

# Role Of Library In National Advancement

Abdul Hai

Library which plays a significant role in the national advancement by disseminating knowledge can hardly be over emphasized. Library is indeed one of the greatest criteria by which the intellectual accomplishment of a nation may be judged.

"A great library contains the diary of human race." These wise words of G. Dawson sum up the utility and imperative necessity of library in the pursuit of knowledge. To a lover of art and literature and seeker of knowledge a great library is therefore a paradise on earth. To him it is a great storehouse of knowledge that enlightens, enriches, enlivens and fortifies his mind with moral strength. Constant reading of good books not only enriches the readers mind with knowledge but also acts as a guide post on the road to happiness. In other words good books guide the voyager to a safe home past across the sea of joy.

It means that library equipped with good books is indispensable for educating the people, enlightening their minds and broadening their outlook which are essential qualities that make a nation great.

History records indefatigable and persistent human efforts to collect huge mass of books to advance the cause of learning and those endeavours which led to the establishment of monumental libraries date back to a heavy past.

In later days great libraries were established in many western countries that made rapid stride towards development through intensive study of science and technology. The great care with which these libraries were preserved provides eloquent testimony to their insatiable thirst for knowledge. We are yet to witness and experience that literary and educational upheaval that characterized the occidental nations when they entered into history in the 15th and 16th centuries. In fact if history has any meaning and any lesson to impart it is to be sought in the way the moribund European nations leapt into life vibrating with energetic activities with the advent of what is known as the era of Renaissance or the Revival of Learning. This created a great stir and convulsion unheard of before. A developing nation can ignore this lesson of history only at its own disadvantage.

But for the Royal Society of Science set up in England in the mid-Seventeenth Century with the avowed object of taking full advantage of the Revival of Learning for stimulating the creative genius of the whole nation towards original scientific research England's military conquests on land and sea could have never given her the glory and prestige which she quickly attained without her great leap forward in the art and literature. The British Empire which co-

vered many parts of the two hemispheres became so vast and expansive that it was truly used to be said that the Sun never sets in the British Empire. But those days are gone and almost all her colonies have shattered the shackles of slavery. According to a former British Prime Minister England's glory now rests on her achievements in the field of art, literature and intellectual pursuits.

It is imperative on the part of an underdeveloped country just put on the ladder of development to take lessons from such epoch-making events to glorify herself by pursuing knowledge and thereby attaining intellectual greatness.

We have passed through many a vicissitude of life and it behoves us to prove by our deeds that history, which is inexorable, has a great lesson to impart. We should never be oblivious of the fact that hard labour, honest efforts, unity, faith, disciplined life and intellectual acumen and fervour can alone make a nation great and secure for her a place of dignity in the comity of nations. It is a happy augury that by her bold espousal of the just cause of the oppressed peoples the world over, Bangladesh has already occupied a place of honour in the world forum.

Centuries of colonial rule has caused us immense harm. Colonial rule accounts for our backwardness in education and economics. We face tremendous difficulties in filling up the gap. But whatever the difficulties may be, we should put in our best efforts to overcome these. It would be an exercise in futility to wax eloquent over economic progress and cultural and educational advancement in seminars and conferences unless such talks are supported by effective actions. Steps are, no doubt, being taken to raise output in fields and factories. And for real educational advancement we need to have a sufficient number of well-equipped libraries but under management of those who are ardent patrons of learning, art and literature. Whatever may be the excuses for our lamentable backwardness in education, it does not go to our credit that only a small fraction of our people are blessed with literacy. I have no exact data of the percentage of literate persons that attend public libraries to expand their domain of learning. It may, however, be said with certain amount of certainty that their number is negligible. Tendency to pass an examination is much stronger than acquisition of knowledge. This is one side of the picture. Another side of it is that after a lapse of time many a literate person who has not crossed the primary

stage relapses into illiteracy. This tantamounts to wastage of time and money.

If we want to make the country educationally advanced, we should strain all our nerves to take adequate and effective measures to arrest the rot. The Government is, no doubt, evincing keen interest in the matter, and what is needed now is that people belonging to all walks of life should come forward to extend their wholehearted co-operation to strengthen their efforts.

One effective means is to set up sufficient number of libraries even in the remotest corners of Bangladesh for the convenience of those who are deprived of the opportunity of reading due to poverty and other causes.

Again, if library is to be made meaningful, the library science should not mean only the mechanism of arranging books on shelves. The persons in charge of a library should also shoulder the responsibility of increasing the number of readers and encouraging them to work for eradicating illiteracy and attending the library regularly. He should help him in the choice of books also.

If some of our libraries look crowded at times, it is not because we have too many readers, but because we have too few libraries even for the small number of readers we have.

If a single individual like Andrew Carnegie can set up 2,000 libraries in America, two thousand persons in Bangladesh should be able to pool their resources to set up at least one library.

If I may be allowed to repeat, the man in charge of a great library has to shoulder a tremendous responsibility. Apart from guiding the readers in the choice and selection of books, he has to inflame in them a burning passion and desire and irresistible urge for study. A librarian should, therefore be a true patriot, an ardent lover of art and literature and a real patron of learning. He has also to see that the readers make the best use of a book the bee does of a flower she steals sweet from it but does not injure it.

In the medieval period mosques, monasteries, temples and churches were the centres of learning. Each of those centres had a large collection of religious books which were preserved with utmost care.

Last part of the 19th Century marked a turning point in the history of Library Movement. There was a great upsurge in founding libraries. In pre-partition sub-continent the Library Movement was first initiated in Baroda which was quickly followed in Bhopal, Rampur, Jaipur, Travancor, Cochin and Mysore. According to Sir Jadunath Sarker the Khuda Baksh Library of Patna contained the largest number of authentic books of the history of Muslim rule in India. History records persistent

ed story was first told by a Christian writer who lived six centuries later. It was therefore of very doubtful authority. The famous historian Gibbon also expressed similar views in his book 'The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire'.

These observations caused flutter in Europe and after heated debate it was generally concluded that the historian was right. Allama Shibli No-mani the great savant and the author of Siratunnabi also proved the baselessness of the allegation that the Arabs destroyed the library at Alexandria in his 'Risaili Shibli'.

There is however no dispute about the destruction of the Baghdad Library by the Moghul Hordes led by Halaku Khan.

Now about the present tempo of our progress in the field of learning there is much to be desired despite the Government's earnestness to rid the country of the curse of illiteracy. If we are to narrow the wide gap between the percentage of literate and illiterate persons we should further intensify our efforts to accelerate the pace of educational development and try to set up libraries even in the remotest corners of the rural areas to provide every literate person the opportunities for study. As Thackeray puts it 'if books do soothe cheer and console if books do enlighten enliven and fortify if they make sorrow hearable to us teach us harmless tears or happy laughter surely we should not grudge these inestimable blessings to the poorest of our friends but we will try with all our might to dispense these precious things over all'.