Yes	31	21
No	119	79
Total	150	100%

Table 19 shows that 79% respondents do not use library.

**Table 20: Data regarding type of documents prefer**

Response	No.	%
Print	135	90
Non-print	15	10
Total	150	100%

Table 20 shows that 90% respondents prefer print documents.

## 6. Recommendation

On the basis of the study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Acquire current data about the older population and incorporate it into planning and budgeting.
2. Ensure that the special needs and interests of older people in your community are reflected in the library's collections, programs, and services.
3. Make the library's physical facilities safe, comfortable and inviting for older people.
4. Make the library a focal point for seniors' information through digital reference services.
5. Target the older population in library

- programming.
6. Reach out to older adults who are unable to get to the library.
  7. Train the library's staff to serve older adults with politeness and respect.
  8. Library awareness programmes should be reached among the senior citizens.

## 7. Conclusion

The senior citizens of Siliguri sub-division are spending their lives quite happily. Most of them have their own house and they live with their children. They prefer likeminded people as usual and religious or spiritual lives. Most of the people have the opportunities to interact with other people for social gatherings. They can easily travel locally. They have no security problem dwelling home. They can trust their workers who usually come to repairing and maintenance tasks. They expect assistance for medical emergency. Most of them use ordinary mobile phone for communication. Smartphone phobia is found among the senior citizens of Siliguri sub-division. Lack of library awareness is prominent among the senior citizen but some people are voracious reader of printed books and other documents. The lives of senior citizens can be improved through library awareness as well as digital reference service. Librarians and policy maker may think about it.

## References

- Bhattacharya, U. & Roy, A. (2013). Digital reference service for the people with special needs: What, why and how?. *IFLA WLIC 2013*. Retrieved from <http://library.ifla.org/130/1/152-bhattacharya-en.pdf>
- Chandwani, A. (2006). An overview of Digital Reference Services. Retrieved from [http://eprints.rclis.org/14295/1/DIGITAL\\_REFERENCE\\_SERVICES.pdf](http://eprints.rclis.org/14295/1/DIGITAL_REFERENCE_SERVICES.pdf)
- Mane Sachin B. (2015) .Senior Citizens: Problems and Welfare. *Research Front*. Retrieved from <http://www.researchfront.in/13%20Special%20Issue%204/5.pdf>
- Policy Research and Development Department (2016). *Senior Citizens Guide*. Retrieved from <https://www.helpageindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/senior-citizens-guide-2016.pdf>