

# Knowledge stores: before and after the printing in India

Dr. Marim Joice

Postdoctoral Fellow, Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Email : [joice98maring@yahoo.co.in](mailto:joice98maring@yahoo.co.in)

**Abstract:** *The paper primarily attempts to look at the early libraries and their transformation after the arrival of the printing press in India. Before the advent of print, libraries were just storehouses of knowledge, and their roles were also limited to the acquisition and preservation of the written records. But with the advent of printing, the role of libraries changed from simply being a custodian of knowledge to the disseminator of knowledge. This caused the paradigm shift in the function. Now, the focus moved to dispensing the preserved knowledge and making it accessible to one and all.*

**Key Words:** *Storehouse, library, printing press, knowledge, custodian.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Libraries have been in existence in India since ancient times. References to libraries or storehouses of knowledge are very common in ancient literature. Libraries have been a central part of the ancient institutions of learning. However, these libraries cannot be compared with the modern public library except that all libraries are storehouses of knowledge. Printed books were unknown then and these storehouses of knowledge contained only manuscripts or handwritten books only.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the basic idea between the ancient and modern libraries does not show any significant difference except in the collections of materials. In the ancient period owing to the absence of printing, only handwritten books or manuscripts comprised the library.<sup>2</sup> The coming of the printing presses in India altered the collection and preservation method. Print also brought about a sea change in the working of the library as well. Libraries no longer remain simply a building but it has become a service institution, disseminating knowledge and providing easy access to everyone.

Several studies have been carried out on the historical aspects of libraries and their development in India. Unfortunately, studies dealing with the educational role of libraries, particularly the public libraries as knowledge repository or their potential in bridging the gap between information-rich and information-poor<sup>3</sup> in the society have never received due scholarly attention nor studied in mainstream history or education. This paper attempts to shed light on the educational aspects of libraries and the introduction of printing in India as a background to the proliferation of libraries after the advent of printing.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW :

Some of the earlier works dealing with the history of libraries in India and their development have been the pioneering work of Mookerjee, S.K. (1969). The development of libraries and library science in India traced the origin of libraries from ancient times up to the modern period. He also discussed the role played by the public libraries in socio-political fields in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Bhatt, R.K. (1995), History and Development of Libraries in India gives the historical account of the libraries and their development from pre-independence to post-independence era. Bhatt also discussed the recommendation made by various committees and commissions for the growth and development of libraries in India. Before the introduction of the printing press, libraries were just storehouses to preserve manuscripts. The introduction of printing brought about tremendous change in the working and nature of libraries. The history and development of the printing press in India were brilliantly explored by Priolker in his book, History of the printing press: its beginning and development. Equally noteworthy is the edited book of Gupta, Abhijit, and Swapan Chakravorty, (2016). Founts of knowledge: book history of India. This book casts considerable light on printing and publishing in India. The historical account of the ancient education and various learning centres in India was extensively discussed by Altekar, A.S. (2014) in his book, Education in ancient India.

<sup>1</sup> S.K.Mookerjee, Development of Libraries and library science in India, Calcutta: the world press private LTD., 1969.pp.5-6.

<sup>2</sup> R.K. Bhatt, History and Development of Libraries in India, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1995. p.16.

<sup>3</sup> National Knowledge commission,(2007),Libraries: Gateway to knowledge, New Delhi, Government of India. p.5.

### 3. METHODOLOGY :

The study has applied the historical method of analyzing the documents as the historical research drew heavily upon primary sources, archival materials, and related published documents. The construction of the history of printing, history of libraries (public) in India, and particularly of the Calcutta public library and the Imperial library available in various Indian repositories like National Library (Kolkata), West Bengal State Archives (Kolkata), and National Archives, (New Delhi) and Serampore Missionary Archive, (West Bengal) were explored and used in crafting history for sound historical research.

#### 3.1 Early Libraries in India

The early libraries were mostly private, own and maintained by the priestly class, kings, or royals at their palaces. These libraries were mostly adorned by manuscript collections and as the scarcity of printed books in the initial years of the printing era often meant books were not for reading but to stand as respect of artifacts signifying authority<sup>4</sup> and admired for their novelty value and used for decorating bookshelves in the living room of prosperous households.<sup>5</sup> William Adam also mentioned in the 'Third Report on the State of Education in Bengal, 1838,' the account of a person previously employed by a European gentleman who supported a Bengali school and subsequently discontinued, maintained that the early printed books were 'preserved as curiosities or as heir-looms to be admired and not use.'<sup>6</sup> Maintaining a library was more of a display of a status symbol than for its intended purpose. Coupled with the limited availability of printed artifacts and restricted literacy on account of social factors such as caste, class, and religion, a printed book was quite novel.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, common people could not get access to the early libraries and there were not many libraries due to the non-availability of books. It was only after the introduction of printing in India that common people come in contact with printed books and the functions of libraries assumed dynamic.

The early libraries were maintained by Buddhists and Jain. In the history of early libraries in India, the Nalanda university library occupied a unique place. Nalanda University was famous for its excellence in education and learning. Students from all parts of India and different countries came to get the benefits from Nalanda University. The authorities of Nalanda University realized from the beginning the importance of a library to preserve our ancient knowledge and wisdom which was till then stored in the human minds (memory). The ancient priestly or sacerdotal class was referred to as walking libraries before the invention of the printing press. The knowledge which was stored in the memory was transferred by writing down for the generations to come and this knowledge accumulated and preserved in the manuscripts documents can be disseminated if store in a particular building or house.

Nalanda university library was located at three buildings appropriately name Ratna Sagara, Ratnodhadhi, and Ratnaranjaka. One of them has a nine storied building. The library quarter was famously called Dharmaganja or Mart of Knowledge.<sup>8</sup> From this account, one can infer to the conclusion that Nalanda university library was well maintained, organized, and classified. Chinese scholars and pilgrims spent months and years at Nalanda to get true copies of the sacred texts and other works of Buddhism. I-tsing got copied at Nalanda 400 Sanskrit work amounting to 5, 00,000 verses.<sup>9</sup> A.S. Altekar, a noted author of the History of ancient education in India, named in his book some of the international scholars who visited the famous university. He quote, Fa Hsien, Yuan Chwang were not the only ones attracted to Nalanda for its fame as a center of learning, there were other scholars like Thonmi, Hiuen Chiu, Taou-hi, Hwuinieh, Aryavarman, Buddhama, Taou-sing, Tang, and Hwui Lu who came from different countries like China, Korea, Tibet, and Tokhar.<sup>10</sup> The University of Nalanda and its library flourished down to the 12th century A.D. until Bakhtiyar Khalji sacked in 1197-1203 A.D. and razed down the establishment to ashes.<sup>11</sup> Other renowned Buddhist universities came into prominence contemporaneously with Nalanda such as the Vikramashila, the Vallabhi, and the

<sup>4</sup> A.R.Venkatachalapathy, 'Readers, Reading Practices, Modes of Reading' in the edited book of Francesca Orsini's 'The History of the Book in South Asia'.2013,Ashgate publishing company,U.K.p.311.

<sup>5</sup> Ghosh, Anindita, 2006,'power in print: popular publishing and the politics of Language and culture in a Colonial society: 1778-1905', Oxford university press, New Delhi, p.182.

<sup>6</sup> William Adam, Third Report on Sate of Education in Bengal, Calcutta: G.H. Huttman Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1838, p.23.

<sup>7</sup>Venkatachalapathy ,A.R, 'Readers, Reading Practices, Modes of Reading' in the edited book of Francesca Orsini's 'The History of the Book in South Asia'.2013,Ashgate publishing company,U.K.p.p.312.

<sup>8</sup> Altekar .p.268.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> As quoted by Altekar in his book Education in ancient India, p.267.

<sup>11</sup> R.K.Bhatt, History and development of Libraries in India.

Kanchi. But the onslaught of Muslim invaders caused the disappearance of the excellent collection at Vikramashila.<sup>12</sup> Most of the ancient learning centers met the same fate. Hence, today the active traditions of temple libraries remain only among the Jains.<sup>13</sup>

According to a Svetambara Jain tradition, the first Libraries were built in the late eighth century to preserve valuable handwritten manuscripts of the Jain knowledge. The Libraries were referred to as Jnan Bhandars or 'knowledge warehouses.'<sup>14</sup> In the absence of any living enlightened teachers, written copies of manuscripts have long played an important role in the Jain intellectual, ritual, and community life. The texts containing the teaching of Mahavira are essential for the guidance of the Jain community.<sup>15</sup> The degree of importance attest to the writing and reverence for the written word in the Jain community has been described by Donald Clay Johnson that 'although all religious groups in India revered their sacred text the Jains are unique in their respect for writing.'<sup>16</sup> Since manuscripts were part of the religious complex, their physical preservation received great care and attention, so the building of temple libraries was quite prevalent.<sup>17</sup> John E. Cort has rightly said, students of India owe a great debt to the Jains for the hundreds of thousands of invaluable handwritten manuscripts preserve in their many *Jnan Bhandars* (Sanskrit- Jnan Bhandargara) or 'knowledge warehouse' in western and southern India.<sup>18</sup> Through these libraries collections which were preserved mostly in manuscripts enriched the knowledge about Indian history, literature, philosophy, and art.

### 3.2 The First Modern Public Library in India: The Calcutta Public Library

Modern public libraries emerged with the advent of Europeans in India. The idea of establishing public libraries was first mooted by J.H.Stocqler, who had first experimented with General Library at Bombay on 15 November 1830, but the library could not survive for long after the departure of the founder and eventually closed down. J.H.Stocqler came to Calcutta in 1833 from London and launched the local daily, *The Englishman*. J.H.Stocqler once again revived the idea of establishing a similar scheme as he had previously attempted and failed, but now receiving good support from the upper class, he said, 'I determined to attempt the introduction of a similar establishment in Calcutta for that city was equally destitute of a public library.'<sup>19</sup>

The first modern public library was established in 1835 with the establishment of Calcutta Public Library. The Calcutta Public Library was born out of the initiative taken by J.H.Stocqler, who suggested establishing a public library in Calcutta in the public meeting of the inhabitants of Calcutta gathered to discuss how to commemorate Lord Metcalf for the liberation of the press in India on 20 August 1835, he said, 'a considerable inconveniences is sustained by almost all classes of the community of Calcutta, owing to the absence of anything like General Library.'<sup>20</sup> Similarly, J.P.Grant who chaired the same meeting also echoed the same sentiment, 'I believed this is the only society of the same extent which has not a single library of some description: at the cape, at Bombay, they are better provided, and Madras has its literary society; but here, in Calcutta, we are without the means of readings except by purchasing books .....this, I think is a very great inconvenience.'<sup>21</sup> Thus, considering the dire need for the public library and by the unanimous decision of the inhabitants present in the meeting it was resolved on 31 August 1835 that:

it is expedient and necessary to establish in Calcutta a public library of reference and circulation that shall be open to all ranks and classes without distinction and sufficiently extensive to supply the ones of the entire community in every department of literature.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>12</sup> As Quoted by Subodh Kumar Mookerjee, *Development of Libraries and Library science in India*, Calcutta: The world press private ltd.1969.14.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Clay John, *The western discovery of Jain temple Libraries*, University of Texas: Libraries & Culture, spring 1993, vol.3, No.28 (spring 1993), p.p.189.

<sup>14</sup> John E. Cort, 'The Jain Knowledge warehouses: Traditional Libraries in India,' in edited book of Francisca Orsini's 'The History of the Book in South Asia', U.K, ASGATE Publishing Limited, p.55.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Clay Johnson, *The western discovery of Jain temple Libraries*, University of Texas: Libraries & Culture, spring 1993, vol.3, No.28 (spring 1993), p.189.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>18</sup> John E. Cort, *Jain Knowledge ware house: traditional Jain Libraries*, Journal of American Oriental Society, Jan-March, 1995, Vol. 115, No. 1., p.77.

<sup>19</sup> As quoted by P.T.Nair in his book 'Origin of the National Library of India: Days of the Calcutta public, Kolkata: National Library of India, 2004, p.8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *The Englishman* reprinted in *Calcutta Monthly Journal*, Asiatic News, October 1835, p. 277.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The Calcutta public library came into existence in 1835, but it was formally opened on 21 March 1836. This was a landmark in the history of public libraries as many libraries emulate the example set by CPL and modeled on this line many public libraries were established. Calcutta public library was a forerunner and it paved the way for the founding of similar libraries in other important cities and towns of India in the later period.<sup>23</sup>

Surprisingly, Calcutta was not bereft of libraries in 1835. There were some significant libraries already existing in Calcutta, such as the Asiatic Society Library, the Bar Library Club, the Calcutta Library Society, and other similar libraries. But these libraries were not open to the general public and the membership to these libraries was limited to specific classes only. The Asiatic society library was opened only to its members; while not a single native was a member in the Calcutta Library society, and libraries attached to the colleges were meant for their students alone.<sup>24</sup> The establishment of Calcutta Public Library was a boon to the natives many of who have no other means of becoming acquainted with European literature than those afforded by the Calcutta Public Library.<sup>25</sup>

Soon the importance of libraries in educational institutions was realized and started to be recommended to make it mandatory for any institutions to have a library attached. The importance of the library was highlighted by W.W. Hunter in the Report of the Indian Education Commission (1882), 'no plan seems better fitted to encourage students to rely upon their own existence.'<sup>26</sup> It further emphasizes how effective the teaching would be if teachers had access to libraries, according to the Report of the Education Commission, 'We cannot doubt that the more extensive the libraries to which the teachers has access the more the life-like minded and effective will be his teaching, nor should the benefits of a library to the pupil themselves be altogether overlooked.'<sup>27</sup> The report strongly suggests that 'school cannot be regarded as properly equipped without a library.'<sup>28</sup> Following the report, there had been an increase in the number of libraries in educational institutions like in schools and colleges. As a result demand for printed books was also increased. It had been observed that since the establishment of libraries in the schools and colleges, a perceptible taste for general reading had sprung up among the students. Encouraged by these new improvements among the students the commission recommended that a small grant be made for the formation and maintenance of libraries in all the high schools.<sup>29</sup> In the later part of the century, many libraries were established in different parts of the country.

### 3.3 The Advent of printing and library movement in India

Christian missionaries were the pioneers of printing and modern education in India. Jesuit missionaries established the first printing press in Goa on September 6, 1556.<sup>30</sup> It was initially meant for evangelization and to engage in mission activities, like printing the translated Bible, Christian literature, or Christian hymns. Missionaries realized that the best way to reach out to the native was through the printed materials. Due to the existence of caste and class in Indian society, there were barriers at times to reach out to them, but the printed material can reach a place where it was physically impossible. The next thing missionaries did after learning the native language was to establish schools. Printing was also a crucial tool to the missionaries in the civilizing project of education. Large numbers of Indians first encountered the printed word through missionary tracts and school books.<sup>31</sup> With the spread of education, many schools were established and the need for libraries also arose to supplement the teaching at schools. Libraries particularly public libraries were very helpful to those who had learned the art of reading and writing but could not afford to buy books for practice so that they do not go to literary relapse. The educational role of public libraries was highlighted by Priya Joshi, public libraries function at times as an extension for schools and at other times as their substitute. As a result 'libraries became almost immediately visible within the colonial landscape with more established libraries often helping to start a newer institution in their cities, thus increasing the numbers of libraries substitute.'<sup>32</sup>

<sup>23</sup> R.K.Bhatt, History and Development of libraries in India, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991,p.6.

<sup>24</sup> As mentioned by Marim Joice in her unpublished MPhil Dissertation, 'A Historical study of Calcutta public library: 1835-1903' Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University,2012,p.96.

<sup>25</sup> *Report of the Calcutta public library for 1847-1848*, Sanders Cones and Co., 1848, P. xxvii.

<sup>26</sup> *Report of the Indian Education commission 1882*, Superintendent Government printing press, Calcutta, 1882, p. 116.

<sup>27</sup> *Report of the Indian Education commission 1882*, Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta, 1882, p. 230.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> *Report of the Indian Education commission 1882*, p. 116.

<sup>30</sup> Priolker, Anant, History of printing press : its Beginning and Development, Bombay: Marathi Samsodhana,1958.p.2.

<sup>31</sup> Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty, Founts of Knowledge: Book History of India, New Delhi:Orient BlackSwan,2016.p.20.

<sup>32</sup> Priya. Joshi, *Reading in the public Eye: The Circulation of Fiction in Indian Libraries:1835-1901*,in the ed.volume of Francesca Orsini's 'The History of the Book in South Asia'.2013,London: Ashgate publishing company,U.K.p.438.

With the introduction of modern education, libraries were made compulsory in every educational institution. Many schools and colleges had attached libraries. Students were encouraged to use libraries and to achieve maximum benefits of using the library; various motivational methods were introduced and had been in practice since the time of Lord Auckland's governorship in India. Students were encouraged to develop reading habits through the use of libraries. In 1839 Lord Auckland gave away prizes to those students who greatly benefited ensuing from the use of the school or college library.<sup>33</sup> This tradition was revived by the Council of Education in 1848 with a slightly modified rule of selecting the deserving student for awards for a thorough understanding of the subject.<sup>34</sup> With the spread of education and availability of printed texts, more and more libraries were established and public libraries served as support to formal educational institutions.

The history of the library movement can be traced back to the advent of Europeans in India and the establishment of the first public library in 1835. This library became a symbol of the modern public library and many libraries were established models in the lines of CPL. Calcutta public also gave impetus to the growth of many public libraries in the later period. After its amalgamation to the Imperial library by Lord Curzon in 1900, it was opened to the public in 1903. The government for the first took the responsibility for providing free library services to all. According to Curzon, the primary object for establishing the Imperial Library was that it should be 'a library of reference, a working place for students and a repository of material for the future historians of India, in which so far as possible, every book written about India at any time can be seen and read.'<sup>35</sup> The Imperial library was transformed into National Library after India's independence by the Imperial Library Act 1948. This paved the way for the library movement in India.

#### 4. CONCLUSION :

Libraries were traditionally a repository of knowledge and information but over the year's libraries acquired renewed importance as the present education system emphasized research and investigation. Libraries have evolved from a mere storehouse of knowledge to a service institution to meet the need of present-day society and it has also been shaped to suit the demand of modern education. The introduction of printing brought about a tremendous impact on the growth of public libraries in India.<sup>36</sup> A library that was once inaccessible to the common people became a regular place for learning. There is a major paradigm shift in the role of modern libraries too. Now, the focus has shifted from collection or acquisition to dispensing the preserved or accumulated knowledge or information to the masses. Accesses to this repository of knowledge and sources of information have become reality for everyone. The study shows that introduction of printing enabled to percolate the diffusion of knowledge widely and rapidly to areas which education had never touched. Printing also enabled to achieve the purpose and function of the library which otherwise would have been nothing but a mere storehouse of knowledge.

#### Acknowledgment

I, Marim Joice, ICSSR Postdoctoral Fellow, profoundly acknowledge the platform providing to me by the council for furthering the project. I would also like to warmly extend my heartfelt thanks to one and all at the ICSSR for their support throughout my fellowship.

#### REFERENCES :

1. Mookerjee, S.K. (1969). Development of libraries and library science in India, Calcutta: the world press private LTD.
2. Bhatt, R.K. (1995). History and development of libraries in India, New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
3. National Knowledge Commission, (2007), Libraries: Gateway to knowledge, New Delhi, Government of India. (5).
4. Venkatachalapathy, A.R. (2013). Readers, reading practices, modes of reading in Francesca Orsini. (Ed.). *The history of the book in South Asia*, London: Ashgate publishing company.
5. Ghosh, Anindita. (2006). power in print: popular publishing and the politics of language and culture in a colonial society: 1778-1905,' New Delhi: Oxford university press.

<sup>33</sup> Subodh Kumar Mukherjee, Development of Libraries and Library Science in India. Calcutta, the world Press Private Limited, 1969, p.23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Government of India Finance and commerce Department, Salaries, Establishment, etc., Education, *Home-Public*, No. 267, 1900, p.1.

<sup>36</sup> As quoted by Marim Joice in 'Evolution and Transformation of Calcutta Public Library: 1835-1953,' unpublished Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2017, p.155.

6. Adam, William. (1838).Third report on Sate of education in Bengal, Calcutta: G.H. Huttmann Bengal Military Orphan Press.
7. Venkatachalapathy, A.R. (2013). Readers, reading practices, modes of reading in Francesca Orsini. (Ed.). *The History of the Book in South Asia*, Ashgate publishing company.
8. Altekar, A.S.(2014). Education in ancient India, Delhi: Isha Books
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Bhatt, R.K. (1995).History and development of libraries in India, New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
12. Mookerjee, Subodh.Kumar.(1969).Development of libraries and library science in India,Calcutta: The world press private Ltd.
13. Donald Clay John, The western discovery of Jain temple libraries, University of Texas: Libraries & Culture, spring 1993, vol.3, No.28 (spring 1993), p.p.189.
14. John E. Cort, The Jain knowledge warehouses: traditional libraries in India, in Francisca Orsini. (Ed.). *The History of the Book in South Asia*, London: ASGATE Publishing Limited.
15. Ibid.
16. Donald Clay John, The western discovery of Jain temple libraries, University of Texas: Libraries & Culture, spring 1993, vol.3, No.28 (spring 1993), p.p.189.
17. Ibid.190.
18. John E. Cort, The Jain knowledge warehouses: traditional libraries in India, in Francisca Orsini. (Ed.). *The History of the Book in South Asia*, London: ASGATE Publishing Limited.
19. Nair, P.T. (2004). Origin of the National Library of India: Days of the Calcutta public, Kolkata: National Library of India.
20. Ibid.
21. *The Englishman* reprinted in *Calcutta Monthly Journal*, Asiatic News, October 1835, (277).
22. Ibid.
23. Bhatt, R.K. (1995).History and development of libraries in India, New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
24. Marim, Joice.(2012). A historical study of Calcutta public library: 1835-1903, MPhil Dissertation, New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University,96.
25. *Report of the Calcutta public library for 1847-1848*, Sanders Cones and Co., 1848, P. xxvii.
26. *Report of the Indian Education commission 1882*, Superintendent Government printing press, Calcutta, 1882, p. 116.
27. Ibid.
28. *Report of the Indian Education commission 1882*, Superintendent Government printing press, Calcutta, 1882.
29. Ibid.
30. Priolker, Anant.(1958). History of printing press: its beginning and development, Bombay: Marathi Samsodhana.
31. Gupta,Abhijit and Swapan Chakravorty,( 2016). Founts of knowledge: book history of India,New Delhi:Orient BlackSwan.
32. Joshi,Priya.(2013). Reading in the public Eye: the circulation of fiction in Indian *Report of the Indian Education commission 1882*, p. 116.
33. Mookerjee, Subodh.Kumar.(1969).Development of libraries and library science in India,Calcutta:The world press private Ltd.
34. Ibid.
35. Government of India Finance and commerce Department, Salaries, Establishment, etc., Education, *Home-Public*, No. 267, 1900, (1).
36. Marim, Joice. (2017), *Evolution and Transformation of Calcutta Public Library:1835-1953*,’ doctoral dessert. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi,(155).