In the days of the Great Mughals, 'Kalikata' (Calcutta) was the name of a small village as well as a large revenue administrative unit or 'parganah'. On 24th August, 1690 at a mid-day the foundation of a new metropolis was laid by Mr. Job Charnock, an agent of the East India Company. The present city of Calcutta stood formerly for three villages - Sootaluty (Sutanuti), Kalikata, Govindapore. There were some fortunate circumstances which favoured the English position. The main was the Englishmen gained the favour of Azim-us-shan, the grandson of the Emperor Aurungzeb, as Nawab of Bengal in 1698 to purchase three villages from the land-owners, Savarna Chaudhury of Barisha against the sum of rupees 1300. Since then Calcutta continued to attract large number of inhabitants. In 1707 Calcutta was declared a separate Presidency. Again the East India Company obtained permission from the Mughal Empire to purchase 38 villages extending down both sides of the river Hooghly. With the right the Company firmly established their foothold and the settlement grew into a thriving town. After the battle of Plassey (1757), the English supremacy was established clearly in Bengal. And gradually Calcutta became the
capital of India in 1773 and also became the seat of the Central Government of British India under the East India Company, with a new eminence and increased importance. As a result, people of many nationalities, trades and occupations settled in Calcutta in larger numbers.

The earliest reliable data on Calcutta can be obtained from a census of Calcutta taken by the Justices of Peace. In this report, earlier estimates of Calcutta's population have been mentioned - that of 1831 by Captain Steel, of 1837 by Captain Birch, Superintendent of Police, and of 1850 by Mr. Simms in his Report on the survey of Calcutta. The figures read:

1831  ...  1,87,081  
1837  ...  2,29,714  
1850  ...  3,61,619  
1866  ...  3,77,924

These figures offer a good index of Calcutta's growing population. The expanding population included civilians, government employees, merchants and traders of English, Armenian, Indo-European and other national origins, some with native and some with English educations. The white population of Calcutta had vastly increased by this time. In 1837, Captain Birch, Superintendent of Police, took a census of the population of Calcutta, according to which the European population
including Anglo-Indians was 11,065. The Indian population was larger. The city flourished as the educational and cultural centre of British India. A great number of reading public had grown up there unlike any that had existed before. It asked for many sorts of reading materials for information and entertainment. The book trade in England found a ready market in the city owing not only to the large population of Europeans but also the fast developing taste among Indians for reading matter in English. There were at this time 21 newspapers in the English language, all published by Europeans, of which 4 were dailies, and there were 15 native papers. In addition, there were 4 monthly magazines and 6 annual publications of almanac and directory types. There were plenty of printing presses from which books were printed in stupendous number.

The people of Calcutta began to have some limited experience with libraries in the second half of the eighteenth century. The early libraries included subscription and proprietary libraries, academic libraries offering some public services, literary societies etc. But they were exclusive in nature and lacked facilities for satisfactory services. Lacking the participation and widespread involvement of the local population forced particularly the subscription and proprietary libraries to become
In this perspective the establishment of the Calcutta Public Library in 1836 was a natural phenomenon. An initiative in this direction was taken when Sir Charles Metcalfe, the then acting Governor General repealed all restrictions on the press embodied in the Press Acts of 1823, 1825 and 1827 for Bengal, Bombay and Madras respectively that had previously restrained the freedom of the press and promulgated a new Act with the unanimous support of his council, the memorable Act No. XI of 1835 that reasonably secured the freedom of the press in India. Free expression of thought for all classes of people in the country was the principle behind the passing of the Act. The leading citizens of Calcutta decided that the establishment of a public library would be an appropriate gesture to commemorate this important occasion.

A number of public meetings were held, the first on 20 August 1835, the convener being the Sheriff of the city. The assembled group decided to open a public subscription for the erection of a building to be called The Metcalfe Library. The building would be an ornamental and commodious, would be offered free of rent and in trust for the reception of a Public Subscription Library, to be formed on a scale, and conducted in a liberal manner worthy of Calcutta. On 29 August 1835, the local press published the following notice:
"Public Library

The following gentlemen have declared themselves favourable to the principles upon which it is intended to found the Public Library in Calcutta. It is requested that those who are equally well disposed to the project, and to whom books have not been sent, will forward their names to the editors of Hurkaru, Courier and Englishman:

Sir Charles Metcalfe
Sir Edward Ryan
The Bishop of Calcutta
Mr. H.T. Prinsep
Sir J.P. Grant
Mr. H.M. Parker
Dwarakanath Tagore
Russumoy Dutt
Dr. Strong ... et al."8

Following the public meeting and the announcement in the press, many subscribers came forward, and soon their names and the amounts subscribed appeared in the local newspapers.9

It was another meeting, held eleven days after, that was on 31 August 1835, some broad-based principles were
worked upon and a preliminary blueprint of the proposed library emerged. This meeting was presided over by Sir John Peter Grant, a judge of the Supreme Court. The resolution passed at the meeting worded and ran as follows:

"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 wants of the entire community in every department of literature." A provisional committee was appointed to frame a set of rules or regulations for the management and use of the Library. The committee was empowered to apply for the temporary use of some rooms in the Town Hall for the purpose of the Library. However Dr. F.P. Strong, Civil Surgeon of the 24 Parganas offered the lower part of his house for the Library. This gracious offer was thankfully accepted. The Provisional Committee was further empowered to enquire into the means of procuring books in Calcutta and to make application to the Government for such assistance in this respect and the method for receiving subscriptions, and such donation of books, from the patrons of the institution.
The Provisional Committee was formed by twenty-four members of which Baboo Russekrishen Mullick and Baboo Russomoy Dutt were Indians. The other twenty-two members were:

- Sir Edward Ryan
- Sir J.P. Grant
- Mr. W.H. Macnaghten
- Mr. C.W. Smith
- Colonel Dunlop
- The Rev. H. Fisher
- Mr. Dickens
- Dr. Ranken
- The Rev. James Charles
- Mr. J.C. Marshman
- Mr. John Bell
- Mr. W.P. Grant
- The Rev. Dr. St Leger
- Mr. James Kyd
- Capt. D.L. Richardson
- Capt. Thompson
- Mr. James Prinsep
- Mr. W.M. Wollaston
- Dr. Ranken
- The Rev. James Charles
- Mr. J.C. Marshman
- Mr. John Bell

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The twenty four members of the provisional committee were divided into sub-committees of four or five, each sub-committee in charge of a specific aspect of the Library.

The committee discussed matters relating to finance, qualifications of the proprietors, the number of subscribers, and the general plans of circulation. The resolution passed at the meeting ran as follows:

"Resolved - That the property of the Library be vested in trustees for the benefit and use of shareholders, and that the following payments do constitute persons, proprietors and subscribers.

Proprietors - Every person subscribing 300 rupees in one payment, or in three payments of 100 rupees, each 100 rupees being paid down, and the remaining instalments at intervals of six and twelve months, to be considered proprietors.

The shares of original proprietors subscribing within the period of one twelve-month, to be transferable on such fine or conditions as the Provisional Committee shall determine. The question of transfer of future shares to be left open to the committee."
Subscribers - The subscription to the Library to be as follows:

1st Class - Entrance 20 rupees per mensem, for every month subsequent to the first. Such subscribers of two years standing or upwards, to be entitled to become shareholders, by an additional payment of 200 rupees.

2nd Class - Entrance 16 rupees, and 4 rupees per mensem, for every month subsequent to the first. Subscribers of this class of 4 years standing to be entitled to become shareholders by an additional payment of 200 rupees.

3rd Class - No entrance fee. A subscription of 2 rupees per mensem payable from the commencement of the first month.

Donors of books and others, on the recommendation of the committee, may be nominated honorary members by a general meeting of proprietors.

No books to be taken out of the library, without a deposit being made; the amount to be regulated by a committee to be appointed annually by the proprietors out of their own body in such manner as shall be hereafter decided.
No books or periodicals to be taken out of the Library, until they shall have laid ten days upon the table; after which period proprietors or subscribers of the 1st and 2nd classes, will have the privilege of taking them out and reading them in circulation, preference being given to the proprietors and subscribers of the 1st class who may apply within a month after the arrival or purchase of such books.

All books to be delivered out in order of application, subject to the above preference.

No other class to be permitted to take any books out of the Library without the permission in writing of the Committee."^{15}

An attempt was thus made to structure and operate the Library as a joint stock concern of shareholders, rather in the form of a commercial house, the merchandise being books and other reading materials. The idea of a jointly owned proprietary library mirrored the contemporary mores of Calcutta society, reflecting a predominantly mercantile attitude."^{16}

It may be mentioned here that Prince Dwarakanath Tagore became the first Proprietor of the Calcutta Public
Library. In grateful remembrance of his patronage the citizens of Calcutta installed his marble bust in the premises of the Calcutta Public Library, which still adorns the entrance of the National Library at Belvedere.  

Mr. J.H. Stocqueler (pseudonym of Joachim Heyward Siddons), the editor of the 'Englishman' became the Hon. Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Calcutta Public Library. The work of the Provincial Committee of the Library progressed satisfactorily. Having considered the various points, the committee called a public meeting at the Town Hall on the 31st October, 1835 at which they apprised the public of the development about the Library by submitting a report of their work. The committee recommended that, for the purpose of insuring attendance at the Library from an early hour in the morning until a late hour at night, two under-librarians would be required. The committee also thought that it would be satisfactory to those who would resort to the Library if one of the under Librarians were an East Indian and the other a Hindoo. The committee was satisfied that highly respectable and well qualified young men of these classes would readily give their services for Rs. 50 each per month. The committee further recommended that the rest of the establishment should consist of:
A Sirca at Rs. 16 by the month
Two Dhuftries at Rs. 12 " " "
A Bearer at Rs. 5 " " "
A Peon at Rs. 5 " " "
A Durwan at Rs. 5 " " "

making a total for the establishment of servants (employees), including the salaries of the Librarians, Rs. 343 monthly.\(^{20}\)

W.H. Stacy was appointed Librarian. But the authorities desired to pay him Rs.100/- per month. As regards the Sub-Librarians, only one post was sanctioned, and the situation was offered to Peary Chand Mitra who later became the acknowledged father of the Bengali novel.\(^{21}\) Public response towards establishment of this Library was immediate and widespread. That the Library created an interest was evidenced from the subscriptions and donations of books that started to come in. Within a very short period the committee acquired a fairly large collection of books. As mentioned earlier, Fort William College as an educational institution had come to an end in 1830 but its rich Library was there. The committee, in the month of September 1835, applied to Government to allow under such rules as it might approve of, the subscribers to the Public Library to enjoy the use of the books belonging to Fort William College.\(^{22}\)
Consequent upon this request for the transfer of books, I.W.I. Ouseley, Secretary to the College, was directed by the Government to furnish a report of the existing state of the library of the college of Fort William with complete list of books, distinguishing the European from the Oriental Works. The report that was submitted contained three lists covering all the books in the Fort-William College Library:

- No. 1, European printed books covering 5,224 volumes;
- No. 2, Oriental printed books amounting to about 11,718 volumes;
- No. 3, Oriental manuscripts amounting to 4,225.

The Oriental books and manuscripts went to the Asiatic Society. As regards the European books, the Provisional Committee of the Library managed to get those books for their Library.

Regarding the endeavour to collect books for the Public Library the committee observed:
Taking the proportion of volumes to works given by the books presented to the Library, and applying it to the 1,772 works lent it by Government, the collection of books at starting would consist of about 5,000 volumes from Government, 1,500 volumes of donations; together 6,500 volumes. Unfortunately, the Provisional Committee did not have the opportunity to select good books from the College of Fort William collection. The initial collection collected was not at all rich. The Library was therefore deficient in contemporary publications and in the departments of Poetry and Drama, Prose works of Imagination, Miscellaneous Works, History, Biography, Politics, Jurisprudence, Science and Arts.

The committee therefore suggested:

"A sum of not less than Rs.20,000 should be placed at the disposal of a committee, for the purpose of purchasing such standard works as they may think advisable, in addition to those now available to the subscribers, in order to supply the deficiencies."

The committee pointed out that:

"In addition to the important assistance already afforded by public and private liberality, a large sum of
money, and great attention in laying it out are necessary in order to provide a library sufficiently extensive to supply the wants of the entire community of Calcutta in every department of literature."

On the 8th March, 1836, a general meeting of Proprietors and Subscribers of the Calcutta Public Library was held at the Library room. The Hon. Sir J. Peter Grant was in the Chair. In this meeting rules for the circulation of books of the Calcutta Public Library among the Proprietors and Subscribers were proposed and ratified. These rules were as proposed earlier by the Provisional Committee in their meeting, attention having been paid to such modifications as the different circumstances of this city required.

The Calcutta Public Library formally opened its doors for reader's service at Dr. Strong's residence on 21 March 1836, and the library hours were fixed from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. After a temporary shift to the Fort William College in July 1841, it was finally removed to the Metcalfe Hall in 1844, where it offered services to the citizens of Calcutta for many years thereafter. The Metcalfe Hall was erected as a public tribute to Sir Charles Metcalfe who restored the emancipation of the press by repealing the restrictive Press Acts of 1823, 1825 and 1827.
Besides the Proprietors and subscribers, poor students and others were allowed to use the library free of charge for a specified period of time. The Library did not work on Sundays and on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day : 1
- Saraswati Puja : 1
- Queen's Birthday : 1
- Good Friday : 1
- Durga Puja : 5
- Christmas Day : 1

Total : 10 days.

The Librarian assisted the members in choosing suitable books and also answered reference queries. Facilities for study in the Library premises were quite inadequate. For this reason, at the beginning, the members were allowed to borrow reference books. But later, issues of books for use at home was stopped.

It may be noted that many eminent citizens of Calcutta both Indians and Europeans joined the Library either as Proprietors or as subscribers over the years. Among the Indian patrons mention may be made of Dwarakanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Ram Gopal Ghose, Rustomjee Cowasjee,

It was indeed a proud privilege of the Calcutta Public Library to receive such liberal patronage both from the Indian and the European citizens of Calcutta. No other institution of the period could claim such patronage from the general public of both the communities.

From its inception and through its initial years, the Calcutta Public Library passed through many difficulties and hard times. In spite of these setbacks, it continued to offer services to the patrons, and it expanded gradually. The circulation figures furnished in the Annual Meeting of 1837 showed that 535 periodicals (perhaps issues), and 2,156 works comprising 4,105 volumes circulated during the preceding year. This statistics were quite encouraging when viewed against the background and circumstances that had preceded the opening of the Library. It also showed that the Library was becoming a popular institution. A Catalogue of the Library was
published in 1846, with a brief history, statistics, accounts, and facts about the working of the Library during the first ten years. In the brief history was noted that the number of proprietors and subscribers had risen from sixty-three to ninety-five. The annual circulation statistics for both works and volumes for the period 1836-46 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Works</th>
<th>Volumes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1836-37</td>
<td>1,794</td>
<td>3,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837-38</td>
<td>5,137</td>
<td>9,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838-39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16,716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839-40</td>
<td>11,503</td>
<td>22,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840-41</td>
<td>13,407</td>
<td>27,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841-42</td>
<td>10,784</td>
<td>20,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842-43</td>
<td>8,764</td>
<td>17,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843-44</td>
<td>9,054</td>
<td>16,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844-45</td>
<td>9,025</td>
<td>17,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845-46</td>
<td>13,309</td>
<td>26,226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the catalogue it appears that the Library had fairly large collections in the popular subjects of the time. Different subject collections included -

East India affairs - 470 sets in 1,306 volumes
Voyages and Travels - 597 sets in 1,009 volumes
Prose works of the imagination - 793 sets in 1,903 volumes.

Latin and Greek - 643 sets in 1,282 volumes.

The collection also contained books on divinity in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew and Oriental Languages.

The periodical collection was quite impressive, holding 107 sets in 1,540 volumes (presumably issues).35

An appraisal of the categories of books purchased between 1858-1872 reflected the varied reading habits of the people of Calcutta who were expected to patronize the library.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Theology, Philosophy, Grammar, Pure &amp; Applied Sciences, Professional Works, etc.</th>
<th>History, Biography, Travels, East Indies</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Poetry, Novels</th>
<th>French Works</th>
<th>Periodicals</th>
<th>Misc.</th>
<th>Total (including periodicals)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Books for the Library were selected by a committee and were purchased both from the markets of London and Calcutta. In selecting the books, the committee did not always respond to the actual demand of the members. Since it was a Public Library, there was sometimes great demand for light literature. But the committee purchased a large number of serious works for research purposes.\(^3\)

The Calcutta Public Library published a delightful catalogue in 1855 with some pretentions to systematic arrangement. The catalogue was of an octavo format and ran 644 pages with an appendix purporting to be a catalogue of the vernacular literature committee's Library compiled by James Long. An interesting feature of this catalogue was that the Bengali titles were translated into English, the volume, the pagination, date of publication and price of each volume was recorded. For example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Rs.</th>
<th>As</th>
<th>P.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shabdambudhi or Dictionary</td>
<td>in Bengali of 36,000 words, 1853, p. 604</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>693</td>
<td>On Salvation</td>
<td>1853, p. 40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The appendix of the Catalogue contained 56 pages. The title page, being a pleasant one, contained a wood-cut
of the Metcalfe Hall. The entries in the Catalogue ran to full length of the page and contained the barest information about a book, namely, its format, its place of publication and the year of publication. Entries in the Catalogue were arranged alphabetically under author under each subject.  

At the initial stage, the Library was open access. The members could pick out any book from the shelves according to their choice. But gradually, large number of books and journals were found missing. The reason for such loss was attributed to the open shelf system. It was decided therefore that Requisition Slips (with the following columns: Date, Press-Mark, Title, Signature of the member) would be observed in accordance with the rules observed in large libraries in Europe. The fixed location system for shelving of books was also introduced. It was decided in 1853 to classify the books according to 28 main subject divisions with a number of subdivisions. The contents page of the Catalogue of Calcutta Public Library published in 1855 lists the subjects under broad headings, like:

Theology
Philosophy
Jurisprudence
History
Biography and Memoirs
Antiquities
The East Indies, including China
Voyages and Travels
Mathematics
Pure and Mixed
Practical Science
Natural History
Medicine
Fine Arts
Poetry and Drama
Prose Works of Imagination
Grammar and Philology
Miscellaneous Literature
Cyclopaedial Works
Bibliography and Printing
Periodicals
Greek Works
Latin Works
French Works
Italian Works
Spanish and Portuguese Works
Northern Literature
Hebrew and Oriental Works

This arrangement continued till the end of the career of the Library with some modifications from time to time.
With the available facts and figures it can be assumed that the Calcutta Public Library had a successful existence with the passing of time and that it expanded in collections and with a growing list of patrons. But in spite of the success and expansion of the Library, it appears that the affairs of the Library were in a sorry state in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The principal cause of this was its poor financial position. A Sub-Committee was appointed in 1873 with a view to finding out ways and means for improving the financial position of the Library. As already stated, the Library's income was derived from the fees paid by the proprietors, and the subscriptions from the members, and donations from time to time. But little success was achieved. In 1880 the management of the Library applied for Government aid. The Government aid was received for a few years. When a sum of rupees 200/- per month was requested for, the Government replied that it could not contribute to an institution run for the benefit of a few. Then came Mackenjee Plan. Mr. A. Mackenjee was a Proprietor of the Library and a high official of the Government of Bengal. He suggested that the Library should be converted into a Municipal Library and should be opened to the public free of charge. Then the Government would not find any difficulty in contributing towards its maintenance when the
institution would be run for the benefit of the public instead of for a limited number of proprietors and subscribers. 42

The chief recommendations of Mr. Mackenjee were as follows:

1. The Library and all its assets to be transferred to the Municipality of Calcutta where it is to be maintained in perpetuity as a free library where all respectable citizens would be admitted for purposes of reading on the premises.

2. The Free Library would have a lending department open only to the subscribers and to the holders of shares in the Old (Present) Public Library. 43

The management of the Library in all departments would consist of the members as follows: 6 nominees of the Municipality; 4 elected representatives of the proprietors of the Old (Present) Library; 2 nominees of the Government of Bengal.

The opening hours of the Free Library would be:

Free Reading Room : 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.
Lending Department : 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on all week days.
The recommendations of Mr. Mackenjee were accepted and the formal transfer was effected on 20 April 1890. The Government of Bengal donated a sum of rupees 5,000 for the first year and the grant from the Municipality was rupees 8,000. Donations raised from individuals amounted to approximately rupees 3,500. A big room belonging to the Agri Horticultural Society was acquired on payment of rupees 800/- per year for the Reading Room, which was opened to the public in July 1890. At once it became very popular. In March 1891, 1465 Europeans and 958 Indians used it; but in the next year the position was reversed: 1633 Indians and 1138 Europeans used it.

The post of the Librarian on a scale of Rs.100-10-200/- was advertised. Bipin Chandra Pal, who later became a famous political leader was appointed Librarian. He joined the post on 20 August 1890. Bipin Chandra Pal resigned after about 18 months due to some differences of opinion with the management of the Library. The next Librarian was Radha Raman Mitra.

The reorganisation of the Calcutta Public Library did not improve matters and the condition of the Library continued to decline gradually. The chief reasons were: the Municipality did not take up the responsibility to the
extent it should have taken in running the Library. The maintenance grant of rupees 8,000 sanctioned by the Municipality was found absolutely inadequate in view of its increasing number of readership as a consequence of throwing the doors of the Library open to all free of charge. The Government aid was also not forthcoming. And by 1900 the Calcutta Public Library turned into a sick concern.46

Later attempts to take over the control of the Library by the Government was made by Lord Curzon who wanted to make the Library a library of reference, a working place for students and a repository of materials for the future historians of India - in which every work written about India at anytime can be consulted. Curzon's ambition was to make Calcutta worthy capital of the British empire in the east and to present it with a library worthy of the same. After prolonged negotiations the final seal of the Calcutta Public Library was put in when Government secured full official control over the affairs of the Calcutta Public Library and the then Imperial Library was founded in Calcutta on 30 January, 1903.47 These arrangements were confirmed and validated by the Imperial Library Act of 1902 (I of 1902). Famous Librarians and scholars headed the Imperial Library since its inception. The first Librarian, John Macfarlane was an Assistant Librarian of the British
Museum prior to his appointment. The great scholar and Librarian, Harinath Dey needs no introduction. Under the able guidance of competent Librarians, the Imperial Library developed into a well-organised Library of reference. The Imperial Library provided the foundation for the future National Library following India's independence in 1947. It is on this solid plinth, that the Indian National Library rests today.

The establishment of the Calcutta Public Library was thus a landmark in the cultural history of modern India. Its significance is best realised if the event is viewed in the perspective of not only the Freedom of the Press but also the Anglicization of Indian education following Macaulay's Minute of 2nd February 1835. In his Minute Macaulay said that English education would bring about a renaissance in India, just as Greek and Latin studies did in England, or just as the languages of Western Europe civilized Russia. That it was a prophetic utterance was evidenced by the conspicuous developments in the country following the introduction of English education. Indeed a great renaissance was brought about. And the Calcutta Public Library was one of the first fruits of that renaissance.

Chronologically Calcutta Public Library may not be the first of the series of libraries which came into existence
after the British occupation of the country; but certainly this was the first well organized Library with a vision for future development. This Library served the reading public of the city for about 65 years. During the long years of its activity the Calcutta Public Library helped to create a good reading public in Calcutta. The Library of the Asiatic Society was for the scholars, but Calcutta Public Library was the place where an ordinary citizen could satisfy his thirst for study and knowledge. It became a dynamic force to develop and foster the reading habit of the people, and by its example it inspired the society to appreciate the value of a library as a cultural unit.

There is no doubt that the public library movement in Bengal started with the establishment of Calcutta Public Library in 1836. The establishment of the Library had its far reaching effect in establishing public libraries in different districts of undivided Bengal by a group of middle class intellectuals, zamindars. And in its wake, therefore, followed many public libraries all over Bengal.
REFERENCE


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35. Ibid., p.124.


41. Appendix II.


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45. Ibid., p.11.

46. Ibid., p.12.


