

Role Of Public Library In Society

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MAN as part of society inherits and enters into full possession of the rich national heritage of culture and experience. If he is to perform his due functions as a member of society and contribute positively to the welfare of the group, he must possess the normal knowledge of a man. Advancement of civilization requires that each member of the society shall acquire so much of common knowledge as is the basis of cooperative life. A library is an effective institution for prolonged, systematic self-education of man in society. Formal education at all levels can be conducted more effectively with well equipped libraries.

There was a time when a library was regarded as a storhouse of knowledge. Modern libraries are no longer depositories of past, present and future. They are the centres of storage and retrieval of information places where information materials are identified, collected, recorded, organised, evaluated, interpreted, administered and preserved.

The UNESCO public library manifesto proclaims the UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and understanding between people and between nations. S.R. Ranganathan's library manual outlines the public library as a social institution, "having educational, informative, political, economic, industrial, cultural and antiquarian functions."

The objective of the public library is to establish a new social order. In other words, it is to be considered as an instrument of social change. At present information is being regarded as a national resource, perhaps as fundamental as energy or matter, which affects all human activities. Information is power. It is indispensable in human society. It needs to be put in the service of the whole community. It is the public library which can provide access to documents, information free of charge for all in the community. In this way, a public library can contribute to the welfare and progress of the community served by it.

A public library serves the local community and is open to the public without any distinction. It must be readily accessible to members of the community irrespective of race, profession, religion, culture or creed, sex, language, age, status and educational attainment. People are allowed free and equal use. All age groups must find materials relevant to their needs. Collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials.

As a social institution, the public library's function is not only to satisfy the need for books but also to promote the desire for books. In promoting the reading habits of the people, the library has to make them library minded, which means it has to draw more and more people towards the library. A public library performs the functions of providing for information, education, recreation, entertainment and inspiration. Recreation and entertainment should be provided through reading. Certain kinds of books and other reading materials can lead to relaxation and achievement of pleasure.

The public library is considered an essential part of a modern society and plays a vital role in the community. It can help in safeguarding democracy, creating political awakening, bringing social awareness and fostering creative leisure activities. A public library can play an important role in helping different sectors of the community. It can help farmers to improve production and businessmen to improve business prospects.

Public libraries today are essentially "universities of the people." They are a product of modern democracy and a practical demonstration of democracy's faith as universal education is a life long process. Libraries are concerned with the entire spectrum of knowledge. Thus we see public libraries have a very important part to play in future development of the social, cultural, educational and research progress in a country. The public library in a society should be the heart from which every develop-

ment in the community gets reflected. A local public library is the social nerve centre of the locality.

The children's department of a public library seeks to encourage wider reading and to develop a love of books. It can enable children to pursue personal and extra-curricular interests, to use the library as an aid to living, and, at the appropriate time, to take up the use of the adult library. The public library is open to children irrespective of the school they attend. It is open during holidays and can also provide study accommodation to assist pupils whose home conditions are not conducive to study and thus it can lead to formation of reading habits at an early age.

The public library attracts by converting itself into a community and cultural centre. It is an agent to procure and transfer information and knowledge for the advancement of society and its culture. It may organise a lecture, a musical concert, a puppet show, drama, a music show, book displays and exhibitions, celebration of local and national festivals, a story hour for children, reading circles and to offer a meeting place for local organizations and associations. In this context, a public library may assume a vital role in the social structure as it can provide the opportunity for communication between men.

The public library not only raises the level of intelligence and status of the common man but also to a great extent it raises the quantum of the common sense of the average man in the community. The library tends to increase the reading habits and change the reading tastes of the people and helps to raise the level of culture.

Very few men and women have the opportunity to receive formal schooling for education. In fine, we can say that public libraries are one of the public institutions of society, a part of the social landscape. The real business of public libraries is community development, improving the quality of social lives and encouraging the development of their econo-

mic conditions. So the public library is indispensable for society to educate, inform and also convert an individual into a better citizen.

But, unfortunately, the public libraries in Bangladesh, in their resources, organisations, readers and extension services do not reflect the above mentioned role and activities. The development of public libraries has been slow and sporadic. There are various deficiencies in the library set-up. This is mainly due to lack of a public library act and the absence of a national body or committee to advise the government on library and information affairs.

In spite of inadequacies, failures and inconsistencies, there is no cause for a sense of frustration. The establishment of the department of public libraries by the government, with all its inadequacies, is a step in the right direction. Public libraries help one and all—children, adolescents and adults—to educate themselves continuously irrespective of sex or creed and thus help them to be citizens with the ability for independent decision and equip with a share of common culture for cooperative living. The library is the only organization which develops the IQ of the common man. The public library, which keeps open for twelve to fourteen hours a day, will welcome the common man and give him an opportunity to develop himself according to desire, capacity or need.

Public libraries can provide well-stocked reference materials and wide-ranging loan services based on systems of branch libraries. They are further supplemented by travelling or mobile libraries, which serve outlying thanas and also villages. Specific facilities are provided for the old and the disabled, and in many cases library services are organised for local schools, hospitals and jails.

The government has planned to formulate a library policy aiming at building a smooth library management system in the country from central to rural level. This policy will provide adequate provisions for financial requirements, so that it would be possible to offer sound services throughout the country.