

PROBLEMS OF WRITERS, READERS AND PUBLISHERS

The fourth angle to solve a triangular problem

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The succeeding paragraphs have reference to a recently published article by A. U. M. Fakhruddin on the problems of writers, readers and publishers. In that piece (9 April, 1984), the author comprehensively summed up the problems of writers, publishers and readers in Bangladesh by quoting statistics, opinions of the famous writers, publishers, readers and a high ranking civil servant having the responsibility to produce and promote publications in the country. Also the writer has the Rx for the problems, but he has not clearly spelt out how it should be served or who should serve it.

I may state the problem as I see it. For the writer the problem is, he does not find a publisher to publish his book (for which he is, at times, constrained to publish his book on his own, which Fakhruddin has not mentioned). For the publisher the problem is that he does not have any real good demand for the book he has published and, last of all, for the reader the problem is he does not find very many good books to buy. The crux of the problem, according to Fakhruddin, is that we have an 'extremely poor reading habit' and that the problem could be solved if the gov-

ernment undertook 'a programme to develop libraries in the country.'

'STATE OF FAMINE' I looked at the problem (as a passing reference) in my work titled 'Approach to Library Administration' (The University Press Ltd., Dhaka, 1980, pp 90-91) in which I stated that we were in a 'state of famine' in regard to book production in this country and the reasons that led us to that 'state of famine' were those I have already mentioned but even then I dismissed those reasons as sheer untenable ones. My assertion was that we did not have very many talents to write good books and that if you had a good book to publish you would find a publisher and that certainly for a good book you would find a good number of readers. And in the same breath I also said that there were no nation who did not have their geniuses and talents and we too have among us geniuses and talents who are competent enough to write good books.

I still stick to my assertions and convictions, and I think I am right. I just cannot believe that a nation made up of about one hundred million people — a people having 6 universities,

600 colleges, 8960 high schools, 43,937 primary schools, 2864 Madrasahs and thousands of doctors, engineers, scientists and intellectuals — cannot write good books and do not read good books.

To me the crux of the problem is: we must write good books and that we can do if we just take the challenge to write good books. And then coming to the concrete realities, I may raise some questions: Do we write books, and good books for that matter? Do our publishers publish books good enough? And do our people buy and read good books? My answer are: We do write books, only that we do not write as many books as we should; we do publish books but do not publish as many as we should and that we do read books only but do not read as much as we should.

READING HABIT

In regard to reading habit, my view is that we just cannot inculcate it in a people. They develop it as they develop other habits. They develop it by seeing other people reading books and they develop it when they know that by reading books they can raise their working efficiency and raise production. People also read

books when they realize that reading books gives them pleasure and solace to their souls.

But even if we have a large number of bibliophiles and a high percentage of people with reading habit we will need libraries for the people. For this we may look at the advanced societies. The reason for this is that we just cannot buy each and every book we would like to buy. And so people have been taking pains since the very dawn of human civilization to preserve the records of knowledge and information and to pass it on to the future generations.

LIBRARY, THE FOURTH ANGLE

This gave birth to the institution called library. So, the triangular problem of the writers, publishers and readers is linked with the fourth angle — the library.

In fact, the writers and publishers are in a sort of relay race to hand knowledge and information to the people, but the problem is that the two cannot run the whole distance. They need a fourth partner in their relay race. The writer walks and watches people in the market place, in the corridors of power, in the slums and in the countryside, and spends his

time in the library and the lab to write his book. The publisher (meaning also the bookseller) does perform his part of the job to publish a book but he cannot reach his book to the people all by himself.

THE ALL-IMPORTANT FOURTH PARTNER

So comes the fourth man in the relay race — the librarian who mixes skills with scholarship to acquire, process and circulate books to the people. In this relay race no one should try to run his partner's distance because he just can't do that. So, if we need to develop libraries in the country to solve the problems faced by the writers, publishers and readers and to hand on our accumulated knowledge to our future generations we must give this responsibility to the librarians. They are the mediators between books and readers. They are a fine breed of horses who can do an excellent running to deliver knowledge and information to the people like Sher Shah's horses. And let us remember that only the horses can run that distance.

(The author is the Chief Librarian of Bangladesh Administrative Staff College, Dhaka).