

(Cont from previous issue)

Pakistan Council under the direct supervision of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting opened its first Centre at Motiheel Dhaka in August 1964 and was closely followed by the Centres at Chittagong (1965) and Rajshahi (1967). Two more Centres one at Khulna and the other at Mymensingh came up later. All these centres with open shelf libraries provided reading facilities to students and general readers and also lent out books for home reading. Since the Central and Divisional Public Libraries remained ever shy to open lending system despite their avowed policy to do so the book loan service of Pakistan Council Centres provided added attraction to the student community and general public alike.

During the period from 1963 to 1965, the Bureau of National Reconstruction opened as many as 61 Information Centres each containing a small library throughout the country. Nine of these Centres were located in and around Dhaka while the remaining 52 Centres were set up at the

Library which also was not ready for use until its integration with Bangladesh Parishad came into force in September 1982. The building complete except the planned prayer hall and the lecture theatre was soon handed over to the new administration and all assets and personnel of defunct Rajshahi Regional Centre of Bangladesh Parishad moved into the new Library Building which was immediately opened to the public.

In a significant post independent development the Directorate of Public Instruction was divested of its charge of government public libraries which were placed under the administrative control of the newly formed Cultural Affairs Division of the Ministry of Education. The parallel library system developed under Pakistan Council and BNR underwent multiple transformation during the post independence period. Both the organisations were regrouped soon after liberation and named Bangladesh Parishad placing it under the administrative control of the Department of Mass Communication of the Ministry of Information and

The following remarks in the Parker's Report underlines the important role played by erstwhile Bangladesh Parishad both in the library and cultural fields of the country:—

'The Bangladesh Parishad is an organisation, said to have been modelled on the British Council but operating mainly within Bangladesh which aims to promote a sense of national identity among the people of Bangladesh through organising cultural activities of various kinds, including the provision of Library facilities. It is administered by the Department of Mass Communications of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting but consideration is being given to the possibility of transferring it to the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs and Sports.

*** There are five main Bangladesh Parishad Centres in Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Chittagong and Mymensingh. There are two sub-centres in Dhaka and one in each of the other four towns. There are fourteen district information centres in the district headquarters.

Public Library Development

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district and subdivisional headquarters. These libraries run with grants provided by the provincial government enlisted local support through advisory committees composed of local leaders and educationists and headed by the DCs and SDOs.

Thus it may be noticed that the pre-independence government initiative in library development of the country was very much diversified. Developed under different Ministries and Departments these Library Systems had no coordination with each other thereby failing to produce the desired coherence of an ideal library network in the country. In the private sector too the spontaneity of local initiative evidenced in the field during the British Rule gradually evaporated in Pakistan period and eventually the state of many of the nongovernment libraries became miserable.

POST INDEPENDENCE EFFORTS

Before the advent of the present decade the field of libraries in the post independence period was limited more or less to harping the old tune. The scheme for the rehabilitation of the Central Public Library was partially implemented in the First Five Year Plan and the Library was finally opened to public at the new spacious building at Shahbagh in January 1973. Construction of the third stack on the second floor, a six unit staff quarter and a modern auditorium for the Central Public Library were completed of course with cuts here and there from the original plan during the Second Five Year Plan.

Similarly the scheme for the expansion of Khulna Divisional Public Library was completed in most part at the end of the Second Plan period. But the new project undertaken in course of the past decade was the construction of a spacious building for the Rajshahi Divisional Public

Broadcasting as its branch in Nov. 1972 and later under the Cultural Affairs Division of the Ministry of Education as an attached Department in September 80.

The only development noticed during the period was the opening of a new Regional Centre at Comilla. It may however be noticed that for the first time the two parallel library systems in the country came under the one umbrella—the Cultural Affairs Division.

A SECOND THOUGHT

The government also meanwhile gave a second thought to the plan of development of public library system in the country and with the realisation that harping the old tune will not yield the desired result in the field decided to take help of foreign expertise for the solution of the problem.

Finally Mr. J.S. Parker, Library Development Consultant of International repute was engaged to make a survey of the state of public libraries in Bangladesh and recommend a planned development in the field. Following a detailed survey of the prevailing conditions of a total number of 178 government and non-government libraries, Mr. Parker submitted his Report in 3 volumes to government on November 2, 1979. But no step was taken immediately even to study the salient features of the Report, not to speak of implementation of the recommendations.

The importance of Parker's observations that no effective measures to improve the library system could be taken by ignoring the prevailing countryside library network run by Bangladesh Parishad was realised only after the Parishad was disbanded and government efforts at the services reorganisation suffered a setback while reforming the Library Sector of the Cultural Affairs Division.

THE ROLE OF BANGLADESH PARISHAD

ers towns not served by the main Parishad centres, and 38 sub-divisional information centres in subdivisional headquarters.

'Each of the main centres provides a meeting hall and a public lending library. The smallest of these, in Khulna has a stock of some 12,000 volumes. The biggest in Dhaka has more than twice that number. The smaller centres are essentially reading rooms with small book collections of about 2,000 volumes and range of newspapers and periodicals'.

'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'.

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 whatever 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. 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.