CHAPTER - II
STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIETY: LIBRARY, MUSEUM & ITS PUBLICATION

In his inaugural address Sir William Jones expressed a strong feeling of disapprobation against an elaborate code of rules. He said; “it may be advisable at first, in order to prevent any difference of sentiment on particular points not immediately before us to establish but one rules at all. These only I mean that in the infancy of any society, there ought to be no confinement, no trouble, no expense, no unnecessary formality. Let us if, you please, for the present, have weekly evening meetings in this hall for the purpose of hearing original papers read on such subjects as fall within our enquiries. Let all curious and learned men he invited to send their tracts to our Secretary, for which they ought immediately to received our thanks and if towards the end of each year, we should be supplied with a sufficiency of valuable materials to fill a volume, let us present ours Asiatic Miscellany to the literary world, who have derived so much pleasure and information from the agreeable work of Kaempfer than which we can scarcely propose a better model, that they will accept with eagerness any fresh entertainment of the same kind. You will not perhaps be disposed to admit mere translations of considerable length, except of such unpublished essays or treatises as may be transmitted to us by native authors, but whether you will enroll as members any number of learned natives, you will hereafter decide with many other questions as they happen to arise, and you will think I presume, that all questions should be decided by ballot by a majority of two-thirds, and that nine members should be the requisite to constitute a board for such decisions. One thing only as essential to your dignity I, recommended with earnestness - on no account to admit a new member who has not expressed a voluntary desire
to become so, and in that case you will not require, I suppose only other qualification than a love of knowledge and a zeal for the promotion of it.”¹ No formal resolution were adopted in regard to these suggestions, but they were unanimously accepted as the rules of the society, and uniformly acted upon for several years. Some new rules were formed and the suggestions of the founder were reduced into the form of rules. Other rules were formed’ from time to time to meet special occasions but nothing like a regular code was adopted until the beginning of the second half of this century. On the retirement of Henry Torrens, the affairs of the society were found to be in great disorder, and considerable differences of opinion existed on many important matters. A complete code of rules, providing for all contingencies, was therefore deemed urgently necessary and a committee was appointed to prepare the same. After much deliberation and examination of the rules of European societies , the committee submitted a new code of By-laws, which was formally adopted on Jan5 1851. One important clause in the code required that every candidate for admission as an ordinary member shall address a letter stating that, “he is anxious to promote the progress of science and literature, and is desirous of becoming a member of the Society.” This was done as much in accordance with the opinion of the founder, who had strongly urged in his inaugural address-“not to admit a new member who had not expressed a voluntary desire to become so”² as with a view to prevent unseemly repudiation of membership which had occurred in some cases. In practice, however, this rule was found to be unworkable and had soon to be rescinded. Other clauses were also found troublesome and a general revision was called for in 1859, on the establishment of the Indian Museum, the altered circumstances of the society requiring extensive changes in the rules, a new code was adopted in 1869.³
Organization and Administration:

The structural weakness of the Asiatic Society became apparent after Jones’ death. The earliest proposal to strengthen and stabilize the institutional life of the society came at a meeting held on 29 September 1796. A special committee proposed ‘a charter of incorporation through the Governor General’, a regular ‘admission fee’ and other ‘regular fees’, the election of a treasurer and two vice-presidents annually, a weekly meeting (as in the era of Jones), and the construction of a society building to house the library and museum. These propositions were stated in a letter to John Shore who was both the society’s President and Governor-General at that time. In 1797 new executive officers were chosen and a treasury created. A special committee was formed to screen the papers to be read at future meetings, However, it was soon found that the finances were in a chaotic condition as a result of ‘members defaulting in payment’, and the first treasurer, Henry Trail, resigned angrily on 3 October 1799 on 2nd April 1800 John Gilchrist (1759-1841), who later became a professor at the College of Fort William, became the Secretary of the society—a position, which in responsibility and importance, now came to be second to that of the President. By July 1800 a resolution had to be adopted urging members to attend the meetings then being held once every three months. The next few years saw a continuing struggle to find a permanent place to house the society and its growing acquisitions of books, coins, and biological specimens. Other schemes were devised with the aim of making the society both the chief repository of oriental works in the world, and the primary agency for the dissemination of oriental research to European center of learning.

Upon assuming his post, Gilchrist immediately reopened the question of building a house for the society, and won the approval of the
majority of members. It was not until 1804, after much campaigning by Gilchrist, Harrington, Buchanan and Colebrook, that the society finally petitioned the government for assistance. It was not until the Wellesley administration, however, that the Asiatic Society gradually completed the process of institutionalization. Between 1801 and 1804, Wellesley, Governor-General of India, made use of the society by recruiting his faculty members from it, and by enlisting its organizational support for his college programme. This arrangement seemed mutually satisfactory for a time, and the Society was able to maintain its informal but exclusive ‘club-like’ atmosphere. At that time the College of Fort William was facing the real danger of extinction, and the Wellesley clique in the society began pushing hard in an effort to transform the ‘club’ into an institution with a more functional role in the execution of cultural policy. Work commenced by 1805 on the society building at its present site on 1 Park Street. When the building was completed in 1808, the society became the first fully equipped institution in the world aimed at the advancement of Asian studies. Wellesley’s college also provided both the impetus and the financial support for many of William Jones’ original schemes, which had been set aside because of a lack of funds. The College of Fort William, therefore, revitalized the Asiatic Society by giving it structure, supporting its scholarships, and making available its library and other resources for the promotion of Orientalism, perhaps, and most importantly, as a training centre for civil servants, the college supplied the Asiatic Society with a younger generation of potential scholars to carry on the work originally inspired by Warren Hastings.

The society began functioning through ‘Committees’. James Hare Junior (?-1831), Assistant Surgeon, East India Company’s Medical Service in Bengal, proposed in 1808 that a Physical Committee be
constituted-in the Asiatic Society ‘to promote the knowledge of natural history, philosophy, medicine, improvements of the arts and whatever is comprehended in general terms of Physics. Physical and Literary Committees were instituted on 5 October 1808. Three medical men, namely William Hunter (1755-1812), John Leyden (1775-181.1) and Abraham Lockett (1781-1834), as well as a chemist and expert on gunpowder, John Farquhar (1751-1826), and the famous missionary and founder of the Shreerampore Mission (1799), Reverend William Carey (1761-1834), voluntarily agreed to serve the Physical Committee. The committee met several times and prepared a list of desiderata and carried on some correspondence. However, after a time they fell into desuetude, and no record is now extant of their proceedings.

Towards the close of 1827, several members of the society who felt a keen interest in scientific enquiries and found the society meetings to be infrequent and not too focused on science proposed that the Physical Committee be revived to cultivate ‘the sciences of zoology, meteorology, mineralogy and geology of Hindustan’. This proposal was accepted in the Asiatic Society’s meeting of 22 January 1828, as well as stating that scientific seminars would be held once a fortnight. On the same date Dr. H.H. Wilson, the then Secretary of the society, proposed that David Tare (1775-1842), the eminent educationist of the Hindu College, be inducted as a new member of the society. Immediately thereafter, the Physical Committee arranged regular scientific discussions on subjects such as the geology of India, the diamond mines of Panna, fertilizing principles of the Hooghly river inundations, etc. The activities of the Physical Committee of the society have been chronicled in detail in the Proceedings of the Meetings of the Physical Committee of the Asiatic Society.
Patron:

The second meeting of the society was held on 22 January 1784, where the members present resolved to request Warren Hastings, first Governor-General, and Members of the Council of Fort William in Bengal, to become the patron of the society. Upon invitation, the Governor-General in Council graciously consented to accept the position. On some occasions governors of states were invited to become patrons of the society. The patrons used to participate in the meetings of the society and take active interest in the society’s affairs. It is both interesting and surprising to note that there is no record to support the fact that Warren Hastings, who was friendly with Sir Jones and a patron of learning, had ever attended any meeting.

President:

Warren Hastings was offered the Chair of Presidency of the society, but he modestly declined the offer. He earnestly solicited the acceptance of his services in any way that would be considered useful to the society’s researches. Thereafter, the members unanimously voted Sir William Jones to the Presidency on 5 February 1784, which he held till his death on 27, April 1794. The election to the office of the President was usually confined to distinguished persons, whose knowledge and zeal and opportunity were best calculated to promote the interests of the society. Dr Rajendralal Mitra (1822-91), archaeologist and educationist, was the first Indian to be elected to this post in 1885. In 1796 the need for an office of Vice-President was strongly felt, and the post was revived at a meeting held on 29 September 1796. Among Indians, Ramgopal Ghosh (1815-68), an active member of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, was the first to be elected in 1853 as Vice-President.
Secretary:

George Hillarow Barlow (1762-1846), Governor-General, was the first Secretary of the society. After two months John Herbert Harrington succeeded him. Ram Kamal Sen was the first Indian to be elected (12 December 1832) a member of the Committee of Papers, and was designated as ‘Native Secretary’ (1833-48). Dr Wilson appointed Ram Kamal Sen to his new post only seven days before the Special Meeting of the society where he announced his departure to England. He was followed by Rajendralal Mitra as Philological Secretary and Pramatha Nath Bose as Natural History Secretary. From 1784 to 1816, the Secretaries were unable to assert themselves as much as they did in later years as the society had very distinguished men of letters as Presidents during this period. As the society began to function more institutionally, the post of Secretary assumed new importance, second only to that of the President of the society.

Members

In the early days, during 1784 to 1828, only Europeans who “expressed a voluntary desire to become so” were elected members. ‘No other qualifications other than a love for knowledge and the zeal for the promotion of it’ was required for membership. Although learned natives were not admitted to the society as either members or visitors at the meetings till 1828, they were cordially invited to send communications which, when received, were translated and read at the meetings, and published in the society’s Transactions. Forty-five years after the establishment of the society, in 1829, membership was thrown open to Indians, at Dr. H.H. Wilson’s initiative. He proposed five Indian names for membership on 7 January 1829. These decisions changed the character of the membership as well as the society. On that day Prasanna
Kumar Tagore, Dwarakanath Tagore, Sib Chandra Das, Rasamay Dutta and Ram Kamal Sen were elected members.\textsuperscript{11} Mahendralal Sircar (1833-1904), founder of the Indian Association for Cultivation of Science (1876), was elected as Resident Member of the Society on 3 April 1867. He was elected member of the Council in 1883. During 1886-87 he was elected member of the Library Committee, Physical Science Committee and Philological Committee. Since then, persons of all nationalities, irrespective of colour, creed and race, continue to be elected members of the society.

**Honorary Member:**

In addition to enrolling ordinary members, William Jones conceived the idea of conferring upon academics of all nations who had rendered conspicuous services to the causes of science, literature, history and civilization the title of Honorary Members.

**Associate Member:**

Associate membership was introduced on 6 May 1835 to secure the cooperation of persons ‘well known for their literary and scientific attainments, but who are not likely to become Ordinary Members’.

**Corresponding Membership:**

Corresponding membership was introduced over 1844—69 in an attempt to remain in contact with and obtain the services of scholars and intellectuals in foreign countries, for the furtherance of the objectives of the society.

**Committee of Papers:**

At the meeting held on 29 September 1796, it was resolved to annually elect a Committee of Papers comprising of the President, Vice-Presidents and Secretary, together with five other members, to conduct
the business of the society. The committee used to select papers for publication and superintended the printing of the Transactions of the society, for which it was given the necessary financial power as well. In June 1808, Dr David Hare moved, seconded by Dr John Leyden, ‘that a Committee be appointed for the purpose of physical investigation, the collection of facts specimens and correspondence with individuals whose situation in this country may be favourable for such discussions and investigations’. The committees met several times and prepared a list of desiderata and carried on some correspondence. After a time they fell into desuetude and no record of their proceedings are available. In 1818, the Physical Committee was revived. In 1846 the Committee of Papers was renamed the Council.

The founder inaugural address did not suggest any rule for the selection of members, but at the second meeting of the society (Jan 22, 1784) members were proposed who were balloted for an elected at the next meeting. At the third meeting such propositions were second and ordered for ballot and this plan has ever since been uniformly followed.
LIBRARY OF THE SOCIETY

The library of the Society is the grand stay, glory and honor of the Society. Its importance lies not in numerical strength but in its rich and unique contents.

During the Presidency of Sir William Jones (1784-1794) no necessity was felt for a ‘House’ for the Society. The Grand Jury Rooms of the Supreme Court was always accessible for meetings of the Society, and there being no office, no establishment, no separate accommodation was required. Since no expense of any kind was incurred, the Members were not called upon to make any pecuniary contribution to the Society. On the demise of the founder, the case became different.’ The Courthouse was not always readily available; books, papers, records and specimens of various kinds had accumulated, and they required a storeroom. A natural desire to secure permanency for these suggested the necessity of a local habitation. It was accordingly resolved in 1796 that an application should be made to the Government for the grant of a free site for a house and members should pay a quarterly contribution of one gold mohur each and an entrance fee of two gold mohurs, which accumulating for a few years, would yield a sufficient sum to cover the expense of building a house. A second application was made on July 4, 1804 for a spot of land at the corner of Park Street. In 1805 when the order of the Government granting the land was received, the Society had accumulated a sufficient sum to be in a position to undertake the building of a house. Captain Lock of the Bengal Engineers, designed a plan, which after some modifications, was made over to Jean Jacques Pichon, a Frenchman settled in Calcutta who built the house. The Society moved into it in 1808. Its Library was thrown open to the members and the public in the same year. Thus the Society laid the foundation of the first academic cum public library in
India. Books that had been received till then formed the nucleus of the collection. The collection has been built up mainly with gifts received from the members, non members and institution. On 25th March 1784 the Society received with thanks seven Persian manuscripts from Henri Richardson; next donation came on 10th November 1784, from William Marsden, F.R.S, who donated his book- History of Island of Sumatra (1783).

Since then gifts were pouring in from Heads from States (e.g. Emperor of Russia)and many other individuals and institutions. Robert Home who was for sometime Secretary of the Society and the first Library - in Charge (1804), donate his small but very valuable collection of work on art. The first accession of importance was a gift from the Srirangapatam committee 3rd Feb 1808 being a selection from the palace library of Tipu-Sultan. Similarly Surveyor general colonel Makenzie’s collection of manuscripts and drawings were received in Dec 1822. A very valuable collection of manuscripts being diverse occasional papers and essays and ten volumes of drawings of antiquarian and archeological subjects, belonging to colonel Mackenzie, for a long time. Surveyor General of India, were received in December 1822. A set of abstract translations of the ‘Puranas’, prepared by native scholars under the Superintendence of Dr. Wilson, and several translations from Persian works have also come to the possession of the society. A collection of some illustrated works on Botany was received from Dr. N. Wallich in June 1817, which was subsequently sent to the East India Company’s Botanical Garden at Sibpur.

To facilitate the use of the library by members a set of rules was framed in Jan 1820. A catalogue of the whole of the society’s library was published in 1833. It shows a total of about a thousand volumes. After the
accession of the college of Fort William collection, a second catalogue of
the European books was prepared by the late Dr. E. Roer, and that shows
a total of 4,315 vol. A third catalogue was prepared in 1856 by the
Rajendra Lal Mitra, and that brought up the total to upwards of 7000 vol.
Accessions to the library have since been very numerous and valuable,
comprising besides sets, more or less complete, of the Transactions of all
the leading European and American learned bodies, nearly all standard
works of reference in science and Oriental literature. The total, it is
estimated, will exceed 20,000 vol. Much inconvenience is felt by
members from want of a good catalogue of this extensive and valuable
collection - perhaps the richest in India.13

Exchange of publications were also made with leading Europeans
and American societies, and of duplicates in the library with private
individuals; members retiring from India sometimes presenting or sold
selections from their private collections.

Presentations were also received on diverse occasions from the
college of Fort William, the General Committee of Public Instruction and
other sources. On the abolition of the college of Fort William, a much
larger collection of historical and other works relating to India, the hole
of its Sanskrit, Arabic, and Urdu works, mostly in manuscripts, were
placed under the custody of the Society, subject only to the two
conditions, namely 1) safe and careful presentation and 2) unrestricted
accessibility to the public at al reasonable hours.

A collection of Tibetan Xylographs was presented by A. Csoma De
Koros (the foremost Tibetologist and the Librarian of the Society) and B.
H. Hodgson. The latter donated also an exceedingly valuable collection of
Nepalese, Sanskrit, Buddhist manuscripts, which contains illustrated
manuscripts dating back to the tenth century A. D. Acquisition by purchase was of course, very insignificant.\textsuperscript{14}

The Society developed its library into a specialized research center in Oriental lore without neglecting to build up a collection of books on various branches of Physical and Natural Sciences. The availability of the whole manuscript collection of the Fort William College in several languages, various gift collections, complete series of journals and proceedings of the leading learned bodies all over the world, latest books on almost all oriental studies, etc. recommended the Society’s library as the ultimate refuge of scholars from far and wide. Moreover, the Government of India raised it to the status of a depository library by presenting public records printed by British official agencies from time to time. Thus the Society’s library became an institution of national importance with eminent scholars as librarians to give it proper direction and development. The Library establishment consisted of one Librarian, one Assistant Librarian, one Daftary, two Durwans, one sweeper and contingencies. The growth of the Society’s Library was assured by the-wise policy initiated by H.T. Colebrook while he acted as the Society’s Agent in Europe in 1821, Arrangements were made with the leading and blooming learned institutions in the UK and Continent for exchange of the Society’s Transactions with their publications. The Society presented its Transactions to the learned bodies in India, America and Middle East, which they reciprocated by regularly transmitting their publications. The Society had thus exchange relationship with the following scientific institutions.

\textbf{India}

Calcutta - Agri-Horticultural Society
Medical and Physical Society
Bombay - Geographical Society  
Medical and Physical Society  
Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society  
Madras - Madras Auxiliary of the Royal Asiatic Society  

U.K.  
Astronomical Society, London  
British Association for Development of Science  
Entomological Society, London  
Geological Society, London  
Horticultural Society, London  
Linnean Society, London  
Medico-Botanical Society, London;  
Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland  
Royal College of Surgeons, London  
Zoological Society, London  
Statistical Society, London  

USA  
Academy of Natural Sciences of America  
American Academy of Arts and Sciences  
American Philosophical Society  
Leyceum of natural History,  
New York Geological Society of Pennsylvania  

Continent  
Paris - Asiatic Society  
Amsterdam - Royal Institutions of Sciences and Arts  
Bordeaux - Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences Linnean Society  

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Prof. H.H. Wilson who was appointed the Society’s Agent in Europe on 9 January 1833, looked after the purchase of books for the Library during 1833-41. He selected such books in European languages published from time to time in England and the Continent, the list of which were regularly submitted to him by the Society’s bookseller in England, W.H. Allen’& Co. during this period. Books selected by Prof. Wilson were supplied to the Society against the sale proceeds of its Transactions and Oriental publications. M. Cassin was appointed the Society’s bookseller in Paris in 1837 by Capt. A. Troyer who acted as the Society’s agent in France. On 31 December 1837, 199 volumes of Journals and 109 pamphlets were received from M. Cassin. These-were exhibited at the meeting of the Society in 1839 (6 February). The works in question embraced some of the most important and valuable publications in every department of Natural History. J.C.C. Sutherland and Dr. W.B.O Shaughenssy, acting Secretaries of the Society, in their Annual Report for 1838 submitted to the Society on 6 March 1839, noted, “The mode in which this supply has been obtained is also very gratifying, the expense having been defrayed by the sale of our Oriental publications in Paris. It is pleasing to observe this reciprocation of benefits by the cultivation of apparently opposite pursuits. We have exchanged the ancient lore of the East for the most modern and useful sciences of Europe. The research of the naturalists are promoted by the discoveries of the philologists and the antiquarians, and thus each in particular sphere, sustain the reputation and enhance the utility of a Society established for the universal purpose of investigation — “whatever is performed by man or produced by Nature’ in the East”.

W:L.Gibbons, the first Librarian of the Society, prepared a Catalogue of the Library. Dr. E. Roer took charge of the Society’s
Library in 1841. Dr. Roer prepared a Catalogue on the basis of the then current European practice. He pointed out the advantage of cataloguing the books subject wise and titles and authors, in the alphabetical order. The proper and principal design of a library was to promote the most extensive and most beneficial use of the books. After making the Catalogue of the books in the Library, Dr. Roer sought the permission of the Committee of Papers (Council) to print it. The new catalogue, containing about 4300 volumes was printed and issued in 1843. Thus, the Society did not neglect the primary duty of cataloging the books in its Library from time to time in consonance with the progress of library science.\(^\text{15}\)

The collection has been grouped into three departments; e.g.

1. Printed Books and Periodicals
2. Manuscripts and Archives and
3. Museum Objects

The Printed Books Department has four sections, viz;

1. European Languages
2. Sanskritic & other Modern Indian Languages
3. Perso-Arabic and Urdu and
4. Sino-Tibetan and South-Asian Languages

Printed books are there in almost all the major languages of the world. There are about 1,49,000 volumes, particularly rich in works on Indology and Asiatic Lore, and in standard philological and scientific serials. The printed books in this department range in date from the latter half of the fifteenth century A.D. and one of its special features consists in the many items of rare works, otherwise unavailable, or scarcely available, including books printed in India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
Total number of Manuscripts in 26 scripts and languages are 47,000 (approx). The total numbers of Journals are about 80,000.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{European Collection:}

One of the object for which the house was build, was to provide accommodation for a library and a museum. From soon after the foundation of the society, books, papers, manuscripts, drawings, copperplates and other articles were from time to time presented to the society and they had to be kept, owing to want of a better place for their preservation, in the private dwelling house of the secretary for the time being and as the exigencies of European official life in this country led to frequent changes. The risk of loss was serious. The new house at once removed this difficulty. The books that has been received up to the time formed the nucleus of a library and funds were sanctioned every year and also on special occasion for the purchase of new books. Mr. H. T. Colebroke was also appointed as agent in London to select and purchase books for the Society. Exchanges of publications were also made with leading European societies, and of duplicates of the library with private individuals and members retiring from the country sometimes presented selection from their private collection.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Oriental collection:}

The early history of the Oriental Library is very much the same as that of the European one. The society depended mainly on casual gifts from members, and they were not numerous. The first accession of any importance was a gift from the Seringapatam Prize Committee (Feb 3, 1808). It include a selection from the library taken in loot from the Palace of Tipu Sultan. There were among them many old and rare works, including a great number of beautifully illuminated manuscripts of the Quran, and of that part of it called ‘Pansurah’. An exceedingly well
written old text of the Gulistan, said to be the first copy from the original manuscript of the author and a codex of the ‘Padshahanamaha’. Bearing an autograph of the Emperor Shahajahan were among them. Presentations were also received on diverse occasions, from the late college of Fort William and the General Committee of Public Instruction of books published under their superintendence and from other sources. The total however, did not, in 1835, exceed a thousand volumes on the abolition of the college of Fort William. The whole of its Sanskrit, Arabian, Persian and Urdu works, mostly in manuscripts, collected at great expense and trouble under the superintendence of Gladwin, Carey, Gillchrist and other distinguished Oriental scholar were placed under the custody of the society, with a promise that they would on the sanction of the Hon’ble Court of Directors being obtained, be given to the society. Subject only two conditions namely — safe and careful preservation, and unrestricted accessibility to the public at all reasonable hours. Pending the receipt of the sanction, the Govt. defrayed the cost of the establishment, amounting to Rs.78 per mensum. The sanction was obtained in 1846, when the monthly grant was stopped and the books and manuscripts became the property of the society, subject only to the two conditions aforesaid.

When the manuscripts came to the possession of the society, it was all but certain that they would ultimately be its property, and in anticipation of the sanction of the court of Directors Mr. Prinsep, then Secretary, caused catalogues to be prepared and printed not only of the new accessions but of all the manuscripts owned by the society. The Persian catalogue bears date 1837 and contains a total of 2,742 names out of which 1013 are Arabic, 1418 Persian and 311 Urdu, - a few of these being printed books. The Sanskrit catalogue was issued in 1838, and it includes besides Sanskrit a few Magadhi, Bengali, Hindi, Carnati,
Tailinga, and Mahratti names. The total is in round numbers 1800. Annexed to this catalogue are list of Sanskrit works then owned by the Sanskrit colleges of Calcutta and Benares. These list were very useful at the time as showing the extent of Sanskrit literature then known to exist. The catalogues were prepared by Maulvies and Pandits in the Indian style, and are not very convenient for reference now. They abound too, in mistakes, and have become absolute from the circumstance of the library having, been greatly extended since 1838. The accessions in the Persian Dept have not been very numerous in all 167 but several valuable codieer have been obtained. The want of a revised catalogue has therefore been much felt and an attempt was sometime ago made to compile a catalogue raison of the Sanskrit works.

Beside these there are in the custody of the society 2507 Sanskrit manuscripts, mostly new to the collection a forenamed, belonging to the Govt. of India and some of great age and value. The ultimate destination of these has not yet been determined upon, but it is expected that they will be so kept by Govt. as to be always available to Indians and Anglo Indian Scholars.

In addition to the above, the society possess a rare collection upwards of 350 Chinese Xylographs of which there is in manuscript. There are like wise palm-leaf manuscripts of Burmese, Siamese, Javanese and Singhalese works to the extent of about 125 bundles of which however there is no inventory of any kind.¹⁸

At present the Library has 1,17,000 books, 79,000 Journals, 47,000 manuscripts, 293 maps, microfiche of 48,000 works, microfilm of 3,87,003 pages, 182 paintings, 2500 pamphlets and 2150 photographs. The books in the library of the Asiatic society deal with Anthropology, Archaeology, Art, Architecture, Ayurveda, History, Dharmasastra,
History of science, Sociology. History of Medicine, History of Technology, several Encyclopaedies, Dictionaries of many languages, Linguistics and languages, Literature, Numismatics studies, Philosophy, Religion, Geography and many other subjects including Bengali literature.
THE MUSEUM OF THE SOCIETY

The Museum of the Society was founded in 1814. In the inaugural address of the founder no reference was made to a Museum but curiosities were sent in from time to time by inofussil members and in 1796 the idea was started of having a suitable house for their reception and preservation. Nothing practical however could be done at the time, and it was not until some time after the completion of the house that measures were taken to carry out the object. On Feb 2, 1814, Dr. N. Wallich wrote a letter to the Society strongly advocating the formation of a Museum, and offering at the same time not only duplicates from his own rich collection to from a nucleus for it, but his own services to took after it and in bringing the letter before the Society the Committee of Papers submitted the following notes, which though long are worth quoting to show clearly what it was that the Society undertook:

A collection of the substances which are the objects of sciences and of those reliques which illustrate ancient times and manners, has always been one of the firsts steps taken by society instituted for the dissemination of specific or universal knowledge. Such a collection was one of the first objects also of the Asiatic Society, and any person engaged in the study of the history and language of this country, or in the investigation- of its natural productions must have had frequent cause for regretting that such a purpose should have been hitherto so very incompletely carried into effect. No public repository yet exists to which the naturalist or scholar can refer, and the only sources of information, beyond verbal and often found in the accidental accumulations of individuals, always of difficult access, indiscriminate selection, temporary duration and little utility.20
The Museum of the Asiatic Society played an important role in the dissemination of knowledge about the natural sciences among Indians. From a humble beginning in 1814, it turned into, the Imperial Museum (later Indian Museum) in Calcutta. In the beginning, when the society had no house of its own, the question of organizing a museum did not arise, although specimens of natural sciences from different parts of India used to come for identification and preservation. In 1808 the society got its own building, and in 1814 came a concrete proposal for the foundation of a museum from Nathaniel Wallich, a Danish botanist and a member of the society. He came to India in 1807 as a Surgeon for the Danish settlement in Sheerampore. He was educated in Copenhagen, where he displayed a strong inclination for the natural sciences. He was well known for his scientific attainments, and was in touch with men in India who shared his scientific interests. Wallich gave the essential impetus to the proposal of establishing a museum in the society’s building. In a letter to the members of the society, he wrote:

The vast regions which are comprised within the sphere of the Asiatic Society’s views exhibit an inexhaustible and perhaps unparallel treasury of the most wonderful and interesting productions of Nature. The far greater portion of these has hitherto escaped the notice of Naturalists, or has been imperfectly, or what is much worse, erroneously described. The deplorable neglect to which the Natural History of this country has been exposed is very striking and must principally be attributed to the total want in India of that grand desideratum, a public Museum.⁴

The historic meeting of the Asiatic Society held on 2 February 1814 on its own premises took the momentous decision of forming a museum. The society conceived a museum with a very wide scope, and
invited the public to make contributions of the following specimens of natural history:

Animals peculiar to India dried or preserved;
Skeletons or particular bones of animals peculiar to India;
Birds peculiar to India stuffed or preserved;
Dried plants, fruits and other parts;
Minerals or vegetable preparations peculiar to eastern pharmacy;
Ores of metals;
Native alloys of metals;
Minerals of every description.
Inscription on stone or brass.
Ancient monuments
Figures of the Hindu deities
Ancient coins
Ancient manuscripts
Instruments of the war
Instruments of the music
The vessels used in religious ceremonies
Implements of native art and manufacturer etc.²²

At the meeting of the Asiatic Society on Wednesday, 1 June 1814, it was resolved that a general invitation to contribute to the collection would be made to the public by advertisement in the Calcutta Gazette, and through a circular letter to the members of the society. The necessary funds were sanctioned by the society for the display and preservation of materials received from the public. The museum was opened to the public within a couple of months. The specimens were properly displayed in glass cases fitted up for the purpose. The museum had two sections, Archaeological-Ethnological and Geological-Zoological, and appointed
Wallich to the post of Superintendent. He took charge of the assignment on 1 June 1814. Travellers’ accounts of Calcutta testify to the popularity of the Asiatic Society Museum, which, within a short time, developed into a repository of geological, zoological, archaeological, and various other branches of the natural history of the continent of Asia, and the Asiatic countries. The museum thus formed thrived rapidly. Contributions were received under all the heads noticed and grants were made freely for their preservation. All coins, copper plates, sculptures, inscriptions on stone, implements and miscellaneous articles received were placed in charge of the librarian, while geological and zoological specimens were classified, arranged and preserved under the superintendence of Dr. Wallich, who was appointed their curator, all donations being duly announced in the pages of the society’s, transactions.

The archaeotectonic and miscellaneous collection was greatly enriched by contributions from Colonel Stuart, Dr. Tytler, General Mackenzie, B.H. Hodgson, Ram Kamal Sen and others. A partial inventory of it was prepared by Dr. Roer in 1843 and a complete catalogue was compiled by R. L. Mitra in 1847. It contained a large number of copper coins beside a few silver, some Greek, Indo- Scythian and Indo- Greek species and coins of other varieties. Roer realized that these monetary issues were important sources for the political history of India, from the period of Asoka to the Muhammedan times. The cabinet was also rich in Gupta coins made of gold, silver and copper. Arrakan coins presented an interesting series. The Muhammedan coins were rich with the issues of the Delhi sultans, the Pathanss of Bengal, the Mughals and the Gajnawi kings. In May 1862, the Government of India announced its decision to establish a public Museum, the Indian Museum in Calcutta. Then followed protracted negotiations between the Government
and the society till the middle of 1865 relating to the transfer of the society’s collections there of Government of India accorded legislative sanction of those condition by the Indian Museum (Act 17 of 1866). This may be added without hesitation that, it was the society which built up the first museum in India and which compelled the Government to established the Indian Museum at Calcutta. After the transfer of its collection, the society has now in its rooms a small but very valuable collection of oil Paintings, Busts of the architects of the society, illustrated manuscripts, copper plate inscriptions, coins, rock edict of Asoka and other curiosities. ²⁴
HISTORY OF PUBLICATION

When the Asiatic society was established on 15 January, 1784, its founder Sir William Jones (1746-1794) began his work with a dream, that visualized a centre for Asian studies including almost everything concerning ‘Man and Nature’ within the geographical limits of the continent. Sir William Jones, an outstanding, scholar from Oxford, arrived in Calcutta on 25 September 1783 as a Puisne Judge of the Old Supreme Court. While still on board of the frigate Crocodile carrying him from England to India, he prepared a memorandum detailing his plan of study. This included “the laws of the Hindus and Mahomedans; the history of the ancient world; proofs and illustrations of scripture; traditions concerning the deluge; modem politics and geography of Hindusthan; Arithmetic and Geometry and mixed sciences of Asiaticks; Medicine, Chemistry, Surgery and Anatomy of the Indians; natural products of India; poetry, rhetoric and morality of Asia; music of the Eastern nations; the best accounts of Tibet and Kashmir; trade, manufactures, agriculture and commerce of India: Mughal constitution, Marhatta constitution etc.” This memorandum could easily be regarded as an early draft of the memorandum of the Asiatic Society itself. The Society which was still in the imagination of Jones was actually founded within four months of his arrival in India Most of the mysteries of this vast land, like its old inscriptions in Brahma, were still undeciphered, and Comparative Philology as a discipline or science was not yet born.

In the early days of the Asiatic Society, William Jones for all his efforts could not procure even a slice of land wherein to house his dream. The Society which in no time was to be regarded as the first and best of its kind in the whole world had no permanent address, no fixed place for holding its meetings and, which was most disconcerting, no funds.
William Jones was, however, not the earliest-among the Orientlists of the East India Company to arrive in India. About a decade earlier came Charles Wilkins (1770), Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (1772) and Jonathan Duncan (1772): Warren Hastings’s “bright young men”, who had paved the way for the two future institutions- The Asiatic Society and the College at Fort William. All the Orientalists who became famous in history clustered around either the Society or the College or both. The Society, of course, was the pioneer and first in the field.

While others were thinking in terms of individual study and research, Sir William Jones was the first man to think in terms of a permanent organization for Oriental studies and researches on a grand scale in this country. He took the initiative and in January 1784 sent out a circular letter to selected persons of the elite with a view to establishing a Society for this purpose. In response to his letter, thirty European gentlemen of Calcutta’ including Mr. Justice John Hyde, John Carnac, Henry Vansittart, John Shore, Charles Wilkins, Francis Gladwin, Jonathan Duncan and others gathered on 15 January 1784 in the Grand Jury Room of the old Supreme Court of Calcutta. The Chief Justice Sir Robert. Chambers presided at the first meeting and Jones delivered his first discourse in which he put forward his plans for the Society.

Asia, he said, was the “nurse of sciences” and the “inventress of delightful and useful arts.” He proposed to found a Society under the name of The Asiatic Society. All the thirty European gentlemen who had assembled accepted the membership of this Society. The name went through a number of changes like The Asiatic Society (1784-1825), The Asiatic Society (1825-1832), The Asiatic Society of Bengal (1832-1935), The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal (1936-1951) and The Asiatic Society again since July 1951
In the first discourse, Jones announced the design to present to the literary World, an annual publication Asiatic Miscellany and invited “all curious and learned men to send their tracts to the Society, for which they would immediately to receive society’s thanks.” He reminded at the same time that the Miscellany should “print no scraps”, and not perhaps “be disposed to admit mere translation of considerable length, except of such unpublished essays or treatises as may be transmitted to us by native authors.” A report of the papers read to 24th March, 1785, since inception, was considered on 7th April 1785, when it was agreed that, in a convenient time such papers should be published. The selection of the papers was left to the judgment of Jones. He carefully screened and polished already read papers before accepting them for journaling. He always tried to keep the scholarly standard of the Journal which sometimes led him to reject detached notes and papers whose usefulness was outweighed by tediousness and extensive space required.25

He also undertook the laborious and unpleasant office of superintending the printing correcting proof of Society’s Transactions, and appointing artists and engravers for illustrating the articles. Jones got the illustrations etched and plates engraved by the best artists. He wrote to Charles Wilkins (17th Sep 1785) for engaging one Mahmud Ghauth for engraving in Sanskrit, in Bengali, and in Hindi, all in the best Nagry letters, and for making a large fine plate for the Society’s Quarto Annual: and to Samuel Davis, who himself drew some sketches at the request of Jones, conveying his ardent desire that Thomas Daniell illustrated a few articles, especially Robert Chamber’s article on Mahabalipuram included in the first volume and the etching of the drawing of the Ruins by Daniell would as a frontispiece to embellish the book. Though it cannot be said definitely whether he made any sketches for the Asiatic Researches, he
etched some drawings of Mahabalipuram scenes and included in his work.

The curiosity to know, created by the publication of the transactions, inspired inquisitive minds to undertake the publication of research journals in the sciences and humanities, even at personal risk. Such an idea occurred to many at that time. This led to the creation of a number of journals, which offered space to short but important communications, and reported the progress of science and diverse branches of learning in America, Europe and India. Among these, mention may be made of the Gleanings in Sciences (1829) and the Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society (1829). Although eminent scholars conducted the above journals, they were short-lived. Asiatic Researches did not admit short communications of scientific intelligence, as they required immediate exposure to the public eye. Notes on scientific subjects found their way into the Gleanings in Science and the Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society from 1829 onwards. The monthly journal, Gleanings in Science, which was projected, edited and financed by Captain James Dowling Herbert (1791-1833), became a medium for the regular publication of precis of monthly proceedings of the society and other scientific contributions, mostly of members of the society. It used to publish extracts from other scientific literatures. In recognition of the patronage extended by the Class of Natural History and Physics of the Asiatic Society, by subscribing liberally to it and selecting it as a vehicle of short notes on important discoveries and ideas, which were necessarily left out of the Asiatic Researches, its editor ‘respectfully inscribed’ the first volume of the journal (December 1829) to ‘the President, Vice President, and to the other gentlemen members of the
Class of Natural History and Physics of the Asiatic Society, in the laudable attempts made by them for the cultivation of science in India.\textsuperscript{26}

James Prinsep (1799-1840), English antiquary, colonial administrator and member of the Society, was associated with this journal.- When Captain Herbert was appointed ‘Astronomer’ to His Majesty the King of Oudh in 1832, Prinsep had to take the editorial responsibility. Prinsep continued the publication of the periodical work under a new title, using the name of the society. The required permission was given by the society on 7 March 1832. The monthly journal, hitherto published under the name of Gleanings in Science, was allowed to assume the name Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (J.A.S.B.), and to continue with it as long as the publication remained under the charge of one or both of the Secretaries of the society. Prinsep defined the scope of the journal ‘to be the progress of various sciences at home especially such as are connected in any way . with Asia.\textsuperscript{27}

Francis Gladwin, who first took up the responsibility of the printing, sent to Jones, on 23rd October 1786, the first printed sheet of the Transactions, in which he was proceedings “with as much expedition as may be consistent with accuracy”. But Jones anxiety for the delay was reflected in his letter to W. Shipley (27 September 1788) :”the society has yet publishing nothing, but have material for two quarto volumes and will I hope send one to Europe next spring.” At last in the beginning of 1789 came out the first volume under the title of Asiatick Researches (instead of Asiatic Miscellany originally thought of by Jones) with the subtitle. Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal, for the enquiring into the history and antiquities, the Arts, Science and Literature of Asia. The number contained 28 articles, with 25 plates, printed matter ran into 488 pages,700 copies were sent to P. Eelmsly (publishers of Jones in London)
who sold the entire lot.\textsuperscript{28} The work was well received in the literary and scientific world and one pirated edition\textsuperscript{29} Wo-octovo editions from London.\textsuperscript{30} and translations in French\textsuperscript{31} German came out in succession and a popular edition of the first two volumes from Calcutta.

The Transactions has survived the test of time and is steel being published of course, through its successor the Journal of the Asiatic Society.

“Asiatick Researches” created quite a sensation in the literary world, and the demand for it was so great, and also urgent on the continent, and a French translation was brought out in Paris under the title of “Researches Asiatiques”. The translation was a faithful one, and it was enriched by a series of valuable notes on the philological historical papers by M. Langles, and on the scientific paper by M. M. Cuvier, Delambre, Lamarck, and Olivier.

The causes, which contributed to the stoppage of his once popular and highly esteemed periodical, were manifold. The first and foremost was tardy publication. From the foundation of the Society inl784 to the close of 1839 with in a period of 55 years the society published only 20 volumes, or one volume at an average in every two years and nine months. In many instances the interval was greater. In the early days of the Society this was not much felt, but latterly it becomes a source of frequent complaint. Another frequent complaint was the form of the ‘Researches.’ A heavy quarto volume necessarily suggested elaborate and finished essays and in the selection of papers for it, short notes, describing new discoveries or new ideas, however interesting were frequently rejected. They were read at meetings and then pigeonholed for decay. The transactions in their quarto from could not be adopted for them. An outlet for these was therefore very much need. For a time these
found a place in the ‘Quarterly Oriental Journal’ which Dr. Wilson started in 1821 while short note on scientific subjects were published in the’ Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society.’ Both those publications however were dropped in 1827. A substitute for these were provided in 1829 by Capt. J. D. Herbert Deputy surveyor General in a monthly publication, which he started under the name of ‘Gleanings in Science.’ His primary idea was to confine it to extracts and abstracts from European scientific publication, but original contributions poured in so rapidly that he had to abstain from extracts. The Society benefited by this publication so far that a precis of its monthly proceedings, which had therefore been preserved in manuscripts, was regularly published. In 1830 Mr. James Prinsep instead of dropping the work proposed to change it name and call it ‘The Journal of the Asiatic Society’. The sanction was given in March 1832. The Journal as it appeared in that month, bore the name of the ‘Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, it’s character, too, was entirely changed. Instead of being a scientific periodical, it became essentially Literary. It came out also with the additional advantage of free postage. The Government having in consideration of the- editor publishing Dr. Buchanan- Hamilton’s Static’s of Bengal’ as an appendix to it, conceded that privilege. For the first two years more ever it was given to the members free of charge. The frequency and regularity with which this Journal appeared recommended it strongly to the notice of authors, and many papers which would have been otherwise reserved for the page of the ‘Researches’ found their way into the ‘Journal’.32

Journal:

The curiosity to know created by the publication of the Transactions inspired the inquisitive minds to undertake publication of
research journals in humanities and sciences at personal risk. Such an idea occurred to many at the time.

These led to the undertaking of a number of Journals which offered space to short but important communications and reported progress of Science and diverse branches of learning in America, Europe and India among these mention may be made of:

Quarterly Oriented Journal (1821)
Transaction of the Medical and Physical Society(1829)
Gleanings in Science (1829)

Through the above journals were conducted by eminent scholars they were short lived. But the need of such journals was so strongly felt, that the vacuum was continuously filled up by new journals. The monthly Journal Gleanings of Science which was projected edited and financed by Capt J.D Herbert.(1829) become a medium for regular publication of précis of monthly proceedings of the Society and other scientific contribution mostly of the members of the Society and extract from scientific literature. In recognition of the patronage extended by the class of Natural History and Physics of the Asiatic Society by subscribing liberally to it and selecting it as a vehicle of short notes an important discoveries and ideas which were necessarily left out by the Asiatic Researches- its editor respectfully inscribed (Dec 1829) the first volume of the Journal to the President (Sir Edward Ryan), vice President and to the other gentlemen members of -the class of Natural History and Physics of the Asiatic Society in the laudable attempts made by them for the cultivation of science of India and the first number of the journal was released in the middle of March of 1832. Prinsep defined its scope in the preface of the journal:
“It is intended, for instance to include in it such papers from archives of the society as though sufficiently interesting, are not yet quite suited to the character of their quarto volume of Transactions. It is not meant, that the selection of these papers should be confined to any particular subject; literary and antiquarian papers being considered equally eligible with those purely scientific”.

It will be greatly admitted that a work such as that announced, has been long called for, and that it will supply a desideratum in our Indian literature. The regular transactions of the Asiatic Society appear in too bulky and expensive a shape to afford sufficient information to the European World of the state of Indian science, or to supply excitement to the laborers in the vineyard here.

The object of the Journal to which the Society lent its name, was declared to give publicity to such Oriental matter as the antiquarian, the linguist, the traveler and the naturalist may glean in the ample field open to their industry in this part of the World (i.e. Asia) and as far as means would permit, to the progress of the various sciences at home, especially such as are connected in any way with Asia.34

The frequency and regularity of its publication was a great advantage and many papers, otherwise reserved for the Asiatic Researches were diverted to this Journal. In 1842 it was resolved to discontinue the Asiatic Researches and take over the Journal, under its own management from 1843. From 1832 to date the journal has passed three stages and entire its fourth in 1953.

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<tr>
<td>First</td>
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<td>Third</td>
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A separate section (part-3 1803 to 1904) dealing with ‘anthropology, ethnography, and folklore and special monographs from time to time as an extra number supplement were added to the Journal. Numismatic supplement was a feature of the Journal (letters) up to the year 1938, while bibliographical supplement was introduced in 1950.

In addition, the Society started publications of the following series of which have either been discontinued or dropped.

**Proceedings:**

The proceedings of every meeting are being regularly kept since 1784. A precis of the proceedings of the society was included for the first time in the Gleanings in Science (1829-31) and then continued in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1832-64) in an expanded form.

In 1865 the Proceedings was separated from the body of the Journal to contain the Precise of the Society’s proceedings and short notes: its title was changed to ‘Year Book’ for such and such year from 1935.

The précis of the society’s proceedings which had been hitherto published regularly every month, could not be oftener issued than once in every two or three months, and it became a frequent matter of complaint. The obvious course in the case was to separate the proceedings from the body of the Journal, and this was done in 1865. The value of the new series was also enhanced by inserting into it short notes, which were not-deemed fit for introduction into the journal but which were, nevertheless of sufficient interest to be worthy of publication.

Another changes was also at the time suggested. The complaints which necessitated the division of the Researches into two parts in 1829 were now brought to bear upon the journal, and a similar division had to be adopted. Care was at the same time taken to keep these parts so distinct by separate pagination and separate indexes as to form two
separate serials, so that scientific scholar may have the scientific matter without the admixture of what to him appeared as literary lumber and the Orientalist may not have to pay for scientific matter in which he did not feel himself interested. This arrangement necessitated the employment of three Secretaries 1) one to look after the general business of the society, 2) one to edit the scientific part of the Journal and 3) a third to take charge of the literary portion.

The most frequent contributors to the Journal have been:

Mr. J Prinsep, B. H. Hodgson, Col. P.T. Coutley, E. Blyth, H. Piddington, Dr. Spilsbury, Dr. J. Campbell Cosma de Koros, Capt Cunningham, General A. Cunningham, M. Kittoe, Capt. Hutton etc.\(^{36}\)

**Bibliotheca Indica:**

The immediate question before the Council of 1847 was, how to utilize the grant, and a Committee was appointed to devise means to carry out the Court’s wishes regarding the publication of the Vedas. The plan approved by the Society was, as suggested in a judicious minute by Mr. Laidley (dated December 1847) to start a monthly serial under the name of ‘Bibliotheca Indica’ and the editorship of a competent scholar, aided by a staff of Pandits. The work was taken in hand at the beginning of 1848. Dr. Roer was appointed the chief editor on a salary of Rs. 100 per mensem, and his principal duty was to supply English translations of the works taken in hand. The first work selected was the Sanhita of the Big Veda, but before four fascicule of it could be published, news arrived that the Court of Directors had made arrangements with Dr. Max Miller for the publication of that work, together with an English translation by Dr. H.H. Wilson, and the Society’s project had, therefore, to be abandoned. Dr. Roer then took up the Upanishads and some other works.\(^{37}\)
NOTES AND REFERENCE:
1. Mitra Rejandralal: Centenary Review of the Asiatic Society of Bengal 1784-1884, Calcutta, 1886, p-6
4. Trail Henry (?—?): He is mentioned as a member of the society at the time of his election as Treasurer, but details are not found in the Proceedings. He was probably a senior partner of Trail, Palmer and Company,
11. Prasanna Kumar Tagore (1801-68): Educationist; one of the founders of the Hindu College. Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846); Friend of Raja Rammohun Roy and founder of Carr and Tagore Company (1834), the first ever Indo-British commercial venture. Sib Chandra Das (1811-90): Student of Hindu College, and one of Derozio’s students. Rasamoy Dutta (1779-1854): One of the founders of Hindu College; supported English education among Indians.


16. Official website of the Asiatic Society..


22. Mitra Rejandralal: Centenary Review of the Asiatic Society of Bengal 1784-1884, Calcutta, 1886, p-34

23. Mitra Rejandralal: Centenary Review of the Asiatic Society of Bengal 1784-1884, Calcutta, 1886, p-34


28. Annual discourse delivered on 19th Feb 1789. In another letter (20, h Oct 1789), to Justice Hyde, Jones wrote:” I have written four papers for our expiring society the society is a fun, rickety child and must be fed with pap; not shall it die by my fault and die it must for I can’t support it alone …” Asiatic Researches, Calcutta, 1789.


37. Ibid. p.61.