

# Historical Development of University Libraries in India

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## Introduction:

Since the ancient times, it has been assured that libraries are the sources of knowledge and also the treasures of gentle culture. Their terminology is supposed to be the heart of a university and also in the form of soul and brain. There was also the occurrence of books by the Sardars' during the Mughal period. They used to keep their private libraries for learning. The then Sultans and Mughal monarchs were also book lovers. With this, we come to know that libraries were in vogue during the Mughal period.

When the art of printing had come into existence in China, no difficulty was found in the case of making copies of books, some thousand years ago. According to this, so many books got printed. That's why books on different subjects were being written and it produced libraries. The nature of books started changing in the wake of time. The world's biggest library was established in Washington in the year 1800 and now 14 crore, 35 lakh books were found. The Length of book cases, available is 478 mile. The patrons of libraries believe that without the well-equipped library no University can get name and fame. The firm proof is available that before the existence of modern libraries, Nalanda, Mithila, Takshshila etc. in such Universities well-furnished libraries were available

## University Libraries in Ancient India:

According to J. N. Agrawal in his book "Libraries in Ancient India" 1956, in the Vedic age instructions were imparted orally without the medium of books", Taxila from 700 B.C. to 300 A.D. was considered to be the most respected seat of higher learning and education in India but still there is no evidence found so far in the archaeological excavations at Taxila that there had been a good library system in the Taxila University. Fa-Hien noticed such libraries at Jetavana monastery at Shravasti (U.P). In 400 A.D., there came into being one of the biggest known universities, the Nalanda University, which by 450 A.D. became a renowned seat of learning, its fame spreading beyond the boundaries of India. Nalanda near Patna grew to be the foremost Buddhist monastery and an educational centre. Nalanda University during the 6th and the 7th centuries A.D. is due to the accounts left by Hiuen-tsang, who lived in the institution for three years in the first half of the 7th century, Information on the Nalanda University Library is also found in the Tibetan accounts, from which it was understood that the library was situated in a special area known by the poetical name the Dharma ganja, (Piety Mart) which comprised three huge buildings, called the Ratnasagara, the Ratnodadhi and the Ratnaranjaka of which the Ratnasagara was a nine storied building and housed the collection of manuscripts and rare sacred works like Prajnaparamita Sutra etc.

The library at Nalanda had a rich stock of manuscripts on philosophy and religion and contained texts relating to grammar, logic, literature, the Vedas, Dharmashastras, the Puranas, Astronomy, Astrology and Medicine. The University of Nalanda and its library flourished down to the 12th century A.D, until Bakhtiyar Khalji sacked it in 1197-1203 A.D. and set fire to the establishment of Nalanda. The world famous universities, such as, the Vikramasila, the Vallabhi and the Kanchi were coming up

in other parts of the country during the period from the 5th century A.D. to the 8th century A.D. All these universities possessed rich libraries (Pustakabhandaras) and in the hall containing such books there used to be an image of the goddess Saraswati with a book in her hand. The Nalanda and the Vikramshila universities were under the control of the king Dharmapala. He founded the Vikramshila monastery in the 8th century A.D.

Jogesh Mishra said in his book “History of Libraries and Librarianship in Modern India.” Published in 1970, stated that, the library occupied a significant position within the establishment, and the donors provided money to buy books for the library. B. Mujumdar in his book “The socio-Economic History of Northern India” published in 1960; stated that, the last of the famous seats of learning in Eastern India was Navadwipa in Bengal. It reached its height of glory from 1083 to 1106 A.D. as a centre of intellectual excellence as well as its rich library facilities, when LakshmanSen, a king of Gauda, made it his capital. R. K. Mukherjee in his book “Ancient India Education” published in 1969; however stated that, this library was also destroyed along with the centre by BakhtiyarKhalji. Situated in South India at Amravati, on the banks of the Krishna, the NagarjunaVidyapeeth flourished in about 7th century A.D. Its library housed in the top floor of the five storied building of the university had an enormous collection on the Buddhist philosophy, particularly of the Mahayana school that Nagarjuna had founded science and medicine.

There is enough archaeological evidence that supports the existence of this 7th century university and its library. The enormity of the collection in this library is borne out by the fact that it not only had works on the Buddhist literature and the Tripitakas, but also works on several branches of scientific knowledge, such as, Botany, Geography, Mineralogy and Medicine. It was a great attraction for scholars from the different parts of India and from countries, like, China, Burma and Ceylon.

### **University Libraries in Medieval India:**

The existence of academic libraries during the medieval period of Indian history is not known, though the Muslim rulers did patronize libraries in their own palaces. Alone exception, however, was a library attached to a college at Bidar, having a collection of 3000 books on different subjects. Aurangzeb got this Library transferred to Delhi to merge it with his palace library. During the medieval period, due to Muslim invasions and political troubles, the powerful empires and kingdoms of Indian rulers fell one by one. This affected higher education and the development of academic libraries as well.

### **University Libraries in Modern India:**

During the British rule in India, number of academic institutions was established by the East India Company, and by the Christian missionaries. Some of the worth mentioning events which led to the growth and development of higher education in India during this period were the establishment of the Calcutta College in 1781, Jonathan Duncan, then a British agent, founded the Benaras Sanskrit College in 1792. The Calcutta Fort William College was founded in 1800. All these colleges were having their own libraries.

The establishment of C.M.S. College in Kottayam, Hindu college in Calcutta in 1816 and Raven Shaw College in Cuttack in 1816 was the immediate result of the Charter Act 1813. These and other colleges came into existence thereafter had their own libraries the day they were established. Srirampur College during this period was founded by the Danes in 1818 and the King of Denmark in 1927 agreed to give this college an academic status by providing equivalence to the Danish Universities with power to confer degrees.

The library of this college too was established along with its foundation and at a later stage the college was given affiliation to the University of Burdwan for the purpose of conferring degrees. The 7th March 1835 decision of the British Indian Government to promote English literature and sciences in India was resulted into the spread of number of colleges in India and by 1839 there were over forty colleges with attached libraries in the British territory in India. For their establishment, lots of money was made available by the Indians in the form of donations. In 1840 Presidency College was founded in Madras, followed by a medical college in Bombay in 1845. This progress in education was instrumental in establishing universities in India.

Sir John Colville introduced the Bill to establish universities in India the Charles Wood dispatch of 1854 popularly known as the 'Magna Carta of English Education' in India also paved the way for the establishment of the universities in the presidency towns and it was passed by the Governor General of India Lord Dalhousie on 24th January 1857, paved the way for the foundation of three universities based on the London Universities Model in the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Indian Education Commission, popularly known as Hunter Commission was appointed by the British Indian Government in 1882 to study the progress of education under the new policy adopted in 1854 by the East India Company and transferred to the Crown and accepted by the Secretary of State in 1859. Sir William W. Hunter in his report had clearly stated that the conditions of the libraries was in a very poor state and declared them "hardly creditable." The Commission paid special attention to the colleges and their libraries and other facilities.

The direct result of the Commission was the establishment of Punjab University, Lahore in Pakistan, and Allahabad University in 1882 and 1887 respectively but still the condition of the education and libraries remained in a poor state. The Raleigh Commission 1902 appointed by Lord Curzon to investigate the conditions and prospects of the Indian universities and to recommend measures to improve their constitution and working and standards of teaching also paid special attention to the academic libraries and found that, "the library is little used by graduates and hardly at all by other students." Further, the Commission commented, "In a college where library is inadequate or ill arranged, the students have no opportunity of forming the habit of independent and intelligent reading."

The Calcutta University Commission popularly known as Sadler Commission was appointed by the government in 1917 to study the situation and the status of education in the country and to make recommendations to solve the existing problems. The Commission noticed that "one of the greatest weaknesses of the existing system is the extraordinarily unimportant part which is played by the library" and found that "in some colleges the library is regarded not as an essential part of teaching equipment but merely as a more or less useless conventional accessory."

The Commission made the recommendations regarding the libraries that college libraries be strengthened and that training should be given to the students and occasionally to the teachers about use of the library. One of the immediate result of the Calcutta University Commission was the establishment of a few new teaching-cum-residential universities at Patna in 1917, Somalia in Hyderabad in 1918, Dacca in Bangladesh, Aligarh, and Lucknow in 1921, Delhi in 1922 and Nagpur in 1923 and all of them were established along with the establishment of libraries as an integral part of the university system.

The University of Madras appointed Dr. S.R. Ranganathan as its Librarian in 1924. He was trained at the University of London Library School before joining his duties at Madras. Things did change rapidly after his joining. He introduced the lending and reference services at the Madras University Library and extended the library hours for the benefit of the readers. Whereas the hours had

previously been 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., they were changed to 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. He delivered a series of lectures to about two thousand teachers at the conference of the South Indian Teachers' Union in 1929 regarding the use and importance of the library services. The Madras Library Association started a summer course in librarianship and the lectures for this course were mainly delivered by Dr. Ranganathan. The main objective of the course in its beginning was to spread the ideas of the value of good library services and modern library methods among potential users of the library.

In the words of Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, in his book "University Library, Then and Now" "This was the first time when such a forward financial step in the history of the university libraries in India was taken in the second quarter of the 20th century." The University of Madras library made a good start under Ranganathan's effective leadership and administration. In 1930, the library had five well-trained reference librarians to help the readers, and they "carried the work to a high pitch of efficiency." S. Subramanian in his book "History and Development of University Libraries". Explain that this was the first time in the history of Indian libraries that special reference service was introduced in a university library. The library collection increased to 93,000 volumes in 1935 and on September 3, 1936, the library was shifted to its first new and permanent functional building. By 1944, when Ranganathan resigned from the position of the Librarian, to become the University Librarian at the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), the collection of the Madras University Library had augmented to 1,20,000 volumes.

The contribution of Dr. Ranganathan to the growth and development of libraries in general and the Madras University Library in particular is undoubtedly tremendous and unforgettable. It will not be wrong to say that the Library School of Madras and the Madras University Library were the laboratories of Ranganathan to propound his ideas in library science and to test them practically. Some of the important and major ideas of Ranganathan were the Five Laws of Library Science which were enunciated by him in 1924, and their formulation and publication in 1929 and 1931 respectively. These laws are still considered a unifying theory for all library practices and services, and set of guidelines for the dynamic development and study of library science as a whole.

The University of Bombay Library received a special grant of rupees 50,000 from the Central Government in 1939 to strengthen its collection for graduate studies. During the period from 1931 to 1939, a few more special grants were given to the library for its collection development. A very special grant of rupees 10,000 was given by Kikabhai and Maniklal, sons of the late Premchand Roychand, in 1931 to replace the electric clock of the library tower. The collection, which stood at 4,504 volumes in 1900, rose to 70,000 in 1939 and 73, 582 in 1947.

W.J. Haggerty express his views in his book "Higher And Professional Education in India" in 1970, "Though higher education and academic libraries made some progress during the first quarter of the present century, yet their growth and development was not very well organized. Academic institutions and their growth after 1916 created a few problems also and the general feeling was that the "quality of Education was being sacrificed for quantity." While such a situation prevailed, the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the Simon Commission, was appointed by the Government in 1927 to study the conditions prevailing in India.

The Simon Commission appointed an Auxiliary Committee to look into the growth of education in India. Sir Philip Hartog, a former member of the Calcutta University Commission (1917-1919), and a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dacca, was appointed its Chairman. In its report, submitted in 1929, the Committee stated that "the dispersal of resources for university teaching among a number of colleges had made it difficult to build up university libraries of the type required for advanced work

both at the Honors and the research stage, majority of the university libraries were inadequate and all needed great additions.”

### Conclusion:

It is also true that as compared to the first two decades the development of university libraries after 1924 did make better progress but the college libraries were still neglected and were struggling to get their recognition. There were only 12 universities in India in 1924 and their number swelled to 18 by the time India got freedom in 1947.

In fact, the academic libraries during the British rule had no significance in the academic life of the institutions of higher education and the pivotal role that can be played by the academic libraries in the life of the institutions could very well be seen in the policy statement of higher education of the free India and the fact was also proven when at the time of national reconstruction, the importance of libraries in teaching and research was recognized, and libraries received the early attention of the Government of India.

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