

PIONEERS

The Library Movement In Bangladesh

—Syed Abul Bashar Mohammad Saifullah And Syed Jaker Hossain

BANGLADESH which was the hinterland of the city of Calcutta in the British Indian province of Bengal, received what was probably the worst treatment from the Britishers. Very few educational institutions were developed here, and there was no means of self-education. No library worth the name, public or government had grown in this part. During the later part of the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th centuries we find only a few private or personal libraries in the then East Bengal such as Purbasanga Brahma Samaj Library, Baldah Garden Library, some subscription libraries in a few towns and library sections in what were designated the Muslim Institutes in certain district headquarters. As there were no well organised libraries here, no library movement in any sense of the term started in this part of the subcontinent. It was in the autumn of 1934 when seven librarians of Dhaka City put their heads together in a small cottage of the Plassey Barracks and discussed the library problems of the country and resolved to launch a library movement in close cooperation with the Librarian of Dhaka University Library and other noted librarians who were interested in the advancement of the profession of librarianship. The following librarians were present in that meeting: Messrs (1) A. R. Mirdah, (2) A.E.M. Shamsul Hoque, (3) Rakib Hossain, (4) Siddique Ahmad Chowdhury, (5) Jamil Khan, (6) Khondaker Abdur Rob and (7) Tafazzal Hossain. Their efforts led to the formation of the East Pakistan Library Association in 1955 A.D. An ad-hoc committee was formed with Dr. Nafis Ahmed, Professor and Head of the

Department of Geography, then part-time librarian Dhaka University as the Convener. This Committee worked hard for starting a library movement in this country. This association of the librarians was joined by Mr. Ahmad Hussain who on return from USA, had taken charge of organising the then East Pakistan Central Public Library, Dhaka later on Officer on Special Duty for development of libraries, Education Directorate, Government of the then East Pakistan and still later, on retirement from government service was the Director, Islamic Academy Dhaka. Also, on return from abroad Mr. Muhammad Siddiq Khan, then appointed Librarian Dhaka University Library joined the association. They two had since been in the vanguard of the Library Movement in the then Pakistan, particularly in the then East Pakistan and later Bangladesh until the death of Mr. Siddiq Khan on 13th August 1978. They received the active cooperation of Mrs. Nargis Jaffer and Messrs Rakib Hossain (deceased), A. M. Motahar Ali Khan, A. R. Mirdah (deceased) and others.

The then East Pakistan Library Association had the following broad aims and objectives:

1. To advance the cause of library movement and promote the establishment of a comprehensive library service throughout the then Pakistan.
2. To promote better administration of libraries by offering technical assistance and advice to library authorities.
3. To promote and encourage the study and research in Library Science.
4. To promote the improvement of the position and also the qualifications of library workers

and to safeguard their interests.

A pioneer is one who goes before to prepare the way for others. He works hard in spite of all obstacles for the promotion of a cause or for approach to an ideal. Whether it is political, social cultural or otherwise, an association and its sponsors are confronted by all manners of obstacles and difficulties in its initial formative stage. The library movement in this country could not be an exception. Future historians of our educational advancement, so far as it relates to libraries, will certainly note, with an account of their achievements, the names of these two noble souls viz the Late lamented Mr. Muhammad Siddiq Khan, Librarian of the Dhaka University Library and Head of the Department of Library Science, Dhaka University, and Mr. Ahmad Hussain, formerly Librarian, the then East Pakistan Central Public Library Dhaka, later Officer on Special Duty for the Development of Libraries, Education Directorate Government of the then East Pakistan and at one time later the Director, Islamic Academy, Dhaka both as the pioneers of the library movement in this country. It will not be out of place here to put on record in brief their career and some of their activities which in the long run may help many would-be librarians and inspire them to work for the cause and for the advancement of their professional career.

SIDDIQ KHAN

Muhammad Siddiq Khan was born on the 21st March, 1910 in Rangoon, the metropolitan city of Burma. He was the worthy son of Late Maulvi Muhammad Israil Khan, one of the earliest Bengali Muslim law graduates

of the Calcutta University. Mr. Siddiq Khan had his primary, intermediate, graduate and post-graduate education in Rangoon. He stood 5th in the Matric Examination in the whole of Burma having distinctions in 4 subjects and, as a recognition of his academic merit, was awarded a government scholarship for 5 years. He topped the list of successful candidates in the Intermediate Examination of the Rangoon University of 1927 and won the Jardine Prize. He took his Honours Degree in History in 1929, B.L. Degree in 1931 and M. A. in History in 1936 and in all these examinations, maintained high academic standard and secured the University Yaccub Abdul Gunny Gold Medal for Islamic studies. His erudition in History won him the fellowship of the Royal Historical Society of London. He was a linguist too and besides Bengali, his mother tongue, he had a thorough knowledge of English, spoken and written, and spoke and wrote Burmese, Urdu and Tamil. He received a thorough in-service training in some of the major British University Libraries and in the India Office Library, London. From its inception, he was associated with the library movement in the then East Pakistan and with institution, organisation and operation of all the three training courses viz the certificate course in Library Science under the auspices of the then East Pakistan Library Association (EPLA), the Diploma and the M.A. Degree courses of the Dhaka University. Besides being the teacher of 95% of the then East Pakistani Librarians in these courses, he also arranged, as the Honorary Secretary for one two-year

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term of the Pakistan Library Association, Scholarships and fellowships for the education and practical training of a number of the then East Pakistani librarians in British and American library schools and libraries. He re-organised the Dhaka University Library on scientific lines and introduced in it many improvements of which the microfilming and photo-copying and the bibliographic section are the most notable.

Earlier, Mr. Khan found himself in different important positions with work of diverse nature which brought out in bold relief his versatile character and rare qualities. He lectured in the Department of History and Political Science of the University College of Rangoon for a decade and then, after he exodus in the face of Japanese occupation of Burma, he assumed the duties of the Officer-in-Charge of Post-Raid Information Service, Civil Defence, (Home, Defence) Government of the then Bengal and was posted at Calcutta. He served as Liaison Officer, Directorate of Industries, Government of Bengal from 1944-46 and at the Assistant General Secretary of the Indian Red Cross Society Bengal Provincial Branch). He was the General Secretary of the then East Pakistan Red Cross Society, Dhaka, in 1947-48 and the Manager of the then East Pakistan Trading Corporation, Dittagong, in 1948-50. He assumed the headship of Devendra College, Manikganj in 1950. For some time he chanced to serve as the Secretary of the then Pakistan Refugees Rehabilitation Finance Corporation, Dhaka 1951-1952. Destiny then placed him as the Secretary to the Vice-Chancellor (Dr. W. A. Johns), University of Dhaka, in the year 1953 and was selected as the Librarian designate in 54 when he went to England for training in librarianship for years. On return in 1956 he took over charge of the library of the Dhaka University. When the Department of Library Science was instituted experimentally and that through his efforts

which appeared in the reputed professional journals of the world viz : Journal of Documentation (England), Library Association Record (England), Libri (Holland), Library Quarterly (U.S.A.), Gutenberg Annual (Germany), Indo-Pacific Exchange News Bulletin (Japan) etc. To mention only a few non-professional journals, he contributed to Islamic Culture, Deccan, Pakistan Review, Quarterly Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, Rangoon Gazette, Burma Municipal Gazette, Muhammad, Bulbul, Dilruba, Swadesh Bangla Academy, Patrika, Sahitya Patrika, Teacher's World etc. His illuminating book reviews established his reputation as a voracious and searching reader.

He attended as one of the two national delegates the Seminar organised by UNESCO on the International Exchange of Publications in the Indo-Pacific Area, and the Inaugural Conference of the Asian Federation of Library Association, both held at Tokyo, November 4-13, 1957. He was elected Vice-President of the Asian Federation of Library Associations for 1957-60. In the UNESCO Regional Seminar on Library Development in South East Asia held at New Delhi in 1960 he served as a UNESCO expert and leader of the group on University Libraries.

Mr. Khan continued his untiring efforts to put the library profession on a strong footing. He was a prolific writer. His health broke down under the terrific pressure of manifold duties and not long after his retirement, at the end of prolonged illness, he breathed his last on 13th August 1978.

AHMAD HOSSAIN

Mr. Ahmad Hussain was born in a Muslim family of Chittagong on July 2, 1909. It is a remarkable feature of his academic career that he was never placed in the second division or class. He had his Secondary, Intermediate courses under the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka, his Graduate and Post-Graduate education in the Dhaka

uncommon facility. During the long 40 years of his service career he occupied very many important positions in which he showed outstanding capabilities and integrity. He started his teaching assignment in the Dhaka Islamic Intermediate College in 1936 and continued upto 1939 when he joined the Teachers' Training College, Dhaka. He then worked as a lecturer in Islamic Studies for about seven years in the Hoogly Islamic Intermediate College, and thereafter for three years he was posted as lecturer in Arabic in the then Dhaka Intermediate College. During this period he happened to work with great credit simultaneously as the Assistant Secretary of two high-powered Committees, both headed by Moulana Md. Akram Khan, viz East Bengal Educational Reconstruction Committee and the East Bengal Language Committee. During the years 1949 to 1954 he was entrusted with the duties of the Secretary, East Bengal Text Book Committee under the Education Directorate from where he was deputed by the then Government of Pakistan in 1954 to go to USA for training in librarianship. He obtained M.S. degree from the Columbia University of New York in 1955. On his return from abroad in 1955 he was made the first Librarian of the then East Pakistan Central Public Library, situated in Dhaka. He was responsible for the unique organisation of the public library as an open shelf library which, in this respect can favourably compare with the public libraries of the advanced countries. In 1961 when the Central Public Library building was given over to the Dhaka University he was made Officer on Special Duty, Library Development, in the Education Directorate, Government of the then East Pakistan and since then he had been working in that capacity until his retirement on July 1, 1969. In addition to his usual duties he had been a part-time teacher of the Department of Library Science of the Dhaka University since its inception until after independence.