

## STATUS OF RARE DOCUMENTS IN THE THREE CENTURY OLD PUBLIC LIBRARIES OF WEST BENGAL

*Biswajit Das<sup>1</sup> & Amiya Paramanik<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>*Librarian, University of Gourbanga, West Bengal, India*

<sup>2</sup>*Research Scholar, Department of Library and Information Science,  
Jadavpur University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India*

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### **ABSTRACTS**

*This paper includes three-century-old public library for the study. It focused on the rare documents of the libraries, well-structured questionnaires administrated personally to collect the data. It depicts the situation and the condition of the century-old public libraries of Kolkata. It also includes the selection criteria of rare documents. The measures are described as value, deficiency, age, condition, physical and aesthetics etc. To identify the real situation the study is rendered on the collection through language, bindings, form of publication, date of publication etc.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Rare Selection, Value, Deficiency, Age Aesthetics, Condition, Collection, Periodicals*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Opening Remarks**

A library is a social organization acting as a knowledge sharing center and offer the basic need for lifelong education and helps for the decision making in day to day life and cultural, religious and socio-economic development for the individual and community people and social and special group. A public library is a system run by the public fund, participation of common people and for the benefit for them. These are the local center for information marketing for the social development and make knowledge available for the users. According to Unesco Public Library Manifesto (1994), the missions of public libraries are:

- Creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age
- Supporting individual both formal education as well as self-conducted education at all level
- Providing opportunities for personal creative development
- Stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people
- Promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements, and innovations
- Ensuring access to citizens for all sorts of community information etc.

The above precedent means to cover proper collection development and the dissemination of information and the library service to the users. This study aims to meet that aspect through the century-old libraries in Kolkata. The term collection development as defined by (Elder 1990), is a mission-oriented strategic program that involved the mental faculty of human beings for the acquisition of library materials. Generally, the thought of collection development confined into a number of resources in one or more subject assemble by a person or origination in a well-planned process for the purpose of dissemination of information and services to the users. The selection procedure of 'Rare Book' has a long controversy since last decades. The declaration of rare of a book or library materials depends on the internal policy of the respective institute or organization. The American Museum of Natural History define rare books, a book printed before 1850 in America, a book printed before 1775 in Europe, a book on valuable thought content, unique manuscript element, book by museum staff and a book on high monetary value. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture declared rare, first edition, a book published before a century ago and the other edition, a book on high value with national importance and the valuable books on Ramakrishna order, and Indian classic. The National Library of India recognized a book as the rare document, a book or journal published before 1860, with illustration, diagram, and also a book published a half-century ago.

## OBJECTIVES

- To identifies the situation and the condition of the century-old public libraries.
- To identifies the comparative strength of the rare collection of the century-old libraries.
- To find out the language base books and periodical collection.
- To find out the policy to selecting a rare document.

## LIMITATIONS

However, in this research work, three (Taltala Public Library 1882, Chaitanya Library 1889, The United Reading Rooms 1872) libraries have been taken for study. To study old & rare collection, originally it was started to collect detailed data starting from the year of establishment of the libraries. But, actually, it has been observed that these libraries rarely preserve their old records. For this, the survey of their stacks has been made and the rare documents available are recorded in this article. Again, some of these libraries surveyed, are sometimes closed due to their financial crisis, sometimes open irregularly, but still exist and thus considered as a sample of this survey.

## METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of data collections, various methods have been employed. Initially, a questionnaire has been prepared, on the basis of this; interviews of concerning persons have been taken. At the same time, different libraries have been surveyed. Literature concerning these libraries has been searched and if found suitable, photocopies have been made on the permission of the authorities.

## HOW MAY DEFINE RARE BOOKS

It is pearl question, what is a rare book? There are three basic factors which determine whether a book is rare or

not first is relative importance second scarcity and thirdly condition and importance. There is also another valuable question, aren't all old books rare? And the answer will be no the dates are rough guidelines at best and are always subject to the overriding factors of intrinsic importance, condition, and demand. According to George Chapman Singer, 'utility of a book depends upon, not to be a reproducible character, able to build unique quality physical objects.' Josiah Q Bennett stated that a book has twine aspects one is the outer form or physical characteristic and other is the subject content which is the thought content of cultural or educational value when outer form covered the publication information, imprint, main text, binding and aesthetics, and other relevant materials. Generally, a rare book is any book which poses the value of high demand, deficiency, high importance, age, condition, physical aesthetics and subject matter. Without demands a book can't be a rare book and if it has no value then no one wants it but demand may be changed.

### **Value**

The value or importance of a book is complemented by the demand but sometimes a valuable book poses less demand due to the policy of the particular library, the right book to the right reader at the right moments. A book is important when the content of the book makes the contribution of human knowledge and the seminal work is added value.

### **Deficiency**

Deficiency is the key measure to select a rare book. When any criteria conflict to each other deficiency play an important role in resolving the measure. Deficiency is measured by the demand. More demand increases the deficiency value and the insufficient supply and reproducible characteristics of the resources.

### **Condition**

Condition means the state of the book whether the book is brittle or out of order to handle, whether it is a complete volume of all the relevant and ideal publication criteria like the position of pages, state of bindings, spine, illustration and any damage or deterioration that effect the appearance of the books.

### **Physic and Aesthetics**

The physical and aesthetical quality always added the potential effective value. The perfect bindings, originals photography, color plates and diagrams, fine illustration, print and cover decoration with metal or other valuable materials also added the potential value. The fore-edge printing is another physical and aesthetical quality that added the potential value.

### **Age and Imprint**

Other important criteria for selecting a rare document age or the date and /or year of publication /creation but age is not so much critical factor as the deficiency. A book published before 1910 about Indic study is potentially valuable but there many rare books are there that's only about 25 year old because of their deficiency and demand. Imprint also poses which is the publisher, place of publication and date of publication.

## **RARE SELECTION CRITERIA OF THE LIBRARIES**

Propose rare selection criteria which are selected for the libraries.

**Taltala Public Library (TPL) (1882)**

- Surendranath Banerjee collection: All the books donated by Surendranath Banerjee and Books in the library published before 1810 and/or the first edition of the book.
- Girish Ghosh collection: All the books donated by Girish Ghosh and Books in the library published within 1910- 1811 and/or the first edition of the book.
- Special collection: Valuable Vedic literature or scripture are treated as the special rare collection.

**The United Reading Rooms (URR) (1872)**

- General collection: The Books which are from the inception of the library is in the general collection and newly gifted old and rare books which are out of print and publishing year not found, with a valuable picture.
- Jadumohan Tagore collection: The books were gifted by Jadumohan Tagore and also valuable.

**Chaitanya Library (CL) (1889)**

- **Rare- 01:** All books in the library published before 1810
- **Rare-02:** All books in the library relevant to the Indian study published 1910-1811
- **Rare-03:** All books which, out of print, brittle, valuable picture, and also valuable but publishing year is not less than hundred years.

**ANALYSIS OF THE COLLECTION OF THE LIBRARIES**

In 1872 Calcutta Reading Rooms was established which was housed in a rented room at the Upper Chitpur Road – Beadon Street crossing. There no continuous number in accession registers. Every year accession number starts from one and thus it is very difficult to say about the total number of documents possessed by the library observing accession register at once. The actual number of the document is not available now. Approximately, this library contains 29,975 books of which 10,231 are in English. Previously, the books were classified under different subject heads. But now books are arranged in shelves alphabetically according to authors. But the children books are arranged in shelves according to the subject concerned. Though, no record regarding the subject categories is available there. So it is not possible to give a detailed picture of documents procured under different subject heads.

Taltala Public Library was founded in the year 1882. The effort for the foundation was going on since 1879. The total collection of this library at present is about 70,064 of which Bengali documents are about 53,000 and English documents are about 17,000. No standard classification scheme is followed. Books are arranged in shelves according to accession numbers. However, documents are classified under different subject heads. There are 22 of such heads which are : Poetry, Fiction, Detective fiction, Historical fiction, Drama, Essay, Travel, History, Biography, Autobiography, Literature, Literary criticism, Collections, Science, Economics, Astrology, Medicine, Fine arts, Arts, Agriculture, National literature (like Freedom movement of a country) and Farce. Like classification, no standard code for cataloguing purpose has been followed. Actually, no detailed catalogues of documents are there. However, there are two or three volumes of published catalogue both for the general section and children section arranged alphabetically under author which are the only inventories regarding the choice of documents. Again in these catalogues, a separate section is given for

rare documents but most of the cases no year of publication of those documents are given. This fails to prove the rarity of those documents. In 1889, when

Chaitanya library was established, Kolkata had too few public libraries to its credit, one was Calcutta Public Library at Metcalfe Hall and later amalgamated with the Imperial Library and the other important one was Kombuliatola Library later amalgamated with Baghbazar Reading Library. The progress of the library towards the growth of its collection of books and periodicals are enormous. From 1889 to 1989, this library has a collection of 25187 Bengali books and periodicals and 11295 English books and periodicals and 615 in another language. This library has a good collection of old and rare documents. It contains rare books, rare periodicals and moreover very important legal documents, committee reports and also reference books. But due to the closed access system, these documents could not be accessed easily. However, the library staff member helped to access some of them

### Collection on the Basis of Language

This study tried to focus, though these libraries are more than a hundred years old its collection is very poor because of the lack of sufficient funds donation. A very irregular grant from the government, different bodies like RRRLF etc. have been obtained and thus the main source of finance becomes the member's subscription and interests of their deposit in banks. Among of its various items of expenditures, important heads are book purchase (nearly Rs.10, 000/to 20,000/- per year), newspapers, periodicals (nearly Rs.2, 000/to 5,000- per year each), binding, electricity, maintenance etc.

**Table 1: Collection in Language**

Libraries	English	Bengali	Other Language	Total
CL	24587	11295	615	36497
URR	10231	19013	731	29975
TPL	52151	16412	1501	70064

### Nature of Bindings of Rare Books

The table 2 divides the rare collection into four categories involving into bindings. The valuable metallic binding books are only a few, Chaitanya library has 4 United Reading Room library has 11 and Taltala Public Library has 25 books are there. It is true that paperback and hardbound books are comparative high in number but leather and metal bindings not so. It proved the measure of building rare collection century old libraries.

**Table 2: Rare Collection with Bindings**

Bindings	CL	URR	TPL
Metal	04	11	25
Leather	902	1523	1789
Hardboard	2483	2825	3112
Paperback	3043	3381	6384
<b>Total</b>	<b>6432</b>	<b>7840</b>	<b>11310</b>

### Rare Books Collections

These libraries contain some old and rare documents. These documents mainly belong to from three collections – a) Books and periodicals in Bengali language b) Books and periodicals in English language c) Books and periodicals in other (Sanskrit, Hindi, etc.) language. These materials are very helpful in conducting researches in many

subjects such as politics, economics, statistics, history etc. Besides these, it contains important old gazettes and government documents, as well as old. Besides these, libraries have some manuscripts e.g. letters of Surendranath Banerjee, old minutes book, other handwritten materials of the great personalities of the Association etc. But the conditions of them are very bad. They become brittle on touch. From table- 3 URR library has strong Bengali book collection other than the other two libraries.

**Table 3: Rare Books**

Libraries	English	Bengali	Other Language	Total
CL	2409	1652	120	4181
URR	1987	3038	71	5096
TPL	4297	2848	207	7352

### Bound Periodicals in Rare Collections

There are so many rare periodicals to meet the demand of the users and the library regularly procures periodicals. The maximum periodicals in the rare collection are in the Bengali language. Some of these are Suravi (1289–1291 B.S.), Sahitya sanghita (1307–1318 B.S.), Probasi (1308–1356 B.S.), Bengali (1885–1890), Bina (1285 B.S.), Masik basumati (1340–1348 B.S.), Bharatbarsha (1321–1356 B.S.), Bangabani (1329–1334 B.S.), Manasi o Marmabani (1324–1336 B.S.), Bharati (1295–1327 B.S.), Bamabodhini Patrika (1287–1329 B.S.), Sahitya (1297–1318 B.S.), Mouchak (1327–1346 B.S.), Sishusathi (1329–1357 B.S.), Adarini (1289 B.S.), Bangamahila (1283 B.S.) etc.

**Table 4: Rare Periodicals**

Libraries	English	Bengali	Other Language	Total
CL	651	1565	35	2251
URR	789	1835	120	2744
TPL	1132	2647	179	3958

### Newspapers in Rare Collections

Two newspapers are there in Taltala Public Library. One of which is in Bengali namely ‘Anandabazar Patrika’ and another one are in English namely, ‘The Statesman’. The other two libraries have also the same Bengali newspaper but it is in brittle condition.

**Table 5: Rare Newspapers**

Libraries	English	Bengali	Other Language
CL	00	01	00
URR	00	01	00
TPL	01	01	00

### Books and Periodicals Collection Published before 200 Years

Table 6 depicts that the collection of rare books published before 200 years ago the majority of Bengali books (1115) are there in the URR library and the TPL has also 983 books in Bengali medium. The TPL has 94 books in another language (Sanskrit, Hindi etc.) out of 2542 books among 1283 in Bengali and 1165 in the English language. It is important

that there are 20.62 % books in CL and 21.77% URR and 22.48% in TPL, published before 200 years ago in the collection.

**Table 6: Rare Books and Periodicals Published Before 200 Years**

Libraries	English	Bengali	Other Language	Total	%
CL	626	668	32	1326	20.62
URR	549	1115	43	1707	21.77
TPL	1165	1283	94	2542	22.48

#### **Books and Periodicals Collection Published in Between 1910- 1811.**

The collection of rare books and periodicals published in between 1910- 1811 of Bengali books collection is stronger than other two libraries. There are 2434 books and periodicals in CL 2227 in URR library and 4564 books and periodicals in the English language. The TPL library has 292 books in other languages (Sanskrit, Hindi etc.). This table also depicts that the rare books are published in between 1910-1911 most of them is strengthen the library collection and represent the older ness of the library.

**Table 7: Collection Published in Between 1910- 1810**

Libraries	English	Bengali	Other Language
CL	2434	2548	124
URR	2227	3758	150
TPL	4564	4512	292

#### **FINDINGS**

- This is the primary factor to be noted here that the poor record management of these libraries.
- Having a poor ventilation system with severe dust problem as well as almost darkness – makes the documents almost destroyed and no one can know about the information content of these documents.
- Again, one can point out the negligence regarding the maintenance of rare documents. Very old documents are covered by the red cotton but they are rarely used and thus attacked by insects inside the cotton. Proper maintenance has not been carried out.
- Documents are placed in a very small room, not arranged properly, keeping the documents on different languages and subjects at the same place.
- . It notices that the shortage of fund acting a vital role to maintain these materials. For this, records of civilization become lost forever.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

It is practical that as these libraries crossed a hundred years, they contain many valuable documents. Every library had been developed by the active support of great personalities, by providing both money and their personal writings,

manuscripts etc. The value of these things at the present age is immeasurable. The libraries do not have any list regarding these materials, whether it has but very incomplete, only giving the author, title and accession number, if any. From this, one cannot trace about the rarity of these documents. They are most of the cases kept in dumps having all types of facilities – darkness, rain, insects, dust etc! These documents become brittle, full of insects and dust. Thus, the records of civilization are being lost forever.

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