



013

# Public Libraries For Mass Education

—M. Wahiduzzaman

**T**HE Government of Bangladesh is committed to ride the country of the curse of illiteracy. It was one of the 19-point programme of a previous government. The present government has its own commitment to rid the country of the curse of illiteracy. On the other hand, the different Ministries of the Government and the Public Corporations of Bangladesh have a lot of information to disseminate to the members of the public. The two objectives are quite distinct from each other, yet they are related and can be integrated for economy, efficiency and results. This is for the reason that we cannot disseminate information to an uneducated people and there is no point in making people educated if they are not served with information.

The integration of education and information has become of critical importance for Bangladesh, which is one of the poorest countries in the world with the highest concentration of people. Bangladesh is at a historic stage when its people must be convinced that probably they are too many in their small geographic area and when they must be informed on agriculture, industry, health, hygiene, science and technology, etc. so that they may fully participate in the economic development of their country.

Both the U.S.S.R. and China took the minimum of twenty years to achieve mass literacy. In the U.S.S.R. it warranted the promulgation of a decree, establishment of an Extraordinary Commission

**There is no point in educating people if they are not served with information, says the author in this concluding part of the article.**

and wide-scale campaign. In China it came through the establishment of "literacy centres everywhere and through (a) continuous efforts for complete eradication of illiteracy, (b) gradual upgrading of leisure-time education and vocational training and (c) education for socialism". In Bangladesh, too, probably we shall be required to make a sustained effort for a long time to eradicate illiteracy.

Sustained effort must be supported by adequate organizational arrangement for the eradication of illiteracy. The Ministry of Education took up the programme of mass literacy under a previous Government and the programme was given to the district administration. A post of Additional Deputy Commissioner (Literacy) was created to administer the mass literacy programme in the district in co-operation with the district officials and the Union Council Chairmen. The government also printed reading materials for the mass literacy programme. That was a wrong decision—the Ministry of Education cannot absolve itself of its responsibility to educate people.

Illiteracy, as stated earlier, is the result of lapses in our formal education and should be taken care of by non-formal education, but whether it is a problem of formal education or non-formal education, it should

be a total responsibility of the Ministry of Education. If we have permanent institutions, that is, schools, for formal education, we should also have permanent institutions for non-formal education because the neo-literates will be required to be kept literate and informed for all time to come. These permanent institutions for non-formal education of the masses would be the literacy centres and could be shaped as public libraries. And these public libraries for the non-formal education of the masses should be established by the Ministry of Education.

Since our approach to the problem of illiteracy is based on the integration of education and information, and since the problem is a gigantic one, we think that there should be a Directorate of Mass Education to tackle the problem.

The Directorate would have as its target the problem of illiteracy and the tool with which it would hit the problem would be rural public libraries. These rural public libraries would serve as the centres for education, information and cultural activities for the village people. These centres would organize mass literacy classes, lectures on agriculture, rural industries, health, hygiene and other topics related to national development. As a matter

of fact, these rural public libraries would be the cultural centres for the village people.

The Directorate's activities would encompass the activities of all the Ministries. But it is necessary that the Directorate be under the Ministry of Education. But since our public libraries are under the Ministry of Education, the Directorate could also be called the Directorate of Public Libraries. And in that case our public libraries would only be performing their traditional, normal and natural functions in response to a historic call for mass education and disseminating information.

The necessity of having more public libraries including the ones in the rural areas is not a new idea. In an excellent work entitled 'Public Libraries in East Pakistan' Mr. M.A. Syed highlighted this necessity back in 1968, and linked it with the development efforts of the Government. Every government has felt this need.

More public libraries, besides promoting education, would also promote publishing industry. There is a triangular problem in publishing industry of the country. Writers do not feel encouraged to write books because they do not find publishers. Publishers do not feel encouraged to publish books because they do not find booksellers (publishers do not always sell books to individual buyers). Booksellers say books do not sell—very few people buy books. In the circumstances, the only way to boost publishing industry in the country would be to have more public libraries that would buy books for the members of the public.