

Review


"They [the people] must be brought up to love books, not simply attractive bindings or pretty pictures, but their contents. They must be taught to regard books as a part of their lives. Libraries will not then appear a luxury, but a necessity of existence". These words appear to be so relevant even in the context of present-day India that one would hardly believe that these are the words of Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda said on an occasion as far back as 1912. He not only said this but what is more important did everything possible to realise this goal of making libraries a necessity of existence. The result was the development of such a well organised public library system in the state that Baroda's American library expert - William Borden said, "What America could only dream of, Baroda could do, and in a measure has done".

In this dissertation Dr Nagar admirably depicts this extremely impressive picture of library development in Baroda. But this is not merely a rehearsal in the history of this glorious past. Dr Nagar has a point to prove. The ideal burden of his thesis is to seek answers to the frequently asked questions, such as - "was the library movement fundamentally a failure, was the movement so narrowly dependent upon the Maharaja that with his death in 1939 the movement too died, or did some other factors contribute to the decay?". This has, however, not been an easy task. A number of old government files, circulars, circulars and other documents have been searched and consulted to get information. The author even contacted Mrs Helen Borden, Borden's daughter-in-law, to see the papers Borden had brought from Baroda but only to be informed that those papers were destroyed just a few years ago. However, he had better luck with the Baroda government records. He could salvage valuable papers from "piles of papers stacked in corners, almost assuming the scene of a heavy stock of wastepaper" all about to be destroyed. It is really gratifying to note that these precious documents have been made of use of in this thesis.

Coming to the main contents of the dissertation, as has been said before, Dr Nagar has tried to dispel the popular belief that the library movement was too narrowly dependent upon the personality of Maharaja Sayajirao to have long survived his personal rule and also the library policy of the post-Sayajirao Government was not conducive to effective library service. His own findings are that the movement was not exclusively dependent on the personality of Maharaja Sayajirao, that the decay had already crept in even while he was alive, that some progress at the previous level was maintained even beyond 1939, and that the post-Sayajirao Government of Baroda was equally interested in the development of libraries. Further, the library movement in Baroda was not a total failure, as all the libraries in Baroda did not die; it is the system that died. The final cause for the total disappearance of the system was the merger of the state of Baroda with Bombay which did not subscribe to the library policy of the Baroda Government.

On the question of the library movement being too narrowly dependent upon the personality of the Maharaja, critics have gone to the extent of saying that, "the incentive for the establishment of libraries in Baroda did not come from the people. Libraries, in a sense, were imposed on them". But Dr Nagar points out that the policy makers were completely aware of such a situation developing
and even anticipated such criticism and did everything possible to ensure that the demand for libraries came from the people. This is clearly brought out in a writing of William Borden, wherein he remarked, "These libraries were to be for the use of the people, not for monuments to the Maharaja. In order to have them used, the citizens must first be brought to want them, and want them badly enough to be willing to contribute a good part of the expense out of their own pockets". Thus the instrument for government action in this matter was that the people of a locality had to come first with one-third financial contribution before the state would provide the other two-thirds in association with the local boards. The response was so overwhelming that it became difficult for the Government to keep up its own end. In fact the Government had to put a ceiling to the number of new libraries that could be established in a year. Hence, there can hardly be a question of 'imposing libraries on the people'.

Dr Nagar has tried to prove that the library movement originated as a people's movement under the leadership of a public leader, Motibhai Amin, in the form of Mitra Mandal (Society of Friends) libraries as early as 1906 and state patronage came only in 1910.

However, as the possible cause of decay of the system, Dr Nagar puts emphasis on two important factors in the organisational and administrative structure of the government machinery which failed to ensure continuity and direction in the growth and maintenance of the libraries. Firstly, the Library Department of Baroda was a part of the State Government. Had the management been vested in an autonomous statutory body, representing different interests, things might have been different. Also, the Library Department had no device to prescribe standards of service or to enforce them. Secondly, the device of voluntary contribution as the sole index of people's enthusiasm and participation also contributed its share to the ultimate decay of the system. The contributions could come from only a section of the people, the comparatively richer section, and in course of time they formed a privileged class with some extra facilities and rights in the affairs of the library. This was detrimental to the spirit of free public library. In this connection Dr Nagar goes into the question of a library tax and tries to find out why the planners of the Baroda public library system avoided the levying of a library tax and depended exclusively on voluntary contributions.

On final analysis, it is said, the example set by the pioneer public library movement in Baroda exercised a wholesome influence on many other regions of India.

It is not only due to the nature of the subject but more due to the excellent and novel treatment of the subject that the publication will be a very useful addition to any collection on library matters.