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The Bangladesh Times Libraries in mass education

The public library is called the people's university. This is specially significant in our situation because of our high percentage of illiteracy and low percentage of indigenous publications. Literacy cannot be attained without books. Literacy cannot be sustained without reading materials and reading facilities being made available. Apart from the high percentage of illiteracy, majority of our literate population end their schooling just after learning the alphabets at the primary level. In most cases, with the end of schooling comes the end of reading and learning. But the schools do not teach all the things which one can learn during one's life time.

Moreover, today human knowledge is developing at such a fast rate that even practising doctors, scientists, engineers, lawyers and so on discover that within ten or fifteen years they are at a disadvantage professionally and economically in competition with recent graduates if they have not energetically and systematically kept their knowledge up-to-date through continued reading.

So, unless we can make reading not a treatment received once when young but a persistent habit inculcated from birth and practised throughout life, unless we keep alive our zeal for continued reading with an adequate supply of reading materials, there is every danger that even our neo-literates may soon relapse practically into illiteracy. As the per capita income of our people is one of the lowest in the world, most of us cannot afford personal collection of books. The libraries attached to our educational institutions on the other hand, cannot give service to the others neglecting their own

clients; In the circumstances, the establishment of a network of public libraries on the British model appears to be the possible solution. This has become all the more necessary in our situation.

To cope with the ever increasing students for higher studies, the Government is considering opening of an open university in our country. In that case the public libraries would be the only source of availability of reading materials for students of the open university.

The authoress identifies the major problems and issues of the development of public library system in the country. Of

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these, the most noteworthy is the bureaucratic control and lack of library legislation. According to the authoress development of public libraries in Bangladesh lies in full bureaucratic control of the government. So long this continues, there is little hope for the healthy development of public libraries here. To improve the situation, the authoress has suggested "... Like in Great Britain, there should be some independent authorities empowered with public library legislation." "This is indeed the prime need of the hour if we sincerely want to develop healthy public library system in the country". This and other suggestions given by the authoress may help mould the thinking of the authorities concerned for future development of public libraries in the country.

The book under review is the latest addition to the scanty library literature in Bangladesh. According to the authoress, "this was a thesis work

completed for fulfilment of master's degree in library science. Later on, the work was rewritten and updated for publication in book form". This has made the work unique because this is the first time that a thesis submitted to the department of library and information science for master's degree at Dhaka University has been brought out as a publication for the public.

The book is divided into ten chapters. The work begins with origins of the public library concept, followed by the objective of the public library, historical growth and development of public libraries both in the U.K. and Bangladesh with special emphasis on library legislation, a comparative study and conclusion and recommendations. Each chapter is full of citations where required. This has given the book an air of authority on the subject. Addition of two appendices viz, "Directory of public libraries in Great Britain" and "Directory of public libraries in Bangladesh" has made the book more informative and useful.

Some incomplete sentences here and there mar the reading of the book. A vital suggestion appears to be missing. That is, the recruitment of professionally trained manpower with due status and pay-scales in want of which the modern public libraries cannot develop properly in our country. Students, teachers and research workers in library and information science both at home and abroad will find the book useful and interesting.

Public Libraries in Great Britain and Bangladesh by Rawshan Ara Parvin Shaikh Publishers
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