



# IHAR SITE ASSESSMENT REVIEW: CHAITANYA LIBRARY

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**IHAR SITE ASSESSMENT REVIEW:**  
**CHAITANYA LIBRARY**



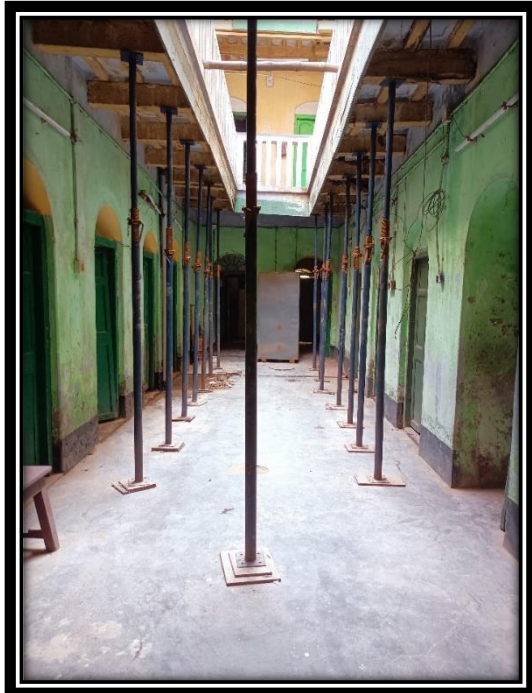
## About Chaitanya Library

It is said that if you are in Kolkata and if you are unable to obtain a specific rare book from the National Library, Asiatic Society, or Bongiyō Sahitya Parishod, then you can indubitably obtain that book from the Chaitanya Library in Kolkata. During the colonial time, this library played a crucial role by awakening the minds of the individuals through fostering nationalist ideas and influencing political attitudes.

Situated on Beadon Street, this three-storied white structure dates back 135 years and is adjacent to the famous Minerva Theater. It was established on February 5, 1889, by a group of eminent thinkers that included Rabindranath Tagore, Kunja Bihari Dutta, and Gaur Hari Sen. On the exterior, looking at the façade and structure, though it may look small, yet it is not. The number of rooms in this edifice is unfathomable from outside. It still retains the literary legacy of Kolkata as well as the aroma of the past.

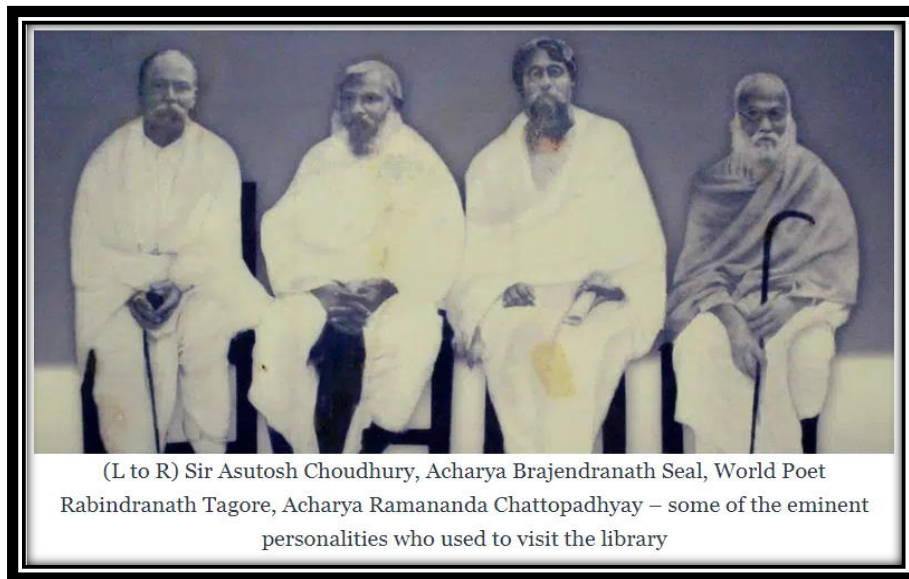
Once a gathering place for discussions and public lectures of Bengali intellectuals, freedom fighters, this landmark edifice has faded due to years of neglect. Among the most noted public lectures given at this library was “the life of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee” by Rabindranath Tagore and “A few thoughts on the poverty of India” by Ananda Charlu. For decades together, this Chaitanya library has been a treasure inland for the bibliophiles. This quintessential library has more than 150,000 rare volumes, periodicals and journals including valuable works on Indian philosophy, history, and culture.

## The Heritage Building – At a glance



## Historical Background of Chaitanya Library

The idea of founding this library was conceived by Gourhari Sen and his friend Kunj Bihari Dutta. Kunj Bihari Dutta's elder brother, Ganganarayan Dutta, was a wealthy resident of the Beadon Street area. Gourhari persuaded him to donate some money as well as a large room on the ground floor of his house for the purpose of setting up the library. The founding members of this library included Rabindranath Tagore. In 1889, the library had 284 members, among whom only six were women. At that time, the encouragement of women's education was still quite limited, and therefore, female visitors to the library were quite rare. The membership fee was two annas.



(L to R) Sir Asutosh Choudhury, Acharya Brajendranath Seal, World Poet Rabindranath Tagore, Acharya Ramananda Chattopadhyay – some of the eminent personalities who used to visit the library

This library was founded primarily to foster an educational environment among common Indians. Some people believe that the name "Chaitanya" comes from the Sanskrit word "Consciousness" or "Knowledge". Another opinion suggests that since the founding members of this institution had connections with the Gaudiya mission, the library was named "Chaitanya." The library soon became a place where common people could come and pursue reading and learning. Remarkably, four Maharajas were enlisted as members of this library - the Maharajas of Mayurbhanj, Cooch Behar, Burdhan, and Darbhanga. At one point, Rabindranath Tagore himself served as the vice-president of this library. Notably, C.V. Raman and Sister Nivedita were also associated with the library as members and often delivered lectures here. Within independent India, this was among the first registered libraries in the Eastern India.

Over time, numerous eminent personalities visited Chaitanya Library and contributed to its intellectual legacy. Among them were Dwijendranath Tagore, Rev. Alex Tomory, Sir Gurudas Banerjee, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, R. C. Dutta and many other distinguished figures, all of whom addressed gatherings within its premises.

## Present Condition of Chaitanya Library

Given all this legacy as a backbone, Chaitanya Library thus stood witness to a significant and fascinating chapter in the history of Bengali literature.

Nonetheless, the library has fallen from its former glory and needs several restoration activities both for its civil structure and for the colossal collection of books that are in dire need of being preserved from being lost forever. Below is a survey by IHAR team of the condition of the various rooms and their respective collections.

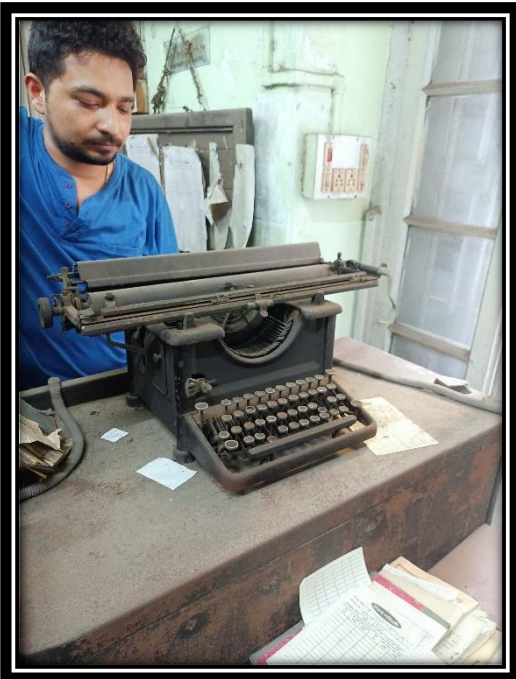
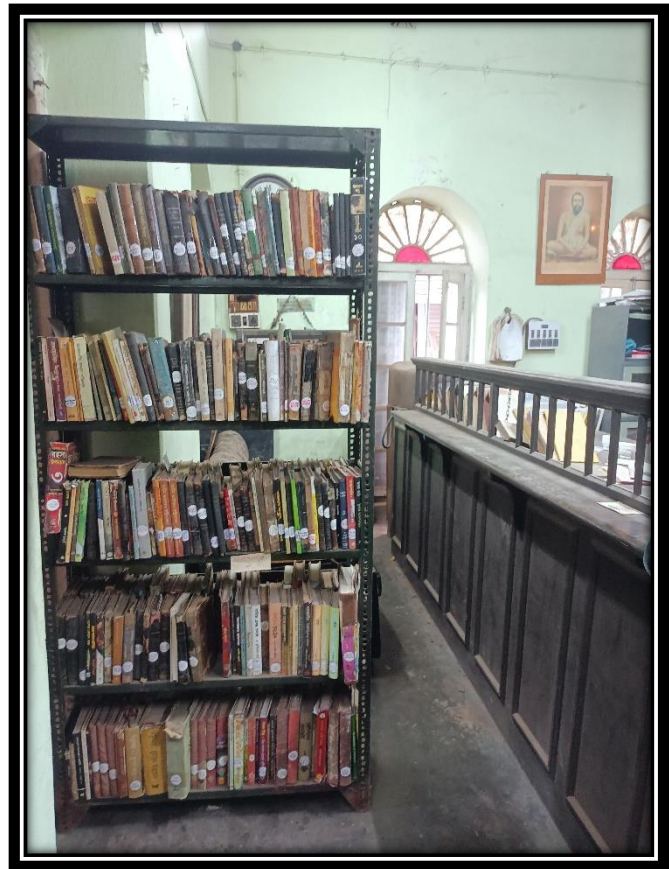
The survey is also accompanied by suggested conditions of the respective rooms and their enormous collections including, books and magazines.

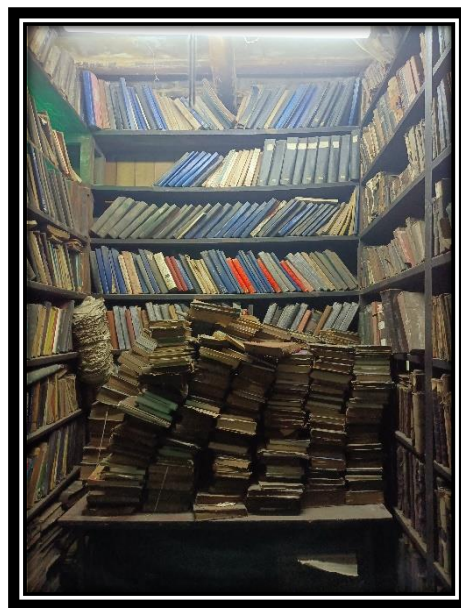
The photographs have been taken to specifically illustrate the condition of the civil structure within the room along with snapshots of the condition of the books and resources stored within them respectively.

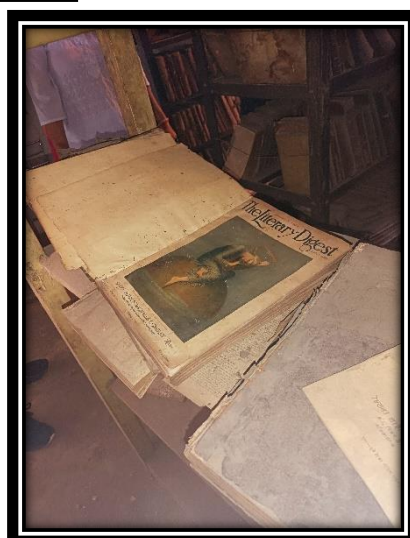
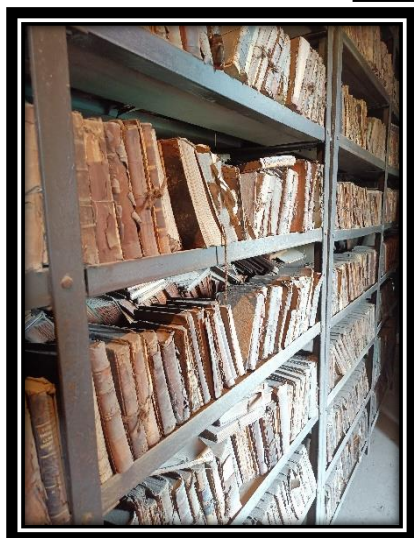
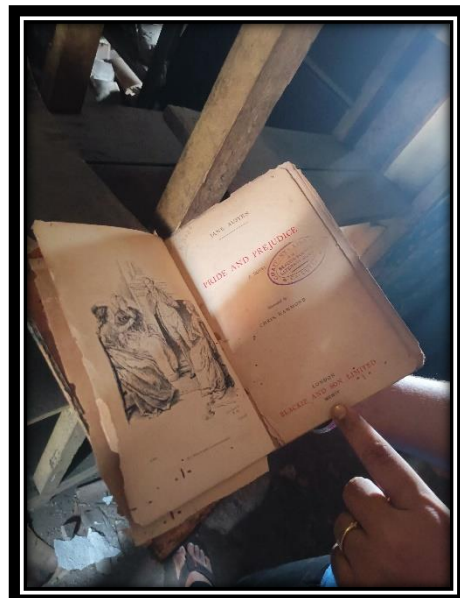
This library has a total of seven rooms. Using photographs, we shall demonstrate each room's current state.

**Room-1**

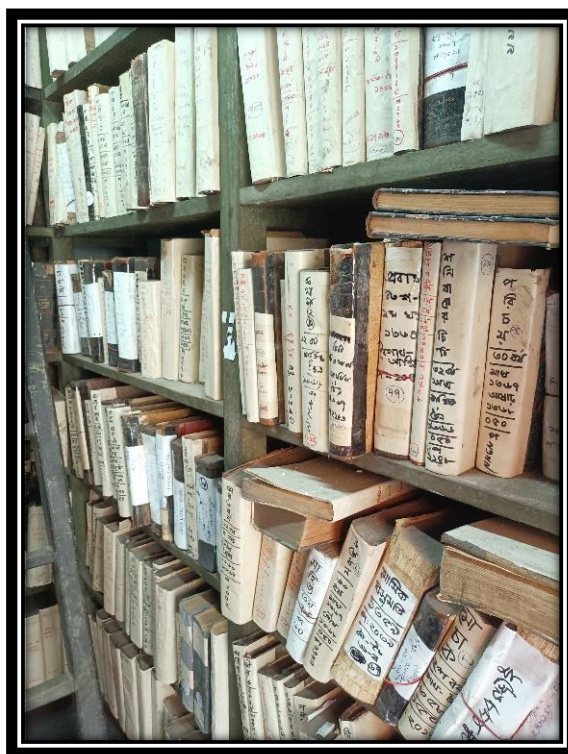
Present condition: **Moderate**



**Room-2****Present condition: Extremely poor**



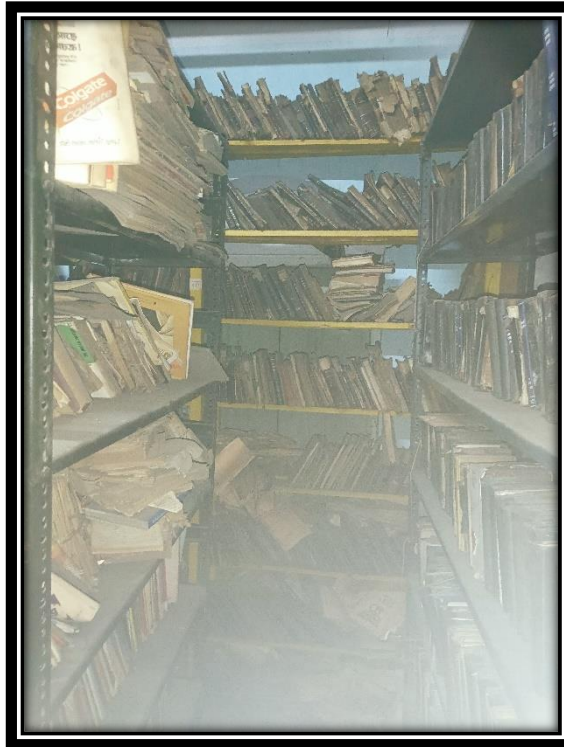
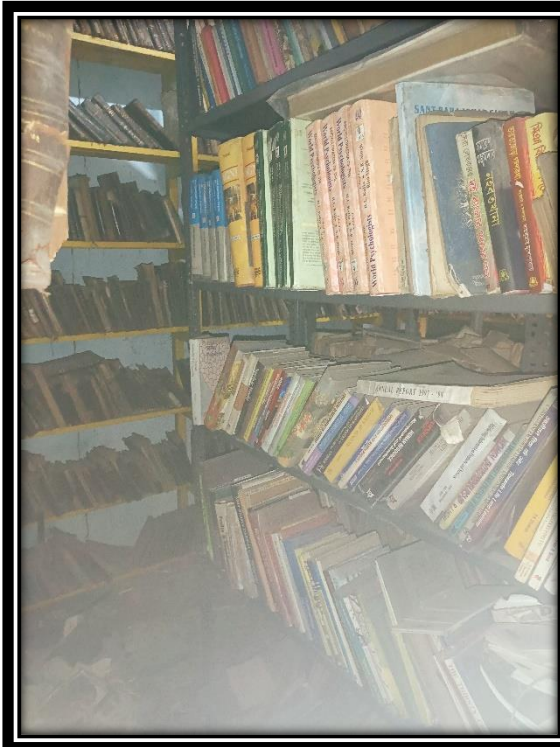
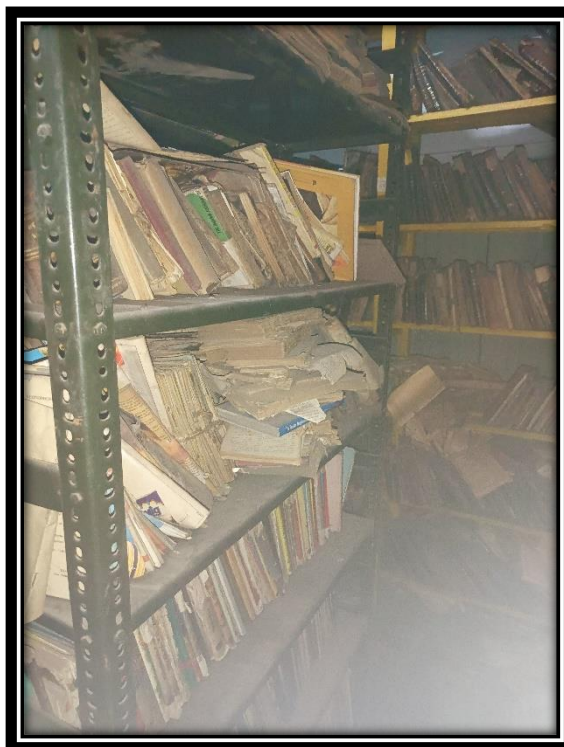
**Room-4**  
**Present condition: Good**



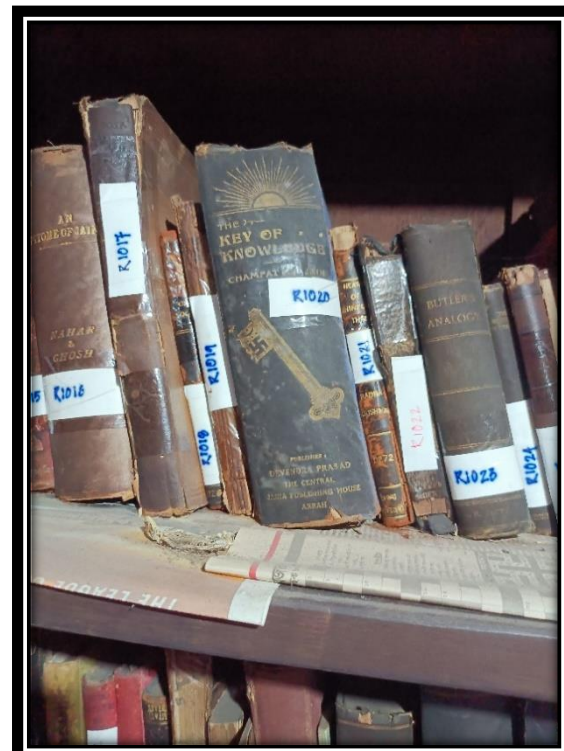
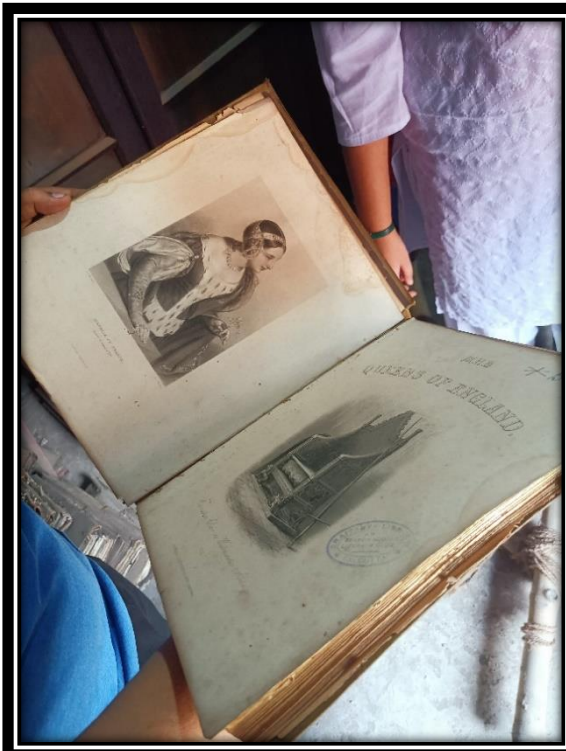
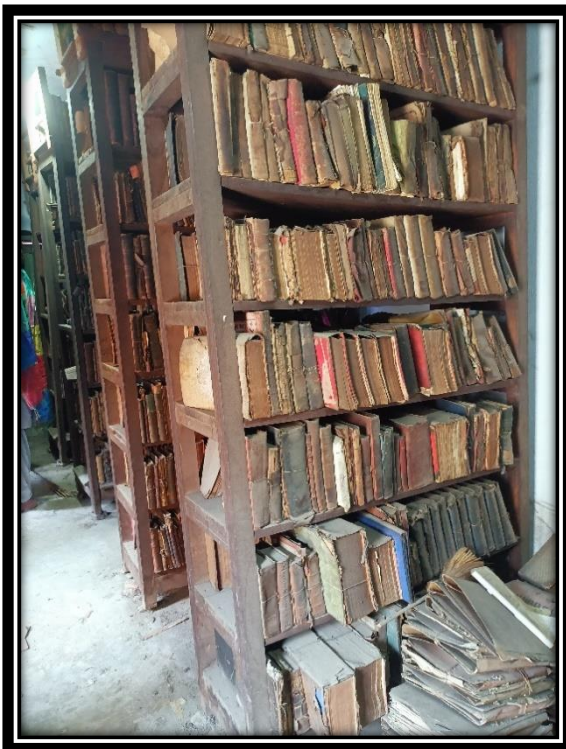
**Room-5**  
**Present condition: Poor**



**Room-6**  
**Present condition: Poor**



**Room-7**  
**Present condition: Moderate**



## Collection of the Chaitanya Library

The library houses an extensive collection of literature, ranging from rare to contemporary. The present collection of over 150,000 rare books and journals is as enviable and coveted as it is exquisite and priceless today. There is a substantial collection of rare Bengali and English books with around 70 - 80 thousand Bengali books and 20 - 30 thousand English books including rare volumes, periodicals, and journals, valuable works on Indian philosophy, history, and culture.

The library's archival record also includes some letters from notable individuals, and these collections have been carried down through the years. The library's first catalogue was prepared in 1959, and the last noted catalogue was prepared in 1982.

There is a reading room, an administrative area and seven book storage spaces in the main building. Rare literature and Bengali history can be found in plenty in this library that need to be openly available to anyone looking for a place to study and do research in a friendly atmosphere.

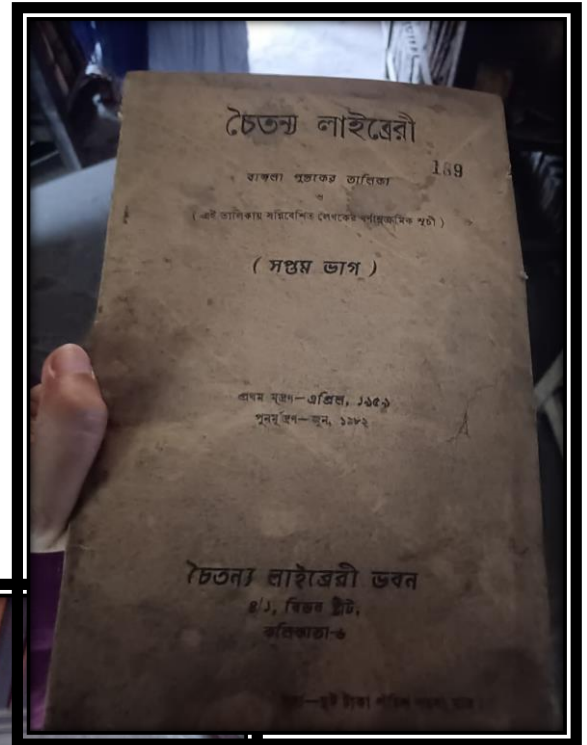
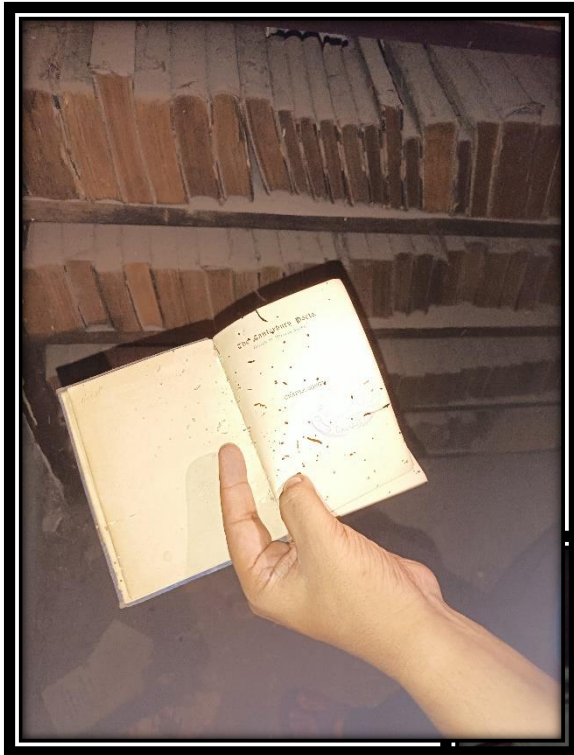
1. Number of Bengali books: 70,000 - 80,000 (approx.)
2. Number of English books: 20,000 - 30,000 (approx.)

### **Present Trustee members of the Chaitanya Library:**

1. Soumen Mitra, Ex. Police Commissioner
2. Kanchana Mukherjee, Bingsho Shatabdi
3. Manish Jajaria, Calcutta Heritage Collective
4. Colonel Nitin Shrestha, Serving Army Officer
5. Swagata Das (present Cataloguer).

**Present Executive-Body member:** Siddharth Sarkar

### Photographs of the Collection in Chaitanya Library

[illegible]

## Present Condition of the Books

- The majority of the books are in poor shape.
- There is improper maintenance of the serial numbering and cataloguing.
- Some of the books are in extremely bad shape. The majority of the books in room no. 2, 3, 5, and 6 are badly damaged and ripped.
- There are several holes in the volumes due to insect infestation.
- Most of the books are covered in dust and dirt, indicating that regular maintenance is not performed effectively.
- The majority of the books had fungal growth on them.
- Simple natural conservation techniques are not applied correctly.
- A collection of pricey and rare books strewn across the floor of library room no. 2 and 3.



## Suggested Process to Conserve the Books

- Digitizing the books that have been damaged due to dumping is currently the primary course of action.
- To prevent insect and bacterial damage, store good books with *Neem* leaves as a natural treatment.
- *Dry Chilies* can be tied in white cotton cloth on the open shelves to control fungus.
- Placing *Black Cumin* powder in small cloth sachets on bookshelf covers can help protect books from insect and fungal damage when stored on the shelves.
- Sufficient quantities of naphthalene balls should be supplied to each rack on a monthly basis.
- Chemical treatment can be used to preserve books more effectively. However, this method involves significant costs and requires substantial time.
- The library should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized to ensure a healthy environment.

## IHAR's Observations

On August 17, 2025, we visited and thoroughly surveyed the Chaitanya Library. We made every effort to examine the entire place. Our sincere appreciation goes out to Siddhartha Sarkar, the library's present executive member, for his assistance. We were pleased to get the chance to inspect the entire library on behalf of IHAR. Currently, a private trust oversees the library.

According to Siddhartha Sarkar that about 20 years ago, the organization was given a government subsidy of between 20,000 and 30,000 rupees. But no additional government support has been given to it since. Currently, the library's collection is being cataloged by Swagata Das, the sister of former Indian President Pranab Mukherjee. Interestingly, the library has also preserved several books that were once banned by the Government of India.

The library is open for public visit every day from 7:00 P.M to 9:00 P.M



IHAR TEAM WITH SIDDHARTHA SARKAR

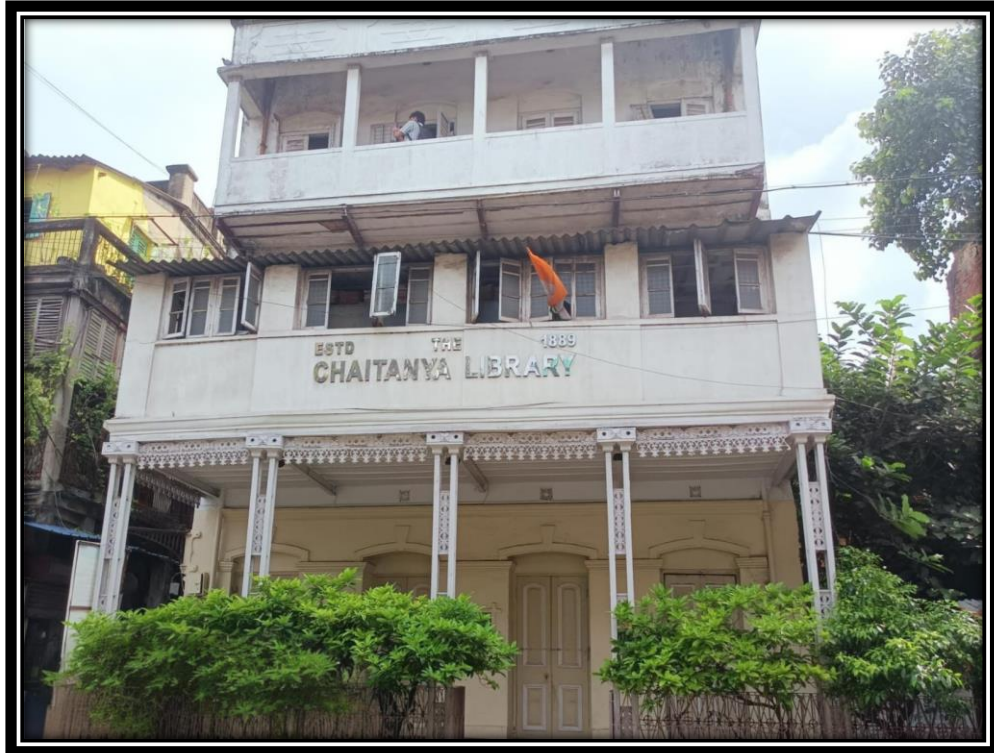
## IHAR's Proposal

This is a proposal to ensure safeguarding of the Collection of Chaitanya Library:

Every rare book and historical document we have seen in the library premises are invaluable and priceless artifact. They carry historical evidence and are considered national property. Therefore, it is our responsibility to make every effort to preserve its safety so that the next generation can see historical events through these invaluable assets. Modernizing library/archival materials is essential for a library to upgrade, improve service, infrastructure, and align systematically with contemporary standards and technologies.

- First and foremost, **fund** is the most crucial factor. This library requires adequate support from the public or private sectors. Because the structure and library section have historical significance, they must be appropriately preserved.
- As everyone is aware, paper is one of the most delicate and brittle organic artifacts, and it is extremely sensitive to touch. Additionally, for conservation purposes, **digitization and cataloguing** is required in this instance. To stop additional deterioration, the first and most important step for the books is to digitize the entire collection, especially the damaged ones.
- Encouraging **educational, community engagement and research activities**.
- Every book in the library needs to be kept in a tidy, well-organized space. **Regular vacuuming and inspections for dust, insects, rodents**, and the growth of mould and fungus are necessary in the storage area.
- There needs to be enough **ventilation and lighting** in the storage area. Use curtains, screens, or shutters instead of exposing books or archival materials to direct sunlight.
- It is not advisable to keep the damaged rare books in a pile. The damaged ones need to be stored in the appropriate **cases or boxes with proper tag/QR code**.

- Since books are made of organic materials, they are all susceptible to deterioration. In general, they are the least resistant to harm from fungi and insects. Therefore, the authorities should take extra precautions to kill and repel insects and safeguard their gathering. The books must be treated with chemical pesticides and germicides in a **fumigation chamber**, if at all possible.



- The library rooms must be **restored** immediately.
- For easy access to the appropriate volumes and records, an archival or **library map** is required.
- Urging the public to peruse the library's catalogue via the **online database**.
- Develop the condition of **archival sources and digitalize inventory list** with the aim of making them open to the public.
- The library catalogue should be **open to the public** and can be searched by anyone, anywhere from a personal computer or mobile phone.

**A few immediate areas that can be addressed at a grassroots level:**

1. The existing executive members are being helped by a few aged volunteers to re-catalogue the books present. But they need more human resources to finish this task.
2. The library's executive body is trying to restore books that are still restorable. They need resources (human and funds) to do this.
3. The library immediately needs an inventory software to digitise the catalogue.
4. The library needs a scanner / printer to help restoring the books digitally and keep them in the rooms being restored.
5. The rare magazines in the library are a treasure house of rare paper advertisements of retro era Bengal. These magazines can be initially taken up to be preserved as rarest of rare artefacts of bygone brands.
6. Engage the public and provide human support to help in the catalogue creation and digitisation so that the masses are aware of what resources are present, what can be preserved and what needs to be digitised.

## Conclusion

Following the observation, our team concluded that this library is a gold mine for academics, scholars, and historians, and everyone with an inquisitive mind can benefit from it. In addition to its unique book collection, this library has historical significance because of the presence of notable historical figures. From a historical perspective, the rare and unique collection of books of this library is astounding.

In the future, these unique relics should be handled with the highest care, which includes proper storage and preservation. It is important to preserve history for the next generation because without it, they would not be able to predict the future. We can preserve the history of the past by properly maintaining, storing, and displaying archival documents that tell the stories of the past.

Thus, Chaitanya Library is a legacy and merits a national title from a historical standpoint. We can preserve this national property and educate the next generation about their rich cultural heritage if it is well maintained and runs smoothly.

—End of Report—