The Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon was a water-shed in the history of British India. When he assumed office in December, 1898 the people of India, barring a handful of Marathi Chitpavan Brahmins, still regarded British rule over India as a blessing. Curzon, who regarded himself as a zealous protagonist and guardian angel of the British Indian Empire, sought feverishly to add to its strength and security by delivering a series of blows against institutions and communities marked out by him as constituting a potential menace to that Empire. But through the remorseless operation of the law that says every action produces an equal and opposite reaction, Curzon, when he resigned his office in August, 1905 had succeeded splendidly in implanting in Indian hearts strong and durable feelings of animosity towards that Empire, and in engendering in them a spirit of resistance and defiance to it. Bengal for a time was virtually in revolt against British rule.
Curzon's 'masterplan' of partitioning Bengal to destroy the nascent nationalism in Bengal incited militant nationalism among the Bengalee Youths. Although the movement was practically confined to the educated idealistic middle class youths of Bengal, its total impact was felt on the national life of Bengal. These militant youths organized various societies and associations in different parts of Bengal to achieve their ends. As a part of their sociopolitical activities many of these associations established public libraries to spread the message of nationalism. The small libraries which sprang up during this time were subscription libraries formed by the enthusiastic young men of the locality. Many proscribed and revolutionary documents were kept in these libraries, which were secretly circulated among the people. Books in English about the great leaders of the world as also Bengali translations of the heroes like Shivajee, Maxim Gorky, McSwiny, Napoleon, De Valera, Lenin and other revolutionaries of the world - episodes from the revolutionary history of other countries, religious literature of India and books of history and cultural movements in other countries - all such documents were very much popular and comprised the bulk of the stock of these libraries.
Monthly subscriptions of 6 paise or so was sufficient to get oneself enrolled as a member of the library. It is a fact that these tiny subscription libraries did actually play a great role in socio-cultural life of the country. In the rural areas where literacy was lower - the practice was to read out the books by one who knew how to read while others listened. In many such libraries actual adult education work was taken up - free night-schools were started. The schools were used by the volunteers to infuse a 'swadeshi' spirit in the minds of the people. These schools were avowedly anti-government. Their teachers were generally political agitators, some of them dismissed from government institutions on political grounds. A good many of the schools were also centres of physical culture. In the language of the police reports these schools were rendezvous of extremist politicians, local centres of sedition and the training ground of political activities.

The repression that followed, the police took the main role. The night classes, the gymnasiums, and the small public libraries had to be closed down or stop their activities. Many of the public libraries established during the time were frequently raided by police force of the British Government, their organisers were arrested and reading materials were taken away. Even the printing presses
could not escape from the wrath - some of them were closed down and some of the publications were proscribed.

These public libraries had a very precarious existence but many of them continued for long. The weakening of the 'swadeshi' movement and the ultimate scrapping of the partition of Bengal in 1912 brought a change in the whole situation. The constant pressure of the police was an important reason for the decay of these public libraries. And the trend continued till the early forties.

Thus the motivation of the founders of the small public libraries during the first decades of the 20th century was somewhat different from that of the people who had started the public subscription libraries in the second half of the 19th century. During the former period, there seems to be a shift of emphasis. Spread of education meant the spread of nationalistic education and more attention during the period was given to supply the reading materials in the regional languages. The phase however moved slowly.

In the second decade of the 20th century the persons responsible for advancing the library movement in British Bengal became very much conscious of the potential, role and need for organized public libraries. This awareness
was, in fact, generated through experience obtained and
lessons learnt from the previous few decades of library
history and obviously from the ultimate fate of those
libraries in Bengal. These persons realised that public
library system in the world, that was coming up, was not
merely an adjunct to the social component of education but
was itself a full fledged component by its own right and
will have relation with and influence upon all other com-
ponents of the society and will be concerned with its very
survival and development. Such an important social compo-
nent can not be permitted to be set up relying on the good
wishes and ideas of some individuals and groups however
extraordinary and well meaning they may be. With the expe-
riences behind them, they also realized that in order to
achieve professional objectives, a steady forum for the
library movement was all important. So the time was ready
for the germination of a new phase in the organized library
movement in Bengal.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BENGAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION : BEGIN-
NING OF ORGANISED LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN BENGAL**

In recognition of the fact that libraries, primarily
the public libraries can make the people informed in order
to increase the political consciousness in them, and to
expand the frontiers of knowledge the 39th session of Indian National congress at Belgaon, South India in 1924 discussed about the importance of founding libraries all through the length and breadth of country. Immediately after this session, the 3rd All India Library Conference was also held at the same venue under the presidency of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, a man of literary genius and a freedom fighter. This conference adopted resolution recommending formation of Library Association in all the provinces of the country for launching and stimulating library movement. Delegates from Bengal who attended the Conference returned to their province with the strong determination to organise a Library Association in Bengal.  

As a sequel to this, a conference of library workers of Bengal and persons interested in library movement was convened at the Albert Institute Hall, Calcutta on 20 December 1925. Mr. J.A. Chapman, the then librarian of Imperial Library, Calcutta, presided over the conference. A message from Rabindranath Tagore was read out at the conference. In view of the resolution of the All India Library Conference at Belgaon, the All Bengal Library Association was formed at the conference with a provisional general committee under the Presidentship of Rabindranath Tagore. Sushil Kumar Ghosh became its first Secretary. The conference urged
the libraries and reading centres throughout Bengal to form district library associations with a view to facilitating the working of the newly formed Association. Moreover, local boards, municipalities and other public organizations of the Province were requested to lend their helping hands to sustain and expand the public libraries within their areas.¹⁰

Within a very short period the Association was able to create interest and awareness about libraries. At the initiative of the Association, The Calcutta Corporation had decided to open children's libraries in its primary schools. The Corporation also appointed an Inspector of Libraries in order to inspect the libraries. Eighty libraries throughout Bengal were inspected. Lectures were also arranged by the Association at different places to create awareness about libraries among the masses, with such topics as, 'Library Movement and the Duty of Young Men', 'Library and the Society', etc.¹¹

The second All Bengal Library Conference was held in Calcutta in the year 1928. Sri Pramathanath Chaudhuri (Birbal), famous literateur was elected President of the conference and there were also Sectional Presidents for the following sections:
1) Library Movement in India - President: Sri Charu Chandra Roy

2) Cultural Education through Libraries - President: Srimati Sarala Devichaudhurani

3) Library Movement Abroad - President: Sri Ramananda Chatterjee

4) Library Administration - President: Sri Surendra Nath Kumar.

In this conference either papers were read or lectures were delivered on subjects relating to libraries and library movement or on allied topics by stalwarts like Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Dr. Kalidas Nag, Dr. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, Dr. Gurudas Roy, Prof. Nirmal Chandra Bhattacharya, Mr. John Van Manen, Sri Nalini-ranjan Pandit and Srimati Latika Ghosh.

The second All Bengal Library Conference referred to above discussed and passed resolutions on various aspects of library development. The salient features were:

a) The wealthy citizens were requested to found and support public libraries as part of their philanthropic activities.
b) The Local Government and the Director of Public Instruction were requested to provide for regular grants to libraries for their respective budgets.

c) The members of the Bengal Legislative Council were requested to move to enact legislation for the development of libraries.

d) There being no copyright library in the country then, it was resolved in the conference that the government be requested to make necessary arrangement to send free of cost one copy of each of the books printed and published in the country to the Visva-Bharti Library at Bolpur, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad at Calcutta and to the All Bengal Library Association at Calcutta.

e) The Universities of Dacca and Calcutta were requested to arrange for extension courses to facilitate training in library administration.

f) The government was requested not to shift the then Imperial Library from Calcutta to Delhi.

g) The government was requested to donate books, particularly to the Association.
h) The provincial government of Bengal was requested to withdraw its ban on the Bengali book entitled 'Pather Davi' by the noted Bengali Novelist, Sri Sarat Chandra Chatterjee.

i) The librarians of Bengal were requested to give adequate attention in collecting manuscripts and rare books and also to take necessary measures for their proper preservation.

j) Publishers of books and periodicals were requested to print their copies on good quality paper, so that these may be preserved for posterity.

The All Bengal Library Association was renamed as Bangiya Granthalaya Parishad in the conference referred to above which was later changed in 1933 to Bengal Library Association in English and Bangiya Granthagar Parishad in Bengali.

The Third All Bengal Library Conference was held in the premises of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta on 18 November 1931, under the Presidency of Mr. Newton Mohun Dutt, Curator of the State Libraries, Baroda.

Soon after the third conference, a meeting of some prominent library enthusiasts was held at the Imperial Library, Calcutta on the 3rd December, 1931 with a view to enlisting wider public sympathy for library movement. The meeting was attended by important personalities like Sri Bijoy Prasad.
Singh Roy, the then Minister for Local Self Government, Sri J.C. Mukherjee, the then Chief Executive Officer, Calcutta Corporation, Mr. Newton Mohun Dutt and many others. It was discussed in the meeting that a draft library Bill to be moved in the Bengal Legislative Council. Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya was entrusted with the work. He was at that time a member of the Bengal Legislative Council. He agreed to take the initiative on behalf of the Association.

THE ROLE OF KUMAR MUNINDRA DEB ROY MAHASAYA:

"The history of restoration of her (India's) glory will have a chapter on the construction of her library edifice. That chapter will show that the edifice was in no small measure helped by the self-imposed task of non-professional men like Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya."

This was what one of the pioneers of library movement in India, Dr. S.R. Ranganathan said about another pioneer, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya. He (Kumar Munindra Deb) was not a librarian. He came to this field out of his eagerness to serve the people. But library movement soon became his passion and mission.

Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya pointed out on several occasions that a library service in Bengal could never develop
without an adequate library law. Individual libraries may exist and flourish, but without an Act, an assured administration or an inter-library co-operation can not be developed.\textsuperscript{19}

On 1 February 1932, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya moved in the Bengal Legislative Council that the Council should recommend to the government that a 10 member committee of enquiry be formed to enquire into the library provision in the Province and to draw up a comprehensive scheme for future development. The purpose of the committee of enquiry would be to ascertain the conditions under which the existing libraries were working and to discover the type of organisation which would most completely and adequately cover the whole field. The Committee would examine the question of adult education also in all its aspects and if it succeeded in drawing up a comprehensive scheme, the Hon'ble Minister of Education would take it up in right earnest and undertake legislation on his own initiative.\textsuperscript{20}

While moving the resolution in the Legislative Council, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya gave detailed description of library system of different countries supported by statistics to bring home the fact that the government should take necessary steps to enact a library law on the basis of the report to be presented by the committee as such law was essential for systematic library service.\textsuperscript{21} He further pointed out
regretfully that Bengal happened to be the most backward province in India at least in library matters. Apart from Calcutta, there was only one library in the province which received State aid to the extent of Rs. 25/- a month. 

Roy Mahasaya's earnest efforts, however, were nipped in the bud by the then Education Minister, Mr. Khwaja Nazimuddin in a very clever move by appreciating the great concern of Roy Mahasaya in the spread, improvement and extension of libraries in Bengal on the one hand and on the other rejecting the resolution moved by Roy Mahasaya by citing fund shortage and the argument that the Provincial government was not directly and primarily responsible for the development of libraries.

INDIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION BORN:

The activities of Bangiya Granthalaya Parishad remained slowed down for sometime because of the constraints it faced for its move for legislation. But the organisers and enthusiasts of library movement of Bengal could not remain silent. In their bid to go in for popularising library movement in a better way they considered it expedient to establish Indian Library Association which took its birth in Calcutta in the year 1933.
To begin with, the founding fathers of Indian Library Association comprised of Dr. M.O. Thomas, Dr. Wali Mohammad, S. Mahendra Singh, K.M. Asadullah, Labhu Ram, AMR Montague, R. Manchanda, T.C. Dutta, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya, D. Trivikrama Rao, I. Venkata Ramanayya, Kshitendra Deb Roy Mahasaya, P.C. Neogi, Abdul Majid, A.C. Woolner, S.R. Ranganathan, R. Gopalan, B.S. Ramasubhier, Sarada Prasad Sinha, Saha Mohammed Kasem Ali Rasulpuri, Upendra Chandra Das, Mohammad Shafi, Yousufuddin Ahmad, K. Sellaih, Ram Labhaya, Abnashi Ram Talwar, S. Bashiruddin and Lala Sant Ram Bhatia who gave the Association three-fold objectives which included:

a) Promotion of library movement in India.

b) Promotion of formation of a trained class of librarians in India.

c) Improvement of the status of librarians.

Two more objectives were added in 1935

a) Promotion of research in library science;

b) Cooperation with international organisations with similar objectives.25

For initial years since inception the office of Indian Library Association was located in the Imperial Library, Calcutta. It was shifted to Delhi in 1946 and remained...
there till September 1953 and thereafter again it was shifted to Calcutta. In August 1964 the office of the Association finally moved to Delhi Public Library. At present the Association is housed in its own building in Delhi.26

REORGANISATION OF THE BENGAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION:

After the formation of the Indian Library Association, the organisers and enthusiasts of library movement of Bengal met at the Imperial Library to reorganise the Bengal Library Association. A provisional committee with Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya as President and Sri Tincouri Dutta, Sri Sachindranath Rudra and Janab A.F.M. Waheb as Joint Secretaries was appointed and entrusted with the task of reorganisation of Bengal Library Association. Lala Labburam and Dr. S.R. Ranganathan actively participated in the deliberations of the meeting regarding reorganisation work. Khan Bahadur Asadullah, the then librarian of the Imperial Library also took a prominent part in the re-organisation of the Association. The provisional committee framed a constitution and a set of Bye-laws for the Association, which were adopted by the Association at its first Annual General Meeting held at the Imperial Library on 19 August 1935. Since then there have been changes in the constitution and the bye-laws of the Association.
The main aims and objectives of the Association included:

a) Promotion of library movement in Bengal.

b) Organisation of library talks, lectures, conferences and exhibitions for developing awareness about libraries among the masses.

c) Publication of books, pamphlets, periodicals, charts, posters, etc. relating to library matters.

d) Movement for the enactment of such legislation as would be conducive to extension of library facilities, better utilisation and administration of libraries.

e) Improvement of the status of librarians.

f) Movement for securing grants from government and other public bodies for the public libraries and to help them in all possible ways.

g) Maintenance of a library and a museum of publications pertaining to the library movement.

h) Promotion of district and other library organisations.

i) Organisations for organising and conducting training classes for librarians, library assistants and library workers.
Being reorganised, the Bengal Library Association continued its efforts to create a good atmosphere for library development in Bengal through its various activities mentioned below:

FORMATION OF DISTRICT BRANCHES:

In order to extend its activities, the Bengal Library Association attempted to form district branches and organisations to take up work in connection with library movement and betterment of libraries in the districts. As a matter of fact several district organisations came into existence at different times and some of them were even very active and functioned very well. Nineteen district branches of the Association were instituted by 1937.28

SURVEY OF LIBRARIES:

In the year 1937 the Bengal Library Association completed a survey on the libraries in Calcutta and the adjoining district of Howrah. The report of the survey revealed an unsatisfactory state: libraries lacked trained personnel and were without sufficient financial support, had improperly organized its collections and lacked an enlightened policy.29
EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

The first library science training course in Bengal was introduced at Bansberia, Hooghly by the Bengal Library Association under the aegis of Hooghly District Library Association in June 1934. It was started as a test case to assess its efficacy, utility and whether it could be possible to conduct such a course by the Association in future for a longer period. This course was of 15 days duration. Being satisfied with the success of this course, the Bengal Library Association started the first summer training course in librarianship with 20 students for a month from the 1st May 1937 at the Asutosh College, Calcutta, under the directorship of Sri Niharranjan Roy, the then Librarian, Calcutta University. Eminent librarians and personalities like Mr. W.C. Wordsworth, Sri Pramil Chandra Bose, Sri Biswanath Banerjee, Sri Pulin Krishna Chatterjee, Sri Anath Nath Basu, Pandit Amulya Charan Vidyabhusan, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya, Sri Tincouri Dutta and Sri Bibhas Chandra Roy Chowdhury offered their voluntary services in conducting the training.  

The training course conducted by Bengal Library Association is continuing till today except for a short interruption for two years during the Second World War.

Along with the Bengal Library Association the Imperial Library of Calcutta also made a major contribution to formal
library education in Bengal when it started its programme in July 1935. Courses were offered in alternate years and each programme continued for a duration of six months. It continued up to 1945.

LIBRARY SCIENCE LITERATURE:

Every social movement is preceded by general awareness activities, which are generally carried out through different writings published in books, periodicals and newspapers. Library movement is no exception.

The first book in Bengali on library science was written by Sri Sushil Kumar Ghosh, the founder secretary of Bengal Library Association in the year 1930, under the title, "Library Andolan-O-Siksha-bistar" (Library Movement and Spread of Education). Dr. Kalidas Nag, a noted educationist wrote about the book,

"Library Movement and Spread of Education, by Sj Sushil Kumar Ghosh, B.L., struck me as a publication of rare volume in as much as it presents in a simple and engaging style the facts of Library Movement in India and abroad through the vernacular medium. Library Movement in the real sense, must be a mass movement and Mr. Ghosh has devoted several years of his life in the noble work of the extension of popular education, in the capacity of the
Honorary Organizing Secretary of the Bangiya Granthalaya Parishad (All Bengal Library Association) has earned the permanent gratitude of the public by compiling this volume which should be in every village library and in the hand of every teacher. The book is a challenge to the conscience of every educated man of our country, who should come forward to help Mr. Ghosh and his colleagues in the great national work that they are doing." Some other worthy books published in Bengali during the period under review are as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Name of the Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya</td>
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<td>Sri Pramil Chandra Basu</td>
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<td>Granthakarmama.</td>
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Apart from publication of books, pioneers of the library movement in Bengal also contributed professional articles of popular types in various newspapers and magazines. Sri Pramil Chandra Basu contributed a series of articles in the 'Ananda Bazar Patrika', a daily newspaper in Bengali published from Calcutta and in a weekly Bengali Journal, Desh, also published from Calcutta. Sri Basu also compiled an author's table built on the model of 'Cutter's Table', for Books written in
Bengali language. Sri Bishwanath Banerjee's article on 'Public Libraries in Bengal', 'Charging System of Indian Universities' Libraries', 'Library Movement in Indian Jails', 'A short History of the Calcutta University Library' appeared in the following Indian journals:

Calcutta Review
Modern Librarian
Library Journal. 33

The first periodical on library science was published by the Bengal Library Association in the year 1937 under the title "Bengal Library Association Bulletin" — and in Bengali, "Bangiya Granthagar Parishad Patrika". It was published in both English and in Bengali and continued to exist till 1951. The Association also for sometime subsidised and managed publication of a Bengali periodical called 'Pathagar' which was brought out by the Ballygunge Institute, a constituent member of the Association and was run as the organ of the Association.

However, the most outstanding activity of the Bengal Library Association was the publication of Bengal Library Directory in the year 1942 containing valuable statistical information about libraries in Bengal. From this Directory we come to know several key information about public libraries
established in Bengal before 1942.

In the preface of the Bengal Library Directory, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy Mahasaya, the then Chairman, Bengal Library Association wrote:

"The want of a Directory of libraries in Bengal was keenly felt since the inauguration of the library movement in this province, now about eighteen years ago. With a view to remove this long felt want we decided, some five years back, to compile a Directory. The task was not an easy one. We appealed to those concerned for co-operation in the columns of newspapers, but the response was very poor indeed. We then started correspondence with individual libraries, and materials began to reach us in dribbles. After strenuous efforts for all these years, we have now been able to compile and publish materials regarding 1,300 public libraries, 73 university and college libraries, 2,016 school libraries and 79 special libraries. ... We do neither claim infallibility in the compilation nor claim it to be a complete list of libraries in the province. We believe there are many more public and school libraries which have been left out - of course, not intentionally, but for non-supply of information by the institutions concerned."
ORGANISATION OF LIBRARY CONFERENCES:

As a part of the library movement activities, the Bengal Library Association organised several conferences in different parts of the Province. Although these conferences were organised by the Association it was not restricted only to the members of the Association. Library organisers, administrators and people interested in library affairs could attend the conference. Presidents of the conferences were chosen from librarians as well as non-librarians. Many eminent personalities of Bengal presided over the conferences. In between 1925-1947 eight conferences were held. The topics of discussion varied from conference to conference.35

The Bengal Library Association continued its efforts to create a good atmosphere for library movement but the Second World War slowed its activities for sometime. The last working year for the Bengal Library Association in British Bengal was 1946-7. In August 1947, when India achieved independence, the Bengal Library Association with all its assets remained in Calcutta in the state of West Bengal, and East Bengal, (then eastern Pakistan, now Bangladesh) was left with a few relatively inactive district associations only. The Bengal Library Association, however, did not stop its activities. Even after independence the library movement in West Bengal was continued through the Bengal Library Association.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid., p.162.


4. Ibid.


11. Ibid.


16. Ibid., p.4.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.


26. Ibid., p.3.


29. Ibid., pp. 66-8.


35. Appendix - IV.