



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

CERTIFICATE NO : ICLTSEMH /2025/C0125268

**Historical Studies on Bengal Library Association Through Public
Libraries in Colonial Bengal During Pre-Independence
Period (1847-1947)**

Srijit Kumar Mandal

Research Scholar, Department of History, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

The Bengal Library Association has long placed an emphasis on improving and expanding public library systems. The association's ability to exert organizational influence was limited from 1925 to 1950. Operations were overseen by a dedicated core group of volunteers. Its financial status was precarious. Its operations were limited by the dictates of a dictatorship. Public libraries and popular education were growing rapidly, but other powers were suspicious. Library patronage that enabled or helped the independence struggle in particular infuriated imperialist rulers. The imperialist overlords meticulously destroyed numerous libraries in order to preserve the outlawed revolutionary literature. In this article, historical studies on Bengal library association through public libraries in colonial Bengal during pre-independence period (1847-1947) has been discussed.

Keywords: *Bengal, Library, Association, Public, Libraries, Colonial Bengal.*

INTRODUCTION

A meeting was convened in Albert Hall, 15 College Square, Calcutta, by the assistant secretary of the All-India Library Association in response to a suggestion made during the Third All-India Public Library meeting to form library associations unique to each state. Meeting attendees included library advocates and leaders from across undivided Bengal. One Mr. A. Chapman, formerly of the Imperial Library, presided over the presentation. Among the notable individuals who took part in the discussion were Professor Amulya Charan Vidyabhusan, Professor Kalidas Nag, Monoranjan Roy, the librarian at Dacca University, Srinivas Acharya of Puri, King Kshitindra Deb Roy, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy, Maulavi Mujibar Rahaman, Prince Sarat Kumar Roy, Prince Rajshahi's Nagendra Nath Roychowdhury, Satyananda Basu, Sasadhar Chakraborty, Narendra Deb, Sahindra Nath Mukhopadhyay, Tinkari Sarkar, and Dr. P.C. Bidge. At Rabindra Nath's request, Sushil Kumar Ghosh gave a speech describing the history and progress of the cause. (Buragohain, A., 2022).

Dr. Kalidas Nag spoke about the library movement in France and the president's speech. Professor Amulya Charan Vidyabhusan delivered a talk regarding ancient Indian libraries. Monoranjan Roy highlighted the library movement in an essay. The author, Dr. P.C. Breed, discussed his involvement with the Spanish library movement firsthand. While going through the proposals for the third All



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

India Library Conference in Belgaum, Sushil Kumar Ghosh voiced some reservations regarding the creation of a library organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Area: Public libraries in colonial Bengal.

Study Period: Pre-independence period (1847-1947).

Hypothesis 1 (H₁): The Bengal Library Association influence the public libraries in colonial Bengal.

Research Design: In this research, qualitative research design was used.

Secondary Data Source: In this research, secondary data source was used.

Methodology: The research work based on the secondary data gathered from various sources, including government publications, censuses, organizational internal records, books, journal articles, websites and reports, e-resources, etc. which were enlisted in the bibliographic section. Also, qualitative research design also used for this study. The area wise historical information of public libraries in colonial Bengal during pre-independence period (1847-1947) were also chronicled.

Tools: In this research, historical research tool was used.

HISTORICAL STUDIES ON BENGAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION TOWARDS PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN COLONIAL BENGAL DURING PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD (1847-1947):

Proposals of Bengal Library Association during 1925-1927:

The All-Bengal Library Association, for example, was established in 1925, which is equivalent to 1332 BS. The All-Bengal Library Association never even convened a conference in the two years following its inception. The new group's primary responsibility in its first two years of existence was to make its objectives known to the public. In order to spread the word about the library movement and its aims, the library association put together slide exhibitions. Sushil Kumar Ghosh, who was the organization's founding secretary, has done a fantastic job with public relations efforts. The association organized gatherings in Hooghly, Howrah, 24 Parganas, and Birbhum to advocate for library services, especially those provided by public libraries. Overtune Hall, 86 College Street, Calcutta, was the site of the association's annual meeting on September 25, 1927. At the meeting of the Hooghly District Library Association, the famous orator and politician Bipin Chandra Pal delivered a moving address on "library use" because of his ongoing engagement with the district's libraries.

Bengal Library Conference:

The formation of library associations occurred at the same time as the approval of plans to raise funds for the building of new libraries and the maintenance and renovation of existing ones. Pramatha Nath Chowdhury, a famous novelist, hosted the occasion. On behalf of the welcome



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

committee, Khitish Chandra Deb Roy served as coordinator. By carefully going over all incoming mail, Sushil Kumar Ghosh was able to achieve his objective. In his opening remarks, Roy Bahadur Chunilal Basu laid out the agenda for the conference. Public libraries, according to Pramatha Nath Chowdhury, are crucial for the spread of knowledge.

Among the suggestions put forth during the meeting were the establishment of library committees in each area and the enhancement of libraries in areas deemed suitable to bolster the library movement. The administration and construction of libraries are greatly supported by wealthy religious leaders, landowners, philanthropists, and trustees. Please, government, give the libraries that are under your jurisdiction enough money. We strongly recommend that municipal governments create libraries within their purview that receive public funding. The strategy advocates for subject instruction in the native language. Novelist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay has pleaded with the members of the Bengal Legislative Assembly to overturn the decision that led to the confiscation of the book "Patherdabi." He has also urged library authorities to protect the rare books and invaluable manuscripts housed in their institutions. For the sake of your libraries' efficient operation, I respectfully request that the directors of the libraries at Calcutta University and Dhaka University do what is necessary. It is imperative that all library directors make preserving scholarly books and curricula their first priority. I went to the government's Education Department and officially asked for library financing. I petitioned the Calcutta Corporation to ensure that the libraries under its supervision were adequately funded. I was successful in getting a senator to back an initiative to create a nationwide library movement. Book, journal, and magazine publishers were advised to use high-quality paper to make their works last longer. Our goal was to persuade the Indian government to rethink moving the Imperial Library from Calcutta to Delhi. Kirtan and Kathakata events were requested by all Bengali library directors at the conference as a means of preserving the cultural tradition of the state. A library program was decided upon at the conference. In summary, the project wants to get people reading more, get libraries all over the country working together, collect historical documents, keep and, if possible, make copies of important and rare books, find a way to measure how well libraries are doing, and fight for libraries. The second Bengal Library Conference's declarations and suggestions reveal that the association's leadership has long been concerned with the growth of public library systems in the country.

As the third Bengal Library Conference took place in the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Building on November 18, 1931, Newton Mohan Dutta, the librarian of the Baroda State, presided over the proceedings. Professors Sachindra Nath Mukhopadhyay, Binoy Kumar Sarkar, and Manmohan Mohan Basu were among the speakers during the conference. Sushil Kumar Ghosh, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy, Dr. Jitindra Nath Bhattacharya, and Dr. Gurudas Roy evaluated literature on a range of subjects pertaining to the library movement. The library association's involvement waned after the conference. It wasn't until 1933 that changes began. The members of the association accepted a resolution to rename the Bangiya Granthalaya Parishad to the Bengal Library Association during a general meeting held on September 14th of that year. This was followed by the addition of



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

the words "Bangiya Granthagar Parishad" in parentheses. The creation of the association was authorized by a public assembly on August 19, 1935. There was a subsequent round of rule changes pertaining to formation. June 12, 1946, was the official registration date of the association, in accordance with the Society Registration Act of 1860. The late Pramil Chandra Basu claimed that the years 1925–1933 were the association's formative years. (Kumar, A., 2019).

The Fourth Bengal Library Conference took place in Ashutosh Hall at Calcutta University on July 24 and 25, 1937. Retired Bangladeshi Prime Minister Fajlul Haque presided over the gathering. Nihar Ranjan Roy, a distinguished historian and librarian at Calcutta University, served as secretary to the welcoming committee, while Water Closet Wordsworth, a former director of education and principal of Presidency College, presided over the event. Sanat Kumar Roychowdhury began an exhibition because of this very reason. A nationwide movement to support libraries was outlined by Kumar Munindra Deb Roy of the Association. In July 1937, the organization reportedly had details on 1,250 public libraries spread across undivided Bengal, according to the report. He proceeded by detailing the processes that are put in place to guarantee compliance with library legislation. Academic libraries, libraries for schools and children, libraries that reach out to people in rural and urban regions, and research on library initiatives in Bengal's municipal district and Calcutta were the four main foci of the conference.

Suggestions for the public library were approved at the meeting. The conference suggested that the Bengal Library Association raise library awareness in order to secure funding for the Calcutta Municipality Library as well as four more libraries at approved sites. The association's position was that Calcutta, along with each district and subdivisional town, should have its own plan. The group should also create an exhaustive library catalog using data provided by both individual and institutional members.

Zilla Parishads and other local governments should provide greater funding to libraries that are well-managed, as was agreed upon during the meeting. In answer to his inquiry, the association was granted a license to organize the Calcutta and district chapters by the honorary general secretary. It was later on that they decided to open a branch in Calcutta.

On March 19th and 20th, 1938, the Belly Hall Public Library in Midnapore town (now Raj Narayan Basu Smriti Pathagar) hosted the sixth Bengal Library Conference. A location other than Calcutta played host to the first-ever Bengal Library Conference. Renowned librarian and historian Dr. Niharranjan Roy hosted the occasion. Former president of the Bengal Library Association and trailblazer in the Bengal Library movement, Kumar Munindra Deb Roy, opened the conference. Notable people from all across the world, including India, extended their best wishes in celebration of the occasion. Former Midnapore district magistrate Binoy Ranjan Sen presided over the welcome committee. A statement made by Subhas Chandra Bose, president of the Indian National Congress, deserves serious consideration. The inauguration address by Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy centered on library legislation and libraries that do not require subscriptions. "The Bengal Library Association



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

will mainly try to educate organizations and the government about the importance of free public libraries and to rally public opinion in their favor over the course of several years," said he. Everybody should be aware that this is an essential service and a basic human right, and he stressed that traveling is the only way to access free public libraries. He has faith that sometime soon the administrations of various levels of government will build a free public library. His forecast would come true if the public library offered only one free service. (Maity, D., 2018).

Bansberia Public Library in Bansberia, Hooghly district, was the site of the Sixth Bengal Library Conference, which was held on April 11 and 12, 1941. The event was organized to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Bansberia Public Library. Binoy Ranjan Sen, S.K., and I.C.S. presided over the affair. At the time, Halder was the district commissioner of Burdwan, and he was the one who started the ritual. Welcoming the guests was a committee presided over by Kumar Munindra Deb Roy. An unusual exhibition was inaugurated by Lieutenant Colonel A.C. Chattyapadhyay, a former director of public health for the Bengal government.

There is little doubt that the association has had a significant impact on Bengali librarianship and library science. These contributions encompass a range of activities, such as the provision of competent librarians, the selection of books, the provision of recommendations to both public and institutional libraries, the publication of seminal works on the subject, and the promotion of open dialogue about the challenges encountered by Bengali library movements. Relying solely on public and institutional donations without any assistance from the government is an admirable endeavour. The Bengali people would deeply value the organization's selfless and committed efforts.

The drive to include libraries in the nation's educational system, in his view, cannot be implemented and sustained without the real backing of the government.

The challenging task of defining and categorizing Indian languages was thoroughly investigated by Pramila Chandra. In his analysis, Anath Nath Roy focused on an article called "Granthagarer Madhyame Bayaska Siksha" (Learning for Adults via Libraries).

One of the main recommendations made at the meeting was for the Bengali state and municipal governments to increase funding for library acquisitions and maintenance. In order to determine who is eligible to receive grants, the group reached out to the government. It had accomplished an excessive amount with an inadequate budget. We advise the association to increase its activity level in order to carry out the next initiatives efficiently. They said they would back out of the project if the provincial government didn't foot the bill. It requested a sizable annual grant from the Bengali government.

Calcutta University's and Dhaka University's administrations were asked by the populace to create a library science curriculum. There could be more scientific library administration if we hired competent librarians for permanent positions and paid them the same as university professors.



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

Calcutta University and the Calcutta Municipality were approached for financial support in order to establish a summer program that would educate librarians.

The Seventh Bengal Library Conference took place at Burdwan Raj College on November 26 and 27, 1944. The presence of Kumar Munindra Deb Roy as meeting chair was anticipated. The president's unanticipated illness forced Pramila Chandra Basu to step in as chair of the conference and read aloud his prepared remarks. Someone named Uday Chand Mahatab convened a meeting. Nagendra Nath Rakshit, the committee's head, was in command. Munindra Deb Roy argued that contemporary libraries should serve as educational institutions that assist people in learning about important topics and developing into better members of society. In this situation, books will be the reading materials. At the association's 1959 annual general meeting, which took place on March 25, Munindra Deb Roy was elected president and Biswanath Bandopadhyay secretary. In the years after WWII, he made some helpful suggestions to improve library resources for all people, but he stressed the importance of government support for expanding library systems. Users' recommendations were implemented, and the Imperial Library, the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, and the Geological Survey of India were requested to relinquish their library holdings.

Constitution of Bengal Library Association:

One of the primary objectives of the Third Bengal Library Conference was to urge the Bengal Legislative Assembly to pass a law protecting the libraries of the state. To further the library movement, the Legislative Assembly approved the act. A library science course should be offered by universities, according to the proposal. (Mandal, S., 2021).

The Bengal Library Association is planning to host a library conference in specific regions. The inaugural district library conference took place at Faridpur on December 6, 1931. This gathering was presided over by Sushil Kumar Ghosh. In 1931, the Bengal Library Association was established to support the library movement in Bengal. As a result, on September 14, 1933, the Bangiya Granthalaya Parishad reorganized and became known as the Bengal Library Association. The group's constitution served as the basis for its internal governance. One of the most important provisions of the Parishad (Association) Constitution was the establishment of public libraries. The objectives of the association were to raise awareness of the library movement in Bengal, encourage cultural development, assist libraries in locating and securing funding from both public and private sources, establish district library committees, train librarians, and create a database of library construction plans and maps that adhered to the Constitution.

Library Conferences and Meetings in Districts of Bengal:

Undivided Bengal's library association was established in response to a request made during the 1924 All-India Public Library Conference in Belgaum. In 1925, the All-Bengal Library Association was established, although it did not hold its first two annual meetings. Over the first two years, the association put in significant effort to publicize the new organization's aims and advantages and to



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

promote the library movement and its aims through slide presentations at different venues. The program's success was mostly due to Sushil Kumar Ghosh, the first secretary of the group. A number of districts came together to highlight the importance of public library services, including Hooghly, Howrah, 24 Parganas, Birbhum, and others. The association's AGM was held in Over Toon Hall, 86 College Street, Calcutta, on September 25, 1927. Distinguished public figure and accomplished public speaker Bipin Chandra Pal delivered an inspiring speech during the ceremony, highlighting the value of libraries.

Improving library literacy in the region was one of its primary goals in the initial decade or two following its establishment. Balia Kandi hosted the inaugural library conference in the Rajbari subdivision of the Faridpur district on June 2 and 3, 1925, a few months following the conference in the Hooghly district. The public library staff from the Rajbari subdivision were in attendance. Rajbari, a sub-divisional library organization, was founded at the meeting. The goal of forming these clubs at the state and regional levels was to encourage reading and writing across the country. (Das, A. K., 2015).

On May 8 and 9, 1920, the Second Hooghly District Library Conference was organized by Uttara Para Saraswati Sammilan. Several notable people were present at the gathering. The convention was chaired by Haraprasad Shastri. In the presence of all, Harihar Seth reviewed numerous papers relating to the rural library. The many advantages of a global library were enumerated by Pramatha Nath Bandopadhyay in his speech. Reviewer Kumar Munindra Deb Roy claims that there are five of the fifty-seven public libraries in the region that are physically located.

Calcutta Library Conference:

In 1935, Calcutta was chosen as the perfect site for the Bengal Library Association's annual conference by the executive committee. At Asutosh Hall on the campus of Calcutta University, the first Calcutta Library Conference was held on January 12, 1936. The gathering was chaired by Khan Bahadur Asadullah, librarian of the Imperial Library. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, inaugurated the seminar. On behalf of the welcome committee, Sir Harishankar Pal presided. The suggestions for the scientific training program for librarians that were agreed upon during the conference will be shared with Calcutta Municipality, the Bengal Government, and Calcutta University. The city's libraries have been requested to receive more financing from the Calcutta Municipality and the Bengal government in order to improve inhabitants' access to information. The newly formed Calcutta Library Association was persuaded to publish a monthly publication after much effort on our part. Creating a detailed constitution defining the association's objectives is the primary focus of the group. (Bhatt, R. K. & Kandhasamy, K., 2020).

Training Programme of Bengal Library Association:

The group decided to start a regular training program for librarians working in school, public, and university libraries after the Bansberia training camp. Twenty library workers from different parts of



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

India started a six-month library science certificate program in July 1935 at the Imperial Library. In this endeavour, the Indian government took the lead.

The training program was overseen by Khan Bahadur Asadullah during his tenure as librarian at the Imperial Library. Graduate workers from libraries all around India made up the bulk of the program's participants. There was no way for volunteers at smaller libraries to get training. The Bengal Library Association established a formal credentialing program for librarians in 1937. A two-week training camp was organized by the districts to assist with this initiative.

Editor of the Statesman Wordsworth brought the issue to the attention of Asutosh College in Calcutta on 30 April 1937. In a blessing and well-wish for the Bengal Library Association, Rabindranath Tagore wrote on April 28, 1919. The group would address a critical need in the country by providing training for competent librarians.

Out of sixty applicants, twenty in-service librarians were chosen for the first training program. Eighteen individuals were successful in the end. On July 24, 1937, in Calcutta's Ashutosh Hall, the winners of the Fourth Bengal Library Conference were presented with diplomas by Bengal's Prime Minister Fajlul Haque. The training that had begun in 1937 was postponed for a year due to the association's financial limitations during World War II.

Publication of Bengal Library Association:

Similarly, it has prioritized the development of library science and library movement content. At the time, the association's organizational situation prevented it from publishing a substantial quantity of publications. The association's newsletter states that publishing significant books on Bengali librarianship has been its primary objective. Library science students, librarians in urban and rural areas, and Bengali readers interested in libraries and related themes will find these publications beneficial.

From the above findings and discussion, it can be stated that the it can be stated that the “Hypothesis 1 (H₁): The Bengal Library Association influence the public libraries in colonial Bengal” has been accepted.

CONCLUSION

The yearly general meetings of the Bengal Library Association and its forerunner, the Bangiya Granthalaya Parishad, took place at about the same time. Minutes from meetings and conferences will most likely vanish. But the public library system and its expansion were the primary subjects of the articles and research published in the journal. Among the topics covered in the paper were managing promotional efforts, enhancing the library's services, and establishing a public library in a small town or hamlet. Public, non-profit, and provincial government roles in public library system growth were discussed at the conferences, along with the library's function in promoting adult education.



**International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering,
Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.**

A library science curriculum is being considered by the Bengal Library Association as a means of more systematic library organization. The training program was incorporated into the group's new constitution upon its reorganization on September 14, 1933.

In June 1934, the Bansberia Public Library in Hooghly held a library science training camp to ensure that libraries could access qualified librarians. The association and the Hooghly Zilla Granthagar Parishad collaborated for two weeks to provide a training program, with Pramila Chandra Basu at the helm. In the first training session, twelve library staff members met in Bengal.

REFERENCES

1. Bhatt, R. K. & Kandhasamy, K. (2020). A Study of Public Libraries in India: Pre-Independence Period. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*, 4467, 1-20.
2. Buragohain, A. (2022). Development of Public Libraries in Post-Independent India: An Analytical Study, *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 10(1), 578-581.
3. Das, A. K. (2015). Legacy of the Bengal Renaissance in public library development in India. *IFLA Journal*, 41(4), 370–380.
4. Kumar, A. (2019). Development of Public Library System in India. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 6(6), 324-332.
5. Maity, D. (2018). Public library development and its use as a part of culture in West Bengal: An analysis. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 1927, 1-10.
6. Mandal, S. (2021). Public Libraries in Colonial Bengal with special reference to Social Practice. *Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online*, 20 (6), 2828-2838.