CHAPTER—IV
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The first ever description about the public library is found in one of the 36 Tamil books. 'Nadivar' has specially mentioned about the characteristics of the librarians and the readers. Chinese scholar Fahsien who visited India sometimes in 399-414 has also written about public library at Nagarjun Vidyapith. The public library had books on religions and philosophy. In 675-685 every 'Math', i.e., religious school, had a library. One more Chinese scholar who came to India in the 7th century found a public library in Nalanda University. Nalanda University had a very big library, spread over a big area known as Dharamganj. According to a Kannad article said to be written on 24th December 1058, the public library in that period was known as 'Chatikshala'. One of the Chatikshalas once had six librarians.

There are references about public libraries that existed in the period of 'Mahabharata'. Basically, these were religious libraries housed in temples and managed by the priests. The books were not allowed to be seen even by the devotees except for a few people who made huge offerings to the priests for their services. Only regular visitors were allowed to read books.

In the Moghul period, public libraries came under the direct command of the state government which provided all financial support to private libraries. He appointed 'Nazims' and
'Daroga-e-Kitabkhana' to look after the libraries in the state. During this period, manuscripts in Arabic, Urdu, Sanskrit and Persian languages were brought to the libraries under the state command.

After the Moghul period, the development of libraries remained very slow. The British rulers were not keen to set up libraries in India, since their only objective in the beginning was business and trade. Moreover, there were wide differences between the thinking of the British and the Indians about the libraries. The Britishers never wanted Indians to be educated. The British soldiers destroyed a number of libraries by burning villages during their loot and rule. Many valuable books and manuscripts were destroyed in fire.

The year 1818 is a landmark in the history of the public library movement in India. The Calcutta Library Society was formed around this year to provide library services to the citizens of Calcutta. This society marked the beginning of the awareness about the libraries in the country. It was exactly 18 years later, when the first public library was opened in Calcutta on the ground floor of the residence of Dr. F. P. Strong, a civil surgeon of 24 Parganas, on 8th March.¹

At the beginning of the 20th century many library movements were started in different parts of the country. The "elic library movement started with the formation of library
associations and library societies. The first of such movements came to notice in Andhra Pradesh.

The history of public libraries in Andhra Pradesh can be traced in 1670 when a library existed at Masulipatam. The movement was at its peak during the freedom struggle in 1857 when many unsuccessful efforts were made to open public libraries. The movement gained momentum with the formation of the Andhra Pradesh Library Association (APLA) in 1914. This association helped the government in establishing public libraries in the state. But most of these libraries were subscription libraries.

Andhra Pradesh came into being in 1956. Dr. S.R. Ranganathan prepared a Model Library Bill for the state in 1957. The state at that time had two library acts, one was the Madras Public Library Act of 1948 and the other the Hyderabad Public Libraries Act of 1955. The Andhra Pradesh state legislative assembly passed an integrated bill in 1960. With this legislation, the network of public libraries spread throughout the state. In 1982-83, there were as many as 4070 public libraries in the state.

Shri Sayaji Rao Gaekwad of Baroda was one of the earliest pioneers of the library movement in India. He worked for the library development in Maharashtra. The Maharashtra Library Association (MLA) which came into being in 1921 is the result of untiring efforts. Earlier a committee called the Fayzee
Committee was appointed by the Bombay government. The committee submitted its report in 1940 but the government could not implement its recommendations till 1947. After independence, the government of Bombay decided to implement the recommendations of the Fayzee Committee. The committee recommended opening of the State central library at Bombay and Poona, and a library each at the district and taluka level. The committee also recommended take over of the existing libraries and grant to private libraries. On the basis of these recommendations, the Maharashtra Public Library Bill was passed by the state assembly in 1967 which came into force on Maharashtra Day, i.e., 1st May, 1968.

The year 1925 marked the beginning of the library movement when the Bengal Library Association (BLA) was formed. In 1818 the Calcutta Library Society was formed to provide library services to the people of Calcutta. But it became ineffective. Though the public library was opened in Calcutta on 8th May, 1836 the professional involvement came with the formation of the Bengal library Association (BLA) in 1925. The association took keen interest in the library legislation. Dr.S.R.Ranganathan prepared the draft bill in 1958. The efforts made in 1958, 1966 and in '78 came to fruition with the enactment of the library law in a state but in vain. Ultimately, success came in 1979 when the assembly passed the West Bengal Public Library Law. Since then a number of public libraries in the state has gone up and there now more than 2,000 libraries are working under this act.
Madras deserves a special mention. It was the first state to enact the library legislation after independence. The struggle for the library legislation took its roots in 1928 with the establishment of the Madras Library Association (MLA). The Association at a meeting in 1931 discussed the draft bill for public libraries in the state. Sir George Stanley, the then Governor of Madras, in his presidential address assured that he "will give the matter (library legislation) his personal attention". The association appointed a committee to draft the bill as discussed in the conference. The members of the committee were T.R. Venkatarama Sastry, K.V. Krishnaswami Iyer and Dr. S.R. Ranganathan. The committee presented the bill to the Viceroy in 1932 and sought his permission to introduce it in the state assembly. Basheer Ahmed Sayeed introduced the bill in the house in 1933. The bill was referred to the Select Committee later in October. The committee returned it in 1934. A notice for introduction of the bill in the state assembly was given by Basheer Ahmed Sayeed in 1937, but the governor withheld his permission. In 1946, Dr. Ranganathan met Avinaslingam Chettiar, the then Education Minister, and handed over the draft bill. It was introduced in the assembly in 1948. It was again referred to the Select Committee. The bill was at last passed as the Madras Act XXIV of 1948 and the governor gave his assent on 29th January, 1949. The bill was published in the Fort St. George Gazette on 8th February the same year. It became operative since
then. Now more than 1,500 public libraries are covered under this act.

In Punjab the public library movement has been very slow. Though the Punjab Library Association (PLA) was formed in 1928, the bill has not yet been passed. Public libraries in the state are under the command of the Directorate of Public Relations. At present there are 12 public libraries in the state. The bill is still under the active consideration of the state government.

Uptill now the library movement in India was limited to individual efforts or a few library associations. But no efforts were made on an all India basis. The year 1933 witnessed three big library organizations. The Indian Library Association (ILA) composed of all kinds of libraries, special, public, government, private, etc., came into being in 1933. The objectives of this association were to prepare grounds for the library legislation in the states. The second big organisation was the Government of India Library Association (GILA). It comprised the libraries and documentation centres working in the ministries and subordinate offices of the government of India. The credit for these two associations went to Kumar Munidra Deb Rai Mahasaya of Bansberia and Dr. S.R. Ranganathan. The third major association born this year was the All India Village Library Association (AIVLA). For the first time, the educational role of public libraries was accepted by the government. It was for the first time that the library movement went to villages from the cities. This
association helped other states to follow the example and adopt the library legislation.

Uttar Pradesh did not have public libraries proportionate to its population and geographical area. No concrete efforts were made for the library legislation. The library was considered a matter of welfare activities. The libraries at that time were in a bad shape. This led to the formation of the Uttar Pradesh Library Association (UPLA) in 1935. At present, 61 public libraries are working in the state. It is sad that the state government has been sleeping over the bill for long and no action has yet been taken.

Bihar, a leading state in ancient India as regards to libraries and educational centres, became very backward in the 20th century. Private libraries mushroomed in the state, but there was no public library. In 1936, the Bihar Library Association (BLA) was formed with a view to enacting the library legislation in the state. But nothing has come so far. About 100 public libraries are being run by the government on the pattern of the public library. The history of the library movement in the state has been very poor.

A different library movement started in Kerala in 1945. Kerala Granthshala Sangam started helping the libraries and took a leading role in teaching and executing the adult education programmes.
Thus, the history of the library movement in the first half of the 20th century and more before independence evoked mixed reaction. Though the national library and some important state libraries came into being, majority of the states paid no attention to public libraries. The movement, however, spread to almost all the states and villages, thanks to library associations.

The national Library of India came into being in 1948 through an act of Parliament declaring the Imperial Library of Calcutta as the national library. In Maharashtra the recommendations of the Fayzee Committee were implemented in 1947. There was no authentic information about the existence of public libraries in the country as such. The government of India brought out a book entitled "Libraries in India-1951". According to this document, the public library existed in 1818 when the oldest public library 'The United Service Library' started functioning at Poona. This book also revealed that in 1951 there were 248 public libraries in India. Of these 22 were managed by the state governments, 18 by local bodies and the rest 208 by private bodies. The Delhi Public Library was inaugurated on 27th October, 1951. This encouraged library science education in Delhi. The Delhi Library Association (DLA) was formed in 1953. Delhi has now about 30 public libraries.

In Madhya Pradesh, the adult education programmes were associated with public libraries. In 1957, the Madhya Pradesh
2. Enactment of a state library act by each state;
3. Authorising of local bodies to levy library cess as a surcharge on property tax;
4. Provision for library grant by the state governments ultimately equal to three times the proceeds of the library cess; and
5. Provision of government of India grant equal to the library cess in a state.

On the basis of the recommendation of the Sinha Committee, the government of India appointed another Committee in 1960 to draft the Bill under the Chairmanship of Dr. D.M. Sen. The committee submitted its draft bill in 1963 which was sent to the states the same year for comments. But the response was not encouraging.

The voice of the public library movement was also heard in Parliament several times. In 1964, Dr. K.L. Shrimali in his capacity as Deputy Minister of Education announced in the Lok Sabha that some of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee would be implemented and others were being reviewed.

A Working Group on libraries was appointed by the government of India under the chairmanship of V.K.R.V. Rao through the Planning Commission on 15th June 1964. The Planning Commission took interest in the library development. The report of this group was published on 26th August, 1966, which became a
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5. Funding for the network of state, central, district, rural and other public libraries through the Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation.

In 1989, the Village Panchayats were made responsible for the development of libraries in the villages through the Panchayat Raj Bill which was introduced in Parliament which could not be passed.

Thus, the development of public libraries in India has not been uniform. Some states adopted the library legislation at the outset but others did it later. In some states, the library bills are under the active consideration of the governments concerned whereas others have not even initiated the process. Madras was the first state to enact the library legislation in 1948. Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh, Mysore also passed such a bill in 1965. Maharashtra and West Bengal followed suit in 1969 and 1979 respectively. Three more states have passed the relevant bills. These are Manipur (1988), Haryana (1989) and Kerala (1989).

CONCLUSION: The history of the Library development in India is the culmination of efforts of individuals, library associations, state governments and the government of India. This history is split into two parts. Before independence the library development was very slow and limited to library associations and the state governments. Notable features were the Fayzee Committee and the establishment of a few libraries. But after independence, the
government of India decided to forge ahead in this direction. The Sinha Committee, the Sen Committee, the Working Groups, the Panchayat Raj Bill and the publication of the first document on libraries etc., were some of the salient features initiated by the government of India. Unforgettable contributions were made by Sayaji Rao Gaekwad and Dr. S. R. Ranganathan for furthering the cause of public library movement in India.

References as serially cited in the text:


