

**THE  
NATIONAL  
LIBRARY  
OF  
INDIA**



*Golden Jubilee*

**SOUVENIR**

**VOLUME**

**1953**



Dhananjayrao Gadgil Library



GIPE-PUNE-042201



# THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF INDIA

Golden Jubilee Souvenir

*Sunday, 1st February, 1953*



सत्यमेव जयते

*“ I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” —MAHATMA GANDHI*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword	
1. History, growth and future of the National Library . . . . .	1
2. Brief history of Belvedere . . . . .	5
3. Perspective in time . . . . .	6
4. List of Chairmen, members and secretaries . . . . .	8
5. The National Library forty years ago . . . . .	11
6. The Bibliography of Indology . . . . .	16
7. Towards a Basic Bibliography on Indology . . . . .	21
8. The Section on ancient Indian history and culture . . . . .	26
9. The Section on Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit . . . . .	30
10. A short account of the Buhar Library . . . . .	47
11. List of Librarians . . . . .	51
12. The Senior Staff of the National Library . . . . .	51
13. Publications of the Library . . . . .	51
14. In Memoriam . . . . .	52
15. Our Thanks . . . . .	53
16. An extract from the "Englishman", Saturday, January 31st 1903 . . . . .	54

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

COVER PAGE : NORTHERN CORRIDOR OF THE STACK ROOM

FRONTISPIECE :— Lord Curzon who inaugurated the Imperial Library

Plate	1. Picture of Belvedere Mansion . . . . .	<i>Between pages 10 and 11</i>
	„ 2. Periodical Room . . . . .	„
	„ 3. Card Cabinet Room . . . . .	„
	„ 4. Close-up of the Card Cabinet . . . . .	„
	„ 5. Main Reading Room . . . . .	„
	„ 6. Reader in Alcove . . . . .	„
	„ 7. The Lending Section . . . . .	„
	„ 8. The Eastern view of the Stack Room . . . . .	„
	„ 9. The Chinese Collection . . . . .	„
	„ 10. A corner of the Asutosh Collection . . . . .	„
	„ 11. Some of the treasures of the Asutosh Collection . . . . .	„
	„ 12. Some of the treasures of the Buhar Section . . . . .	„
	„ 13. The Accession Section . . . . .	„
	„ 14. They have served us well . . . . .	„
	„ 15. The Governor's visit . . . . .	„
	„ 16. Presentation of Bharati's newspaper . . . . .	„
	„ 17. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Sir Asutosh Mookerjee</span> . . . . .	„
	„ 18. The various locations of the Library since its inception to the present day . . . . .	<i>Facing plate 16</i>
	„ 19. Builders of the past . . . . .	
	„ 20. The staff of the National Library . . . . .	

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## FOREWORD

We are celebrating to-day the Golden Jubilee of the National Library but we should not forget that its first foundations were laid more than a hundred years ago. We must, therefore, remember with gratitude the services of distinguished citizens of Calcutta like Dwarkanath Tagore and Peary Chand Mitra whose efforts led to the establishment of the Calcutta Public Library on 8th March 1836. Private effort could not, however, sustain the ideal they had set before themselves and Lord Curzon's intervention was needed to convert it into a truly national institution. The early part of its history is thus a record of non-official effort beginning with the establishment of the Calcutta Public Library and ending with the opening of the Imperial Library on 30th January 1903. If, therefore, we call the celebrations to-day a Golden Jubilee, it is only in order to mark fifty years of development as a State institution and not in forgetfulness of the services of the public-spirited citizens who laid its first foundation.

It is even to-day interesting to read Curzon's speech when he inaugurated the Imperial Library. He mentions his visit to the Calcutta Public Library in Metcalfe Hall. The shelves were full of books, 'the majority of which had parted company with their bindings', while 'the tenancy of the readers in the Library was freely disputed by pigeons who were flying about the inside of the room and evidently treated it as their permanent habitation'. Curzon also speaks of his visit to the Library of the Government of India with its large collection of books stacked in a crowded and unsuitable building. He then describes how these two institutions were fused to form a unit and become the nucleus of the Imperial Library.

Curzon's intention was that the Library should contain all books written about India in Modern languages. In addition, it should also contain all standard works of reference. He looked forward to the time when it would become 'a place to which people will resort as they do to the British Museum in London or the Bodleian in Oxford, to pursue their studies under agreeable conditions with every assistance that pleasant surroundings and a polite and competent staff can place at their disposal'.

There has been immense development in the technical equipment of libraries since Curzon's time. Western countries have developed new concepts of Library architecture. Use of micro-photographic methods of recording, electronic rapid selectors for Bibliographic control and empirically devised schedules of classification have come to the librarian's aid in extending the

scope of libraries in all directions. We in India cannot hope to create these facilities overnight but we may claim that the foundations of a good library laid by Curzon have been developed along lines which entitle us to call it a National Library in the truest sense of the term.

The most significant development in the history of the Library took place when soon after the attainment of Independence the Imperial Library was converted into a National Library. It is a testimony to the wisdom and love of books of our national leaders, especially the Prime Minister, Shri C. Rajagopalachari, the then Governor General and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Minister for Education, that one of the first steps taken by the national Government was to convert the Belvedere Mansion, formerly the dwelling of the Viceroys, into the permanent habitation of the National Library. The building has adapted itself to the needs of a Library remarkably well. Wooden shelving has been scrapped and replaced by steel shelving specially designed to achieve economy in space and to prevent the ravages of rats, white ants and other enemies of books. New furniture has been designed for the Reading Rooms. Special alcoves have been equipped for research scholars.

Along with the improvement in the physical amenities, steps have been taken to increase the Library's capacity of service to the public. The staff of the Library has been nearly doubled to cope with the new developments. The book-grant has also been more than doubled. A beginning has been made with special grants to fill up the more obvious gaps in the Library, as also for buying Indian language publications from the various States of the Union. We are considering measures to make available to the Library a copy of all books published in the country and establish a Bindery. As soon as funds permit, air-conditioning of the rare-books and the installation of microfilm and photostat facilities will also be taken on hand. A scheme is being examined whereby scholars from outside Calcutta may be able to live economically in the precincts of the Library for carrying out their projects of research.

A survey of the present holdings of the National Library will compel from all a tribute to the vision and imagination of the early Librarians. Almost every important publication about India since its establishment as the Imperial Library will be found here. The Library has also been enriched by the gifts of generous donors. Special mention may be made of the priceless collection of Arabic, Urdu and Persian books and manuscripts bequeathed to it by the Zamindar of Buhar. Among recent donors, the

pride of place must go to the heirs of the late Asutosh Mukhopadhyay. They have donated to the nation his magnificent collection of more than 75,000 volumes covering almost the entire range of human knowledge. A rich collection of books in Bengali and Sanskrit donated by Ramdas Sen also deserves special mention.

The Library's own holding of official publications, periodicals and rare Indic material is a treasure trove for scholars and authors. It has been further enriched by the magnificent donations mentioned above. We are thankful to the distinguished scholars who have surveyed in this Souvenir Volume the strength and the weakness of the Library in their respective fields. Readers will, I hope, agree that the total impression left by these studies is one of strength and great potential for research and study.

On the occasion of the opening of the National Library to the public in its new buildings, I am reminded of the words of Mr. J. Bourdillion who in proposing a vote of thanks to Curzon said in 1903 :—

“ Those who knew the Calcutta Public Library in its old days, before the magic wand of the reformer had been waved over it, will hardly recognize the institution to-day. Dirt and disorder indescribable reigned supreme : it was almost impossible to find a book or to read it in comfort when found ; the surroundings were sordid beyond measure, and birds nested in all the rooms. Now all this is changed ; the quiet order and comfort of these halls invite study, and bring back to our recollections memories of happy hours spent in College or University Libraries or in that paradise of the student, the Reading Room at the British Museum ”.

Things had greatly improved with the establishment of the Imperial Library but it is only with the transfer of the National Library to its present premises that we have achieved the quiet order and comfort of spacious halls in beautiful surroundings that may be described as the student's paradise. It is our hope and will be our endeavour that the National Library may be as great an improvement on the Imperial Library as the Imperial Library was on the Calcutta Public Library.

CALCUTTA,  
30th January 1953. }

HUMAYUN KABIR,  
*Additional Secretary to the Government  
of India, Ministry of Education.*



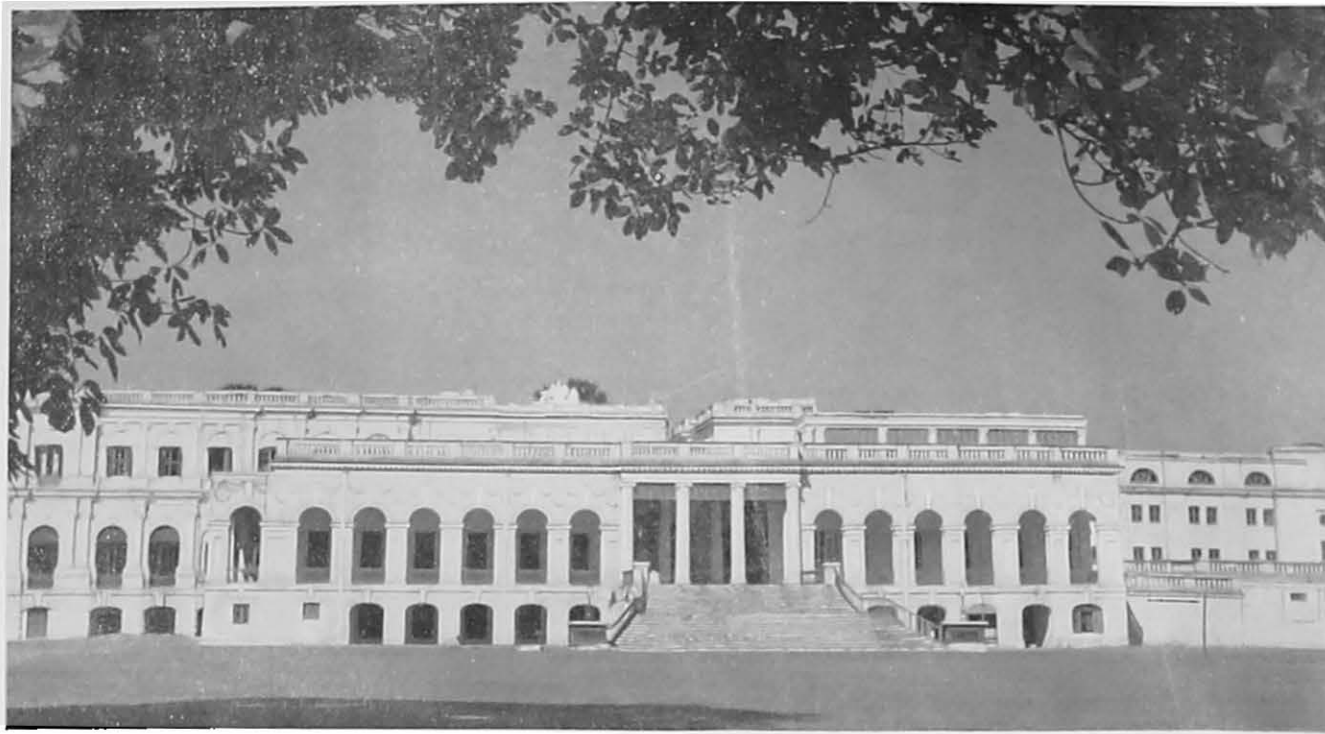
*Lord Curzon, who inaugurated the Imperial Library.*



Metcalfe Hall (1844-1923)



The Esplanade location (1923-1942)



Belvedere (1948- )

Between 1942 and 1948 the Library was at Jabakusum House, not shown in the picture.