History of Library System Development in India before Independence

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Abstract: In the west first public libraries were established under the Roman Empire. They had a Latin and Greek rooms. Chinese Library which was established during Qin Dynasty, Islam the libraries (land from Timbuktu to Afghanistan and Modern day Pakistan the libraries), Medieval Christian Libraries are famous in the world history. India is no exception. Libraries were established in ancient India mainly by the patronage extended by emperors, major capitalists, and scholars. Indian emperors and kings supported scholars and scholarship. Public libraries have always been the door to learning for a great majority of the populations that they serve. They are knowledge centres and contribute to lifelong learning. This research paper will incorporate key phases of development of Library system in India before independence. Library system in India developed in three different phases.

Key words: Library system, education, literacy,

Introduction

Public libraries arose worldwide along with growth in education, literacy, and publications. Every country has its own public library history with influential leaders. Monarchs, wealthy people, and philanthropists have all made a contribution to society in the form of public library development [1]. In the west first public libraries were established under the Roman Empire. They had a Latin and Greek rooms. Chinese Library which was established during Qin Dynasty, Islam the libraries (land from Timbuktu to Afghanistan and Modern day Pakistan the libraries), Medieval Christian Libraries are famous in the world history. India is no exception. Libraries were established in ancient India mainly by the patronage extended by emperors, major capitalists, and scholars. Indian emperors and kings supported scholars and scholarship.

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This research paper will incorporate key phases of development of Library system in India before independence. Library system in India developed in three different phases.

They can be categorized as –

1) Ancient Period (Before 1200 AD)

The Indian civilization dates back to 3000 B.C., but there is no reliable evidence to show that any recorded material then existed. During the Vedic period (1500-500 B.C.), however, a vast amount of religious and secular literature was produced; the world's longest poem, Mahabharata, was composed in this period. So were the Vedas and Ramayana.

It was during the time of Asoka (269-232 B.C.) that his promulgations were inscribed on stone pillars and rocks in two different scripts to become the first official records inscribed in public places. Thus, these inscriptions could be ascribed as the first libraries of India. Also the memorials and shrines built with sculptures of Buddha's birth stories and discourses, and labelled with short inscriptions have been called "open libraries". Of the earliest libraries, Nalanda university library has a distinct place. It was large enough to cater to the needs of thousands of students and hundreds of teachers. Foreign scholars used to visit this library to find authenticated copies of the sacred books of Buddhism. The library was housed in three splendid buildings; one of them was a nine-storied building. The size of the collection is not known, but it is estimated that it comprised hundreds of thousands of volumes; one visiting scholar, I-tsing, is reported to have stayed for ten years to copy four hundred Sanskrit texts. The library is reported to have flourished until the twelfth century, but as it was completely destroyed, no further details about it are known [2]. Besides Nalanda, the famous Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang, mentions in his work, "Si yu ki", other Buddhist libraries at Tamralipti (now in West Bengal) and at 24 monasteries. These libraries consisted of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries and were well equipped and had a number of scribes to copy manuscripts[3].

In India the emperors and kings always supported scholars and scholarships. Therefore the libraries in ancient India were established by the patronage extended by emperors, Zamindars and scholars. These libraries functioned like private institutions and the admission was limited to scholars and royal guests. Similarly ancient universities of Taxila and Vikramshila had valuable libraries. When we study the history of early libraries in the world it is found that the early libraries of the world mainly consisted of published records called Archives.

Archaeological findings from the ancient city – states of Sumer have thrown light on temple rooms full of clay tablets in cuneiform script. Similar libraries were found in Ancient Egypt. There is ample evidence showing libraries at Nippur around 1900 BC and those at Nineveh about 700 BC showing a library classification system. Another early organization was in effect at Alexandria. Over 30000 clay tablets from Ashurbanipal library was discovered at Nineveh, giving Archaeologists with an amazing wealth of Mesopotamian religious, literary, and administrative work.

2) Medieval Period Libraries (1200-1757 A. D.)

Muslim influence in India during the 13th century A.D. marked the dawn of another era of learning and scholarship. The Mughal period gave a further stimulus to the growth of libraries. Mughal rulers attached considerable importance to libraries and appointed scholars as librarians. The Mughal emperors were patrons of art and literature. In the period of Emperor Babur, Humayun, and Akbar many new libraries were established and existing ones further developed. Mughal libraries featured magnificent buildings, rare manuscripts, and scholar librarians. Humyan set up a library at his Agra Fort where he kept books, portfolios, Plated

Pen cases, picture books and works of calligraphy. Akbar encouraged reading habits among his kingdom. He setup a unique library of rare books at Fatehpur Sikri exclusively for women.

It is learnt that there was a collection of 24000 books in his library. Jahangir, son of Akbar created a law that if a wealthy person died without any successor then his assets should be used for creating Schools, Monasteries and libraries. During Mughal period the technical work of the library like arranging the books in a meaningful sequence, keeping a written record were also carried out. The names of Maharaja Sawai Man Singh of Jaipur and Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab will be remembered with appreciation in the history of library services in India[4]. The Maharaja of Tanjuar started the famous Saraswati Mahal Library in 17th century A.D. It remains a unique institution in its nature of collection and services[5]. In 17th century A. D. the Maharaja of Tanjuar started the famous Saraswati Mahal library it is unique library for collection and services. In India the public libraries were opened for common people after the advent of British rule.

British Period (1757-1947)

Libraries established by the kings and capitalists functioned like private institutions and the admission was limited. Service to the general public had to wait for the British. Unfortunately, the arrival of the British and resulting political disorder also brought chaos to the Indian way of life. This was a severe blow to the cultural heritage of India, which had arisen from the Indus valley civilization. When libraries began developing in India during the early nineteenth century, they were a western product[6]. In 1808, the Government of Bombay proposed to register libraries, which were to be given copies of books published from the "funds for the encouragement of literature"[7]. According to the "Sinha Committee", this was the beginning of the first phase of public library development in India. During the first half of the 19th century, the three presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras had public libraries[8]. These libraries were mostly financed by Europeans residing in these towns. Of these, the establishment of the public library at Calcutta in 1835 was the most significant.

This was the library which later developed into the National Library of India. Almost simultaneous, subscription libraries were started in many Indian cities. These were, of course, not public libraries in the true sense of the term, and did not provide free books for all. Founded in imitation of their western counterparts, the use of these libraries was confined to small, affluent portion of society.

The first three decades of the 20th century can be looked on as the golden age of the Indian library system. On January 31, 1902, the Imperial Library Act was passed and Lord Curzon transformed the Calcutta Public Library into the Imperial Library in 1906.

Developments in Baroda were also notable.

The development of public libraries in Baroda was unique. Baroda developed a network of public libraries to serve the entire Princely State. Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III of Baroda who traveled all over the world was deeply impressed by the role played by public libraries in the promotion of education in

the United States and thought of extending such benefits to his own subjects[9]. In 1910 he invited an American expert, William Alson Borden to organize the public library system for his state. The public library movement

that flourished in Baroda was a glorious one. But that was not a general trend of that period because in no other part of India, a parallel development occurred. Yet another development during the period was the organisation of a host of conferences such as:

• The first conference of library workers and persons interested in the library movement was held at Beswada, Andhra in 1914.

• The first All India Library Conference of Librarians was held in 1918 at Lahore.

• The first All India Library Conference was held at Calcutta in 1933.

• The first All India Public Library Conference was held at Madras in 1934.

With the existence of democratic governments in several provinces beginning in 1937, another phase of the library movement began. Between 1937 and 1942, a number of village libraries and travelling libraries sprang up in Assam, Bihar, Punjab, and Travancore. It was estimated that there were about 13,000 village libraries in India in 1942. Another remarkable development was the appointment of the 'Library Development Committee' by the Government of Bombay, with A.A.A. Fyzee as its chairman. The Committee ambitiously recommended a comprehensive library system to be implemented in three successive stages. Because of financial constraints, the government could only implement part of the recommendations.

The British rulers made changes in traditional educational system and encouraged the book production and establishment of libraries. These libraries were mainly used by the British Ruler and these libraries were later on converted in to native libraries, as the book production local languages increased considerably. These libraries were opened for common people of the country. In 1845 Bombay native library was established. Which is still in existence and which is now known as people's free reading room and library at dhobi talav, Mumbai? The few main libraries can be mentioned which were established during British period.

• Bengal Royal Asiatic Society Library, Calcutta,

• Asiatic Society Library, Bombay (1804)

• Calcutta Public library (1836)[10]

• Petit library 1856

• Connemara Public library (1890)

• Khudabaksha Oriental Public Library (1891)

• Oriental Library, Mysore

• Oriental Research library, Baroda

• Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Pune.

The year 1808 can be regarded as the beginning of first phase of public library development in India as the government of Bombay proposed to register the libraries which used to provide published books from the "funds for the encouragement of literature"[11]. In the early 19th century the three presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta & Madras had public libraries. These libraries were mainly financed by Europeans who were residing in these

cities. The public library at Calcutta which was established 5 in 1935 was later developed into National Library of India. Around this period the subscription libraries started in many cities of India. These libraries did not offered free services and reading facilities but the same was made available by charging reasonable fees. But these libraries were used by small portion of an affluent society. The Indian library system golden was between 1900-1930. The Imperial Library Act was passed on January 31, 1902 and in 1906 Lord Curzon converted the Calcutta Public Library to the imperial Library. In the development of Public Libraries the state of Baroda was a pioneer in it's approach. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad III played an important role in establishing network of public libraries in the entire state. He invited an American scholar, William Alson Borden in 1910 to establish public library system in the state of Baroda. Under his guidance the public library movement flourished in Baroda. He is known as "Father of Library Movement" in India.

The development with regard to public library was the organization of some important conferences which were held for the first time in different parts of the country. The Conference of the library workers and persons interested in library movement which was held at Beswada, Andhrapradesh in 1940. All India library conference of librarians which was held at Lahore in 1980. In 1933 All India library conference was held at Calcutta. All India public library conference which was held at Madras in 1934. Another milestone in the development of public library system in India took place between 1937 and 1942 many libraries in villages and mobile

Libraries came up in Assam, Bihar, Punjab and Travancore.

The appointment of "Library development committee" by government of Bombay under the chairmanship of A. A. A. Fyzee is landmark in the development public library system[12].

The committee recommended a comprehensive library system to be implemented in three successive stages. But due to shortage of finance the recommendations could not be implemented fully. The University of Madras started in 1923 the full-timed appointment of University Librarian and Dr. S. R. Ranganathan became the first University Librarian on 4th January 1924. He did great work for the development of academic libraries and public libraries[13].

1. In 1931 he postulated and published five laws of library science.

2. In 1933 he coined colon classification for classifying books.

3. He formulated classified catalog code in 1934.

4. Model public library bill was prepared by him due to this the library bill was introduced in many states of the country.

In 1835 some educationists, scholars founded Calcutta Public Library and and it was in 1836 opened to general public. The library was moved to a novel and vast structure, erected in honor of Lord Metcalf, the then Governor-General of India. Due to the Great War of 1857 the foreign supporters who earlier supported Calcutta Public Library withdraw their assistance and afterwards the functioning of library was almost stopped. Lord Curzon, who was then the Viceroy & Governor General in India

from 1898 to 1905 merged the Calcutta Public Library with the Imperial Library of the East India Company in 1902. This new Imperial Library was opened on 30th January 1903 in the Metcalf Hall. After the Freedom of India Imperial Library in 1948 was converted into National Library of the country.

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