

A MAGIC WAND IN LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT

(Contd from previous issue)

ALL the centres of Pakistan Council and Bureau of National Reconstruction remained closed to the public for some time after independence and then by a government Order dated November 1, 1972 those were regrouped as Bangladesh Parishad Centres and were placed under the administrative control of the Department of Mass Communication in the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting While Pakistan Council Regional Centres were renamed Bangladesh Parishad Centres the BNR Information Centres in the District and Subdivision were converted into Bangladesh Parishad District and Subdivisional Centres and those at the major cities became Sub-centres attached to the Regional Centres.

Assessing the distinctive role played by the Bangladesh Parishad in the field of Library and culture, Government later decided to separate the organisation from the Department of Mass Communication and place it under the administrative control of the Ministry of Sports and Culture as a full-fledged Directorate.

With a total number of 64 Centres and Sub-centres including six Regional Centres at Chittagong, Comilla, Dhaka, Khulna, Mymensingh and Rajshahi Bangladesh Parishad represented a nationwide chain of libraries and also presented various cultural programmes inviting in its nationwide forums a cross section of the country's eminent intellectuals, artists and students as well.

The annual report of 1981 shows an assemblage of a total number of over 18,30,000 persons attending the Parishad Libraries and in connection with cultural programmes in the year.

The total number of programmes presented round the year through the country's Parishad Centres stood at 185.

MAJOR PROGRAMMES :

The major programmes organised through these Centres each year are :

1) Inter-University Debate in English and Bengali in which primarily selected University-level debators both in English and Bengali met at an Inter-University contest arranged by

periodicals: i) Quarterly Bangladesh Parishad Patrika containing scholarly papers read in various seminars and symposia organised by the Parishad Centres. Two issues were published since its introduction in July '81 and the third was in the press when suddenly the activities of Bangladesh Parishad were suspended in June 1982.

ii) 'Antarey Anirvan' the Ekushey February souvenir seven issues of the Souvenir were published up to February 1982.

Besides as a product of the seminars on Regional History and Culture a book on 'Garo Sanskriti' was published while History and Culture of Sylhet

Government Libraries administered by the Ministry of Sports and Culture. The absorption of the assets and personnel of Bangladesh Parishad in the Central Public Library Divisional Public Libraries in Chittagong and Khulna the opening of Rajshahi Divisional Public Library with the assets and personnel of Bangladesh Parishad Rajshahi Centre and transformation of the District and Sub-divisional Centres into District Government Public Libraries finally paved the way to a nationwide public library network.

For reasons beyond the comprehension of this humble contributor Parker Report did not receive much attention during the formulation of the Second Five Year Plan but the Government actions following the disbandment of Bangladesh Parishad elevated the observation of Mr. Parker as if to the strature of a prophecy. Observed Mr. Parker in his Report:

"It was originally intended to include the Bangladesh Parishad libraries in the survey and questionnaires had been completed for one main centre two district centres and two Sub-divisional centres before it was decided at the request of the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs and Sports not to survey the Parishad libraries on the ground that they were responsibility of another ministry. This is unfortunate in view of the fact that the Parishad libraries represent the nearest approach to a nationwide public library network which exists in Bangladesh and in view of the discussions which have since taken place on the possibility of transferring the Bangladesh Parishad to the

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the Bangladesh Parishad Headquarters awarding prizes and certificates to the successful contestants;

2) Ekushey February Literary Contest in short story essay, poetry and one-act drama at District Divisional and National level with award of prizes to winners at all levels finally producing an annual souvenir containing National Award winning writings and articles from the members of the Board of Judges;

3) Seminar on Regional History and Culture held at District Headquarters with the participation of scholars and educationists conversant on the subject preferably belonging to the District concerned.

PUBLICATIONS :

The major publications of Bangladesh Parishad were two:

was in the press and those of Comilla Patuakhali and Rangamati was under process.

As mentioned in the Parker Report Bangladesh Parishad in its library sector continued to provide both issue and reference service covering 5 university towns and Comilla the BARD city and offer reading facilities to a large number of students and reading public in the country. The total number of books in Regional and other Centres stood over 1 lakh and 1,33,000 respectively totalling 2,33,000 by June, 1982.

All these facts were brought to light on the sudden disbandment of Bangladesh Parishad by an Order of June 15, 1982 resulting in the issue of July 7 Government Order seeking the merger of all Bangladesh Parishad Centres with the three existing

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Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs and Sports'.

In the recommendations the report observes :

9.8.2. All public libraries operate essentially as autonomous, self-contained units and there is no significant degree of co-ordination or co-operation between them. The only organised library system serving the general public is that administered by the Bangladesh Parishad.

9.8.3. The lack of a proper organisational structure for public libraries in Bangladesh is a serious obstacle to their development and it will be quite impossible to implement any of the preceding recommendations of this report without creating a suitable framework for the direction of public library development the allocation of resources and the monitoring of results.

Further Mr. Parker advocated for inclusion of the Parishad System in the library network saying— "The libraries of Bangladesh Parishad should be brought within the scope of what ever arrangements may be made for the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs and Sports to exercise closer control over Public Library development".

Similarly long before these developments late Mr. Mr. F G B Hutchings former President of the Library Association of United Kingdom while writing a foreword in Mr. Mohammad Abu Syed's book on Public libraries made the following remarks:—

"... I regret to say there are signs of division in the field of Public libraries for example the Pakistan Council for National Integration is establishing Public Libraries, though such are also established by municipalities and districts. I greatly favour the work which P C N I is doing and the spirit in which it is being done. Nevertheless I feel that its library work should be integrated with other libraries particularly other public libraries."

NOW A DEPARTMENT : Originally both the Bangladesh Parishad and the proposed Directorate of the Central Public Library came up before the Martial Law Committee on the Organisational Set-up for consideration. But the disbandment of Bangladesh Parishad and subsequent unification with government public libraries simplified the task of the Committee which immediately went for working out an integrated library system. The Report of the committee dealing with the Department of Public Library stated:

After disbandment of Bangladesh Parishad and transfer of all other assets of this Department to Central Public Library the need to reorganise the Library Services into a Department was felt. The newly organised Department of the following Librarians will have the following Library under its administrative control:

a) One Central Public Library

b) three Divisional Public Libraries at Rajshahi, Khulna and Chittagong and

c) 53 District & Sub-divisional Public Libraries.

The broad functions of the Department are as under :

a) To provide reading facilities for all classes of readers;

b) To act primarily as a Reference Library; c) To build up and maintain a comprehensive book collection as varied as possible with special emphasis on text and reference books;

d) To build up and maintain adequate stock of books of Juvenile interest with arrangement for circulation through Juvenile Libraries situated in different residential areas of the city;

e) To function as a cultural centre with a carefully designed programme of extension lectures, exhibitions etc. so as to create and foster intellectual interest and reading habit among the general public;

f) To shoulder responsibilities of reorganisation and development of Public Libraries in the country;

g) To reorganisation and development of Public Libraries in the country;

h) To provide advisory service and reference service to the Public in general;

i) To provide research and reference service to scholars and to Government Departments;

j) To organise country-wide literary competition with a view to find new talents in the literary field;

k) To organise seminar and bring out publications on life, culture and history of Bangladesh."

Now that the Department of Public Library has been set up with the aforesaid functions, the libraries under the Department will function as a cultural centre in addition to its provision for reading facilities for the students and general public alike.

The noble idea of using the libraries as cultural centres as

well as nurtured by planners for years, but it is the first time such idea is being implemented.

The present administration is

planning to use its modern au-

ditorium for library and book

orientated selected programmes

The countrywide literary organi-

sed by the Department is now at

the final stage.

What was a mere foundation

stone in 1953 and what were

isolated attempts in later years

to build up a countrywide net-

work of educational and cultural

forums have now consolidated

into centres of learning and

cultural activities.

The setting up of the Depart-

ment should not, however, be

taken as an end in itself. It

should rather be taken for the

base on which will stand the

edifice of the public library sys-

tem of the coming days where

people in general and the stu-

dents community in particular

would increasingly find an ideal

resort for educational and cul-

tural enrichment.

The author of this series of

articles on Library Development

is the erstwhile Director, Depart-

ment of Public Library.