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Rural Public-Library Proximity and Tribal Information Needs in Rajasthan: A Literature-Based Review and Documentary Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines access to library and information services among tribal and rural communities in Rajasthan, focusing on public-library availability, tribal information needs, and documentary evidence gaps. A literature-based review and documentary analysis approach was adopted using scholarly publications, government documents, Census records, library legislation, and administrative data. Mission Antyodaya 2022–23 data were analysed descriptively to assess public-library availability across 46,227 villages in Rajasthan. The findings indicate that 34,579 villages (74.80%) fell within the combined distance categories of 5–10 km and over 10 km from the nearest public library. Existing research on tribal farm women in Rajasthan also highlights the importance of agricultural and livelihood-related information. However, the available administrative data do not separately identify Scheduled Area villages, tribal-majority villages, or library access by Scheduled Tribe status. Consequently, tribal-specific access rates and comparisons between tribal and non-tribal communities could not be established. The study combines statewide rural library-proximity data with tribal-focused literature and policy documentation to identify evidence gaps and highlight priorities for geographically accessible, digitally inclusive, and community-responsive library services in Rajasthan.

Keywords: Public libraries; Tribal communities; Rural communities; Information access; Rajasthan; Mission Antyodaya; Documentary analysis

1. Introduction

Library and information services contribute to education, lifelong learning, social inclusion and community development. Libraries can help the tribal and rural communities obtain education and information on agriculture, employment, government schemes, and livelihood options. But access is dependent on where people live, availability of resources, digital facilities and the relevance of the information to the needs of the community. The issues are considered in the context of Rajasthan. The total number of villages in the notified Scheduled Areas of Rajasthan were 5,697 in 2018, in which the number of Scheduled Tribes was 70.43% of the total population (as per the Census 2011) in the villages (Lok Bhavan, Rajasthan, n.d.). These numbers highlight the need to comprehend the issue of information access in tribal areas. It looks at the literature and literature reviews that are relevant to the specific community needs. In their study of 120 tribal farm women of Pali district, Meena and Sharma (2012) found that there were constraint to access the advanced information and pointed out farming related information needs. While the study didn't directly examine public-library use, it shows that livelihood-related information is significant. Likewise, Sharma's (2007) PhD thesis offers a reference on the rural and tribal library and education in the State of Rajasthan. The legislative framework of the public library development in Rajasthan is given in the Rajasthan Public Libraries Act, 2006 and the Rajasthan Public Libraries Rules, 2012 but services are not actually available nor effective just because of the existence of these rules. Yet, there is an evidence gap in the relationship between tribal information needs and availability of public libraries in Rajasthan. The available literature is scattered, with library development issues, educational opportunities, and information related to livelihood separately considered, and there is no consistent evidence of the proximity of the villages to the libraries and of the relationship between the prevalence of STs and the location of libraries in the Scheduled Areas. Moreover, administrative information about the library service does not provide any information on whether it is sufficiently staffed, has a good IT offer, is culturally relevant, or meets local needs. For this purpose, this study uses the data available at the village level under the Mission Antyodaya for 2022–23 along with relevant literature and official documents to understand the proximity of public libraries, the information needs of tribal population and restrictions of the available evidence in Rajasthan. It doesn't calculate tribal-specific access percentages; it determines what the evidence tells us, and what additional data is needed to effectively plan for the library in response to community needs.

2. Aim and objectives

The aim is to assess what existing literature, policy documents, and available secondary indicators reveal about access to library and information services for tribal and rural communities in Rajasthan.

1. To review Rajasthan-focused and relevant comparative literature on public-library development and information needs among tribal and rural communities.
2. To analyse statewide village-level data on public-library availability and distance from libraries.
3. To examine the policy context and identify documentary evidence gaps concerning library services in tribal areas.

4. To recommend priorities for accessible, inclusive, and community-responsive library services and future research.

3. Research methodology

This study employs a literature-based review and documentary analysis to examine public-library availability and information needs among tribal and rural communities in Rajasthan. Secondary sources include scholarly publications, government documents, Census records, library legislation, and administrative data. Literature searches were conducted from 1 October 2026 to 9 October 2026 using Google Scholar, IndianJournals, INFLIBNET IndCat, and relevant official government websites. Search terms included "public libraries" AND "Rajasthan," "rural library access," "tribal information needs" AND India, and "tribal library services." Sources were selected according to their relevance to library development, geographical accessibility, community information needs, and the policy framework. Mission Antyodaya 2022–23 village-level data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with percentages calculated against 46,227 surveyed villages. The findings were compared with Rajasthan-focused literature and comparative studies. As the dataset does not separately identify Scheduled Area villages or library access by Scheduled Tribe status, tribal-specific access rates and comparisons between tribal and non-tribal communities could not be established.

4. Review of existing literature and policy

4.1 Rajasthan-focused research

Sharma's (2007) doctoral thesis is very close to the present topic, wherein the focus is on the role of libraries in the educational upliftment of the rural tribal population, particularly in the tribal areas of Rajasthan. The year, university and researcher are confirmed by the catalogue record, but a catalogue entry is not sufficient to establish the specific findings from the thesis. Therefore, this thesis is not considered a source of accurate empirical findings, but rather a bibliographic pointer. Kumar and Gupta (2020) have given a state level narration on public library system in Rajasthan along with some government initiatives and problems involved in the development of public libraries. The growth of public libraries has been more noticeable in large urban centres and their article points out the need for further development in Rajasthan. This offers a suitable policy and institutional setting for the current paper. But it is not possible to set the exact condition in each tribal settlement or district just from a state-level overview.

4.2 Tribal Information Needs and Access to Relevant Information

Understanding library access among tribal communities requires attention to the kinds of information people need, as well as the geographical availability of information institutions. Meena and Sharma (2012) studied the information-input patterns and information needs of 120 tribal farm women in six villages in Pali district, Rajasthan. Their findings highlighted limited access to advanced agricultural information and the importance of information concerning farming activities, including pest and disease management. Radio was also identified as a regular information source for a considerable proportion of the participants. These findings demonstrate that

tribal information needs may include practical livelihood-related information in addition to formal educational materials.

This study is relevant to library planning because public libraries and community information centres may help connect users with reliable agricultural, educational, health, employment, and government-service information. However, the findings of Meena and Sharma (2012) should not be interpreted as evidence that public libraries were absent or ineffective in the study villages, because their research examined information needs and information sources rather than the geographical distribution or performance of public libraries.

The evidence reviewed above highlights the importance of examining both the availability of information services and their relevance to community needs. However, information-needs studies alone cannot establish whether public libraries are geographically accessible or adequately equipped to respond to those needs. This distinction makes it necessary to consider library infrastructure, service provision, and administrative evidence alongside research on information requirements.

4.3 Comparative Evidence from Rural and Tribal Library Studies

Studies out of the state of Rajasthan offer further insights into the provision of rural libraries and access to information for tribal communities. The study is useful in identifying theme and possible approach to the planning of the library but the conclusions of these studies cannot be directly applied in the context of Rajasthan. Manjula and Jayarama Naik (2022) studied the collection capacity and usage of the rural public libraries in Bangalore Rural district, Karnataka. This is relevant because it is not only the physical presence of a library that's important, but the availability and use of suitable resources as well. But nothing can be inferred from Karnataka to create the collection conditions and usage pattern of libraries in Rajasthan. Lal and Tiwari (2022) studied digital information literacy among tribal people of the rural area of Kanker district, Chhattisgarh. They rely on their research for a comparative perspective of the role of digital information skills in the context of information access. In this context, it shows a meaningful aspect that can be studied in the future but not identifies the level of digital literacy of the tribal communities in Rajasthan. Naik and Dhanyasree (2025) conducted a study on access to and utilization of health-information resources in tribal population of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. They were interested in the sources of information and how to access it, reflecting the importance of analysing information pathways. However, access to health information and the distance to public libraries are two separate issues and the study should not be considered evidence of the availability of public libraries in Rajasthan. As a group, these comparative studies expand the conversation on rural library resources, digital information literacy, and community information needs. The results of their studies should be examined within the context of the geographic area, the population and the study's purpose. One of the key gaps for Rajasthan is the absence of any comparable evidence that could be linked to the proximity of public libraries in villages and Scheduled Tribe population or Scheduled Area. This study tries to fill that void by considering the indicators of proximity between the library and the state-wide and literature and policy documents from the state of Rajasthan. But this comparative study can't prove the rates of library use in Rajasthan among the tribes. There is a need for further

work to relate the known information on the location of libraries and their services to the officially notified Scheduled Areas and the needs of its population.

4.4 Legal and institutional framework

The Rajasthan Public Libraries Act, 2006 aims to establish a legal framework for the promotion and development of public libraries in the state and also provides for a State Library Council (Government of Rajasthan, 2006). The Rajasthan Public Libraries Rules 2012 have been issued to implement the rules (Government of Rajasthan, 2012) and include provisions regarding recognition of libraries. The instruments are significant because they provide a formal framework for development in public libraries. However, laws and rules are not service outcomes—there is no proof of equity of geographic coverage, adequate staffing, accessible buildings, current collections, or effective digital services simply by the presence of a law or rule.

4.5 Secondary data and what they can show

Mission Antyodaya 2022-23 has a village level table which documents the availability of public libraries and distance bands. This is helpful as it takes the discussion beyond the broad concept of rural disadvantage and provides a numeric measure of proximity. It is still a secondary administrative dataset, however. Its indicators do not provide information about opening hours, staffing, the condition of buildings, the relevance of the collections, the accessibility of buildings for people with disabilities, the availability of languages, Internet speed or user satisfaction. The dimensions are in need of more evidence.

5. Results and quantitative analysis

According to Mission Antyodaya 2022-23 report, the survey has been completed in 46,227 villages of Rajasthan. Of them, 3446 villages (7.45%) were cited for the public-library availability within the village. The counts by distance from the nearest public library for the remainder are reported as follows: These figures are shown in percentages in Table 1 in relation to the 46,227 villages that were surveyed (Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, 2023).

Table: 1

Village-Level Public-Library Availability and Distance Categories in Rajasthan, Mission Antyodaya 2022–23

Recorded category	Villages	Percentage	Interpretation
Public library available in village	3,446	7.45%	Reported availability within the village
Nearest library under 1 km	659	1.43%	Short-distance category
Nearest library 1–2 km	1,392	3.01%	Short-to-moderate distance
Nearest library 2–5 km	6,151	13.31%	May require a dedicated trip

Nearest library 5–10 km	11,540	24.96%	Potentially difficult for frequent access
Nearest library over 10 km	23,039	49.84%	Largest distance category
Total surveyed villages	46,227	100.00%	Mission Antyodaya 2022–23

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, Mission Antyodaya 2022–23.

5.1 Main finding: proximity is a substantial concern

The cumulative results indicate that 34,579 of the 46,227 villages surveyed were in the 5-10 kilometer's and over 10 kilometer's ranges respectively accounting for 74.80 per cent of the total. The pattern also shows that proximity is a significant factor in the planning of public libraries in the region of Rajasthan. The figures should, however, be regarded as indications of distance to be claimed, not as individual measures of exclusion or use of the library. Exclusion is not necessarily distance. There are other circumstances that might influence where some residents go, how they get to a library in school or college, how they access digital resources, or how they are able to get materials to them. On the other hand, even a library in close proximity could be inaccessible if it is not open long enough, the collection it carries is not suitable, no one is employed, the paths are not safe, the facilities are not accessible or the library does not contain material in the reader's native language. The figures actually indicate a potential access issue rather than indicative of the quality of access.

5.2. Library and Information Services in Tribal Areas of Rajasthan

Geographical availability does not guarantee information services are adapted to the local information needs of tribal communities, so their needs must be considered in the wider context of public-library planning in Rajasthan. The Rajasthan Lok Bhavan website lists 5697 villages in the notified scheduled areas of the state and the population of Scheduled Tribes are 70.43% of the population in the Census 2011 in the scheduled areas (Lok Bhavan, Rajasthan, n.d.). This establishes an official geographic and demographic lens through which to look at equitable information access as an issue for focus in the Scheduled Areas. Also, there is an emphasis on livelihood-related information based on the available literature. Meena and Sharma (2012) found that the tribal farm women covered in their study in Pali district were not able to get advance information about agricultural activities and they needed information on various farming activities. This evidence indicates that for library planning, there should be a focus on not only school-level reading materials, examination resources, health information, digital support, and information on public welfare programmes but also agricultural and livelihood information. They are possible service priorities based on the information needs documented and should not be seen as a description of existing library collections or services. There is also another research lead that has been provided by Sharma (2007) in his doctoral thesis on the role of libraries in the upliftment of education in rural areas with special reference to tribal areas that is exclusive to Rajasthan. The catalogue record accessed does not, however, provide details of the thesis's findings, so the scope of the evidence it contains about the library facilities,

use or lack of use of facilities, or service gap needs to be verified by consulting the full text. The statewide data should be used to put local planning initiatives in rural libraries in perspective, but is not meant to make a determination of the extent of library access within the specific context of the tribal community. For a tribal assessment, details of village specific areas of Scheduled Areas, availability of libraries in their respective villages, and the services available to their members should be provided. As of yet, there is a lack of detailed documentation on the correlation between the public-library accessibility and tribal information needs in Rajasthan. A number of gaps in evidence about access to libraries in tribal areas of Rajasthan were identified during the documentary analysis. Official data on Scheduled Areas and village level proximity of libraries to various villages does not correlate the location of the library with Scheduled Areas or population of the Scheduled Tribes. Moreover, the information available on staffing, collections, local language resources, reach and digital facilities is still inconclusive for the purposes of evaluating the quality and inclusiveness of library provision. The gaps indicate a need for library records which are geographically disaggregated and additional research on information needs of tribal community.

5.3 Interpreting the "available" category carefully

The 7.45% is not to be taken as the percent of Rajasthan's population having a library, but as an administrative indicator for a village. Unit of analysis is villages; villages are vastly different in population. Also, the number does not mean that the remaining 92.55% of villages doesn't have any access to the library; they show different levels of distance from a library. The true story is that in-village availability is a small sample in the data, and many villages are listed as having been located far from the nearest public library.

5.4 Implications for tribal and rural communities

The dataset does not disaggregate these counts by tribal identity, so it cannot prove that tribal villages have worse access than other rural villages. However, if the tribal community is spread out or is far away from service centres, a long distance could be a practical obstacle to children, older adults, people who are handicapped or households with limited transportation or disposable money. These are reasonable explanations that could be examined using district-level data and community research rather than statements of what this data shows.

6. Discussion

6.1 Geographical Accessibility of Public Libraries

The village-level results indicate that geographical proximity is an important consideration in rural public-library planning in Rajasthan. The clustering of villages in the length of distance categories indicate that the planning of a library service based on the number of libraries alone is not necessarily a representative representation of geographical distribution. Distance categories do not, however, provide any evidence of actual or exclusionary use of libraries. There should also be evidence to assess effective access including measures of transport, opening hours and staffing, collection relevance, digital facilities and evidence of outreach provision.

6.2 Information Needs of Tribal Communities

As shown in the literature reviewed, the community's information needs are also important to take into consideration in addition to geographical availability. Meena and Sharma (2012) have studied the information needs of the tribal farm women of Pali district; it revealed that there is a lack of availability of advanced agricultural information for tribal farm women. They find relevance in agricultural and livelihood-related information through their research. While public-library services were not directly explored in the study, it serves as a valuable background for planning information resources that are relevant to education, farming, employment and government welfare schemes.

6.3 Policy Framework and Practical Provision

There is a formal structure for establishing public libraries as provided in the Rajasthan Public Libraries Act, 2006 and Rajasthan Public Libraries Rules, 2012. However, laws cannot determine the geographic availability, staffing and responsiveness of services. However, it is not possible to make a state-level analysis to provide conditions of individual tribal settlements; therefore, Kumar and Gupta (2020) have given a wider perspective on public-library development in Rajasthan. So, it is important to have verified local records to assess local provision of practical service.

6.4 Inclusive and Community-Oriented Services

The results indicate the added value of mobile libraries, community reading programmes, local content and digital support. Libraries might offer educational materials, agricultural information, job-related information, and directions to obtaining accurate government information. Resources should be in Hindi and in appropriate local/tribal language and used with communities' consultation. These measures are action items that are proposed to be service priorities and do not describe current library services in tribal areas.

6.5 Evidence Gaps and Future Research

A significant drawback is that the Mission Antyodaya data set does not separately identify villages in the Scheduled Areas, tribal dominated villages or the percentage of villagers accessing library facility by their Scheduled Tribe status. Thus, the study does not provide any evidence of access rates or of differences between tribal and non-tribal communities. More research is needed on the following aspects of libraries in selected Scheduled Areas: Library Locations, Library Staffing, Library Collections, Library Hours, Digital Library Facilities, Library Outreach Programs and Library Users' Information Needs. This would help to make better assessments and to plan libraries with inclusion. In general, the results indicate that in order to promote better library services in Rajasthan, the geographical accessibility of the libraries and the information requirements of the communities must be considered. Statewide administrative data are a good reference point, and specifically tribal-based research and verified local data are needed to create a more accurate and comprehensive plan for services.

7. Recommendations

1. Prepare a map showing distribution of libraries within the district/block-wise based on village data, and separately for Scheduled Area and for tribal-concentration villages where there is certainty on the data.
2. Focus villages in the 5-10km and >10km zones for mobile-library visits, book-deposit stations, community reading rooms and planned outreach.
3. Make a public-library service dashboard available for locations, hours, personnel, collections, languages, internet access, access, and visits to the public library available in the public domain.
4. Improve the collections of the community, such as child materials, school support materials, examination materials, materials about agriculture and livelihood, health materials from reliable sources, and guidance in government-sponsored schemes.
5. Provide Digital access & Digital-literacy sessions but not discounting offline access & materials or those who prefer print.
6. Educate library staff and local volunteers on community outreach, information literacy, inclusive services, privacy and referrals to authoritative public information.
7. Emphasize the use of clear and unambiguous measures to evaluate the pilots like outreach visits done, villages visited, materials circulated, attendance to the programme, digital support, and user feedback.
8. Conduct future field research in certain tribal and rural districts to check whether distance, transport, language, gender, disability and service quality affect real library users in the tribal and rural areas.

8. Limitations of the Study

The study is based on secondary literature, documentary sources, and data obtained from the Mission Antyodaya 2022-23 conducted in the villages. The results are thus subject to the availability, coverage and accuracy of these sources. There is no separate information available for the availability of library in the villages from the administrative dataset on the basis of Scheduled Area villages, tribal majority villages and accessibility based on Scheduled Tribe status. Therefore, it is not possible to measure library access, individual library use, service quality, or differences between tribal and non-tribal communities. Moreover, there is little research available in the field which is directly related to Rajasthan, thereby limiting the scope of comparison. These constraints suggest the need for further research at district level for mapping of actual provision of libraries and information needs of the tribal areas through community-based research.

9. Conclusion

This study focused on public library proximity and the information need of the tribes of Rajasthan based on literature review and documentary analysis. According to Mission Antyodaya 2022–23, 7.45% (3,446) of the

surveyed villages reported having a public library available within the village, and 74.80% (34,579) of the villages were in the combined 5-10 km and over-10 km categories. The results of these findings indicate geographical proximity as an important factor to take into consideration when deciding on the planning of a rural library. The literature reviewed also highlights the need for information related to agriculture and livelihoods to tribal communities. The existing data, however, does not provide information on library access as distinguished based on the location of the Scheduled Areas or Scheduled Tribe status and thus it was not possible to determine the access rates and difference between Scheduled Tribe and non-Scheduled Tribe communities. Future research needs to correlate actual library sites with Scheduled Area boundaries, evaluate staffing, collections, digital facilities, outreach, and community information needs. This would help provide more community responsive, inclusive and accessible public library services in Rajasthan.

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