

Library as a Cultural Forum

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It is evident from records that the planners of Library Development in the country, since pre-independence days, laid great emphasis on the spread of literary and cultural activities. The authorities while formulating plans for the development of public libraries in the country in late fifties, envisaged the development of institutions like a museum of natural history, museum of science and technology, an arts and crafts gallery and in institution for the permanent preparation of historical records and archives pertaining to the area. The Central Public Library, set up in the country's capital city, also included in its objectives organisation of subject-oriented lectures seminars and symposia as well as other cultural programmes and for that purpose a separate auditorium was included in the project.

How that Dhaka has a National Library for the preservation of historical records and archives, a National Crafts Museum, Sonargaon Folk Arts and Crafts Museum, a Science Museum and Arts Academy for the preservation and display of antiquities, scientific devices and arts and crafts, the public libraries are left with the task of organising suitable seminars symposia and cultural programmes along with providing the readers with adequate books, newspapers, periodicals and other reading materials.

THE TRADITION

Both in the country and abroad the public libraries, apart from their function of providing books and other reading materials to the readers, have long been traditionally providing avenues for creative use of leisure for people of various walks of life. Debates and discussions on various topics of interest, seminar and symposia spotlighting the country's library trend and national heritage as well as part of facilities other than creation of reading habit among the public. In his book, public library and their Mission Andre Morois writes, "..... a public library in a real centre of culture propagating human knowledge and dispensing delight. It is a channel for the spread of ideas and provides the members of the community with a means of making intelligent use of their leisure".

IN SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

The magnificent role played by libraries in national reconstruction is evident from the recent history of Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. In Soviet Union great emphasis was laid on the development of libraries immediately after the revolution. With N. Krupakata, wife of Lenin at the head of Library Development Programmes of the country, the entire system was brought within the control of the Commissariats for Education of the various republics under which the Central Library Commissions were organised. The libraries were fact development as a network covering cities towns, factories, trade unions and even remotest rural areas made these institutions campaign for literary among Russia's 80% illiterate population providing

library networks public libraries has experienced a rapid expansion in the past three decades or more. There were 1,732 public libraries about the eve of liberation, and their total collection has increased from 16 million to 210 million volumes.

A CULTURAL CENTRE

Modern public library in advanced countries are no longer treated as a silent centre of study and research only. It also represents a centre for the community's cultural life. In Western countries libraries, to day, organise seminars and symposia on current topics of interest and also report published in China Handbook series entitled 'Culture' by the China Handbook Editorial committee reads: "The backbone of the country's library at Cambridge, Massachusetts, on John F. Kennedy the memorial library the reading public. The dedication to cultural programmes to the delight of musical score, film shows and other cultural programmes. The country's own library system has also records of organising seminars, symposia and cultural programmes for years. Bangladesh National Reconstruction immediate facilities as well as forums for dissemination of the country's cultural pattern until it was merged with the Central Public Library giving birth to the Department of Public Library in 1982.

THE PRESENT SET UP

In the recent reorganisation of the country's erstwhile diversified public libraries under the Department of Public Library, the planners did not neglect this aspect of public education and entertainment. Apart from providing reading facilities with books, newspapers and periodicals and assisting researchers with the supply of information, books and other materials, the object of the reorganised library system included its function as a cultural centre to organise carefully designed programmes of extension lectures, exhibitions etc. So as to create and foster intellectual interest and reading habit among the public, "invite country-wide literary contest with a view to finding new talents in the library field and also to arrange seminars and bring out publications on the life, culture and history of Bangladesh. Thus like the advanced countries in the West and other socialist countries, libraries today stand recognised in the country's system of public libraries as a centre and forum for cultural advancement. The Department of Public Library, even in its formative stage organised literary contest throughout the country and published the resultant brochure "Antarey Anvayan" for two successive years, 1985 and 1986. Unfortunately the Ekushey February 1987 did not see this commemorative literary contest and the subsequent publication. However, it is yet to be seen as to how the lofty ideals of propagation of national culture through the country-wide network of libraries are materialised by the dedicated library workers in the coming years.

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