INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, man has sought knowledge of the seas and planets, of growing things, of the ways things work, and of man himself. Men seek to know of the atom's secret and the mysteries of medicine, and of the ways of life of man in distant lands. They seek further knowledge of the earth, the skies and the space beyond. As more and more men seek to learn the things that books can teach - as this knowledge swells and spreads, a long felt need grows all the greater - the need for many books within the reach of all men. To serve this need, expanding with the ever-widening boundaries of knowledge itself, is the challenging task and the purpose of the libraries.

The word, 'Library' derived from the Latin 'Libraria' means a 'place in which books, manuscripts, musical scores or other literary and artistic materials are kept, for use but not for sale.' Thus an assembly of books or graphic records is not a library, nor is a library only a place where books or graphic records are preserved. A library is an organisation. It is a system designed to preserve and facilitate the use of graphic records. The library is the logical laboratory for learning about human interaction
with information systems and intellectual processes associated with information acquisition, integration and problem solving. The library may from time to time assume certain marginal functions, but its basic purpose remains generally the same - a link in the communication chain that is concerned with the custody of recorded knowledge. Its fundamental concern is with the communication of knowledge, ideas and thought.

The Indian Sub-continent has been exposed to a wide range of cultural and educational experiences and heritages from ancient to modern times. In ancient India corporate educational institutions in connection with the Buddhist Monasteries were evolved. Library invariably constituted a part of such institutions. During the Mughal period libraries developed in the private collections of kings and emperors, sometimes in temples supported by the rulers. Both in Ancient and later in Mughal India, education, culture and libraries were patronized by the uppermost strata of the population. Royal, personal and institutional libraries allowed limited access to the few and were in almost exclusive possession of the scholarly individuals and the people with status. The majority of the populace was taken to be mentally torpid and intellectually anaemic, not fit for the
use of the reading-material available in the libraries. The outlook of the libraries was very narrow and they were not considered as an effective instrument of social education to one and all.

But as the position of the English changed from traders to rulers, a completely new phase began on the Indian library scene. In 1757 Clive's victory at Plassey enabled the English to have territorial domination over Bengal and its dependencies. Since after 1757 Calcutta became the nerve centre of the activities of the Englishmen in India, it was in this city, the first city in Asia, that the influencing factors of the eighteenth century England first started operating. Within a decade after 1757 the English and European inhabitants in Calcutta were large in number. The inhabitants being now not traders merely, but of different walks of life, the cultural forces of the eighteenth century became active. It was the age which gave rise to the newspaper, the magazine and the novel. It was the age when people gathered in rendezvous like clubs and coffee-houses and expressed ideas and opinions, which involved discussion and criticism. These phenomena were brought about by the emergence of the literate reader, a species different from the earlier Learned reader, who grew in plenty and developed the habit of reading.
for information and entertainment. The new social condition made it necessary that there should be collection of reading material which the inhabitants could use commonly. The gradually growing English community in India started its own library activities. With the passage of time, the library efforts of the English were expanded to involve local people from common walks of life. This expansion provided the base for the modern development of libraries in Bengal and other parts of India.

The object of this thesis is to trace the growth and development of public libraries in Bengal (after independence West Bengal) since the inception of Calcutta Public Library. The period covered being roughly a little more than 150 years since the inception of Calcutta Public Library in 1836. History of public libraries is viewed here as study of the development and progress of such libraries from 1836 to 1991. The period selected for this survey has a great historical importance. The so-called nineteenth century renaissance in Bengal was in its first phase. Its results, direct or indirect, in the field of literature, arts and sciences, political activity and thought, journalism, social reform, religious ideas and activities, education etc. were more or less evident during this period. The age was enriched by the thoughts of great writers and
thinkers of the Bengalee society. It also witnessed the growth of national political organisations of different types. The great 'Swadeshi' upheaval and boycott movement against the Partition of Bengal and the crystallization of the national education movement occurred in this period. The growth and proliferation of public libraries during the period are viewed against the social and educational background of the time and place. It traces the various changes in these libraries, the nature, form and direction of the changes. The causes of the changes also have been considered. Various political, social, education, economic movements in India and especially in Bengal had an impact on the public libraries in this area. All these factors and their role in the development of public libraries form an important part of this study. The entire process of growth and development of public libraries have been traced from the beginning in order to enlighten the discussion and make the picture complete. Sincere attempt has also been made to show the impact of these developments in later days with particular reference to post-independence West Bengal.

Although some earlier surveys have been undertaken against the broad spectrum of libraries, the present work is the first to focus on the growth and development of public libraries in Bengal (after Independence West Bengal) alone.
The present work is intended to fill up an important gap and illuminate an important aspect of the cultural history of Bengal. In this study the term, 'public library' has been used in the restricted sense of a 'subscription library'. Any library which is open to any one, belonging to any caste, creed or sex, on the payment of the prescribed subscription has been designated here as a 'public library'.

During the period under review the province of Bengal underwent several territorial reorganisations with the gradual expansion of British rule in India. The present state of West Bengal is a part of the former province of Bengal in pre-independence India. In 1947, when India achieved independence, the province of Bengal was partitioned, the bigger eastern part being separated from the rest of India to form the new state of East Pakistan. Later on 1971, it came out from Pakistan's rule and became independent Bangladesh. The smaller western portion was named West Bengal and at the time was divided into two detached areas - one smaller northern unit, including the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar and a much bigger southern unit, comprising the districts of West Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura, Hooghly, Howrah, Calcutta, 24-Parganas and Midnapore. In 1957, a
narrow corridor, formerly a part of the neighbouring State of Bihar was transferred and attached between the northern and southern portions of West Bengal to give the State a territorial unity; most of the Purulia district was also transferred to West Bengal. All these changes of political boundaries lead to difficulties in research. For example, census data for Purulia, naturally, were not included within the West Bengal figures before the 1961 census and this leads occasionally to non-availability and non-comparability of data for the Purulia district. In this study the term 'Bengal' refers to in a loose sense.

By 'Bengal' the investigator shall assume to cover the area now contained by the State of West Bengal (post-independence West Bengal).

The materials for this thesis have been collected as far as possible from the original sources available in India. The official proceedings of the Government of Bengal and India, reports of different commissions, gazetteers, census reports, newspapers and periodicals, literary works, reports of different associations and libraries have been consulted. Secondary works published before and during the period under review have also been taken into consideration as far as available and possible. Some informations have been collected
from the office of the Directorate of Library Services, Govt. of West Bengal and office of the Refugee Rehabilitation Commissioner, Govt. of West Bengal. The investigator also visited many of the public libraries in different districts of West Bengal in order to gather his materials. Oral evidence has been collected from people connected with some of the libraries.

The investigator with due humility admits that some loopholes may be found here and there. Insurmountable barriers are always there to thwart the attempt. They are:

1) Library services are closed almost twice a week and invariably on Sundays. So the investigator could not meet the wider section of the reading public.

2) The public libraries established during the period under review mostly depended for service, on voluntary workers. There was no government help to begin with. Lack of trained personnel and frequent shifting of libraries for accommodation resulted into the loss of valuable documents.

3) Visits to all public libraries under discussion being impossible, only the principal libraries were visited as these reflect the trend of the time.
The study is presented in eight chapters including conclusion. In these chapters important landmarks in the development of public libraries in the State have been enumerated. A brief account of the progress made by the libraries is given. The changing character of the libraries and the aspects of change have been reviewed. The contributions made by these public libraries and their achievements are discussed. The problems faced by these libraries are also considered. Efforts have been made to study the growth of public libraries systematically, phase by phase, from the beginning.

In the first introductory chapter, the early English settlement and the rise of the proprietary commercial libraries in Bengal have been depicted. The second chapter deals with the genesis of Calcutta Public Library. Chapter three traces the establishment and growth of public libraries in different districts from 1850 to 1899. Aspects of development, the changing character of public libraries, the beginning of Indianisation of libraries have been studied in greater details. The introduction of printing ushered a new age and pushed up the book production and library development in Bengal. In the third chapter the role of the printing press has also been delineated. In the fourth chapter an attempt
has been made to trace the development from 1900 to 1947. The formation of Bengal Library Association marks an important landmark in the history of the library movement in Bengal. Contributions made by Bengal Library Association and others to the development of public libraries in Bengal have been discussed in detail with relevant statistics in this chapter. The fifth chapter contains an analysis of the role and policy of the Government of West Bengal to the development of public libraries in West Bengal during the first thirty years of independence, from 1947 to 1977. The sixth chapter deals exclusively with the library legislation in West Bengal. In chapter seven, the public library development since 1979 (post-legislation period) has been discussed critically. Chapter eight sums up the total enquiries of the study and attempts to arrive at certain conclusions. At the end, the appendices provide a much fuller glimpse of original documents.

The investigator wishes to establish the following hypotheses of the study:

1) That the public library movement is the outgrowth of previous commercial and circulating libraries of the Old Calcutta, run by private individuals.
2) That the first phase of the movement was sporadic, pioneered by idealist youths of Bengal.

3) That the next phase of the movement was conducted mainly by the Bengal Library Association in an organized way.

4) That immediately after the independence of India, government partially involved itself through grants and establishment of government and government sponsored public libraries in West Bengal.

5) That the public library movement entered into a new phase both quantitatively and qualitatively with the enactment of the West Bengal Public Libraries Act.

Chronological Developmental Stages in the West Bengal Public Library System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Nature of Endeavours</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Completely private/non-government</td>
<td>1836-1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>endeavour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Partially government endeavour</td>
<td>1947-1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Extensive government endeavour</td>
<td>1979 -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The very nature of the subject has necessitated the use of many Indian words and terms including Bengali and Arabic, but English equivalents have been given. The correct spelling or proper names has been used as far as practicable. However, in some places only the roman transliteration of titles of books and works have been given.