

An quest for a new basis

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The planning of modern public library services in Bangladesh owes its origin to the establishment of Central Public Library in Dacca and to the structure suggested by Mr L.C. Key, an UNESCO expert from Australia, who on a request from the then Government of Pakistan, surveyed the library situation and submitted his report to the Government in 1956. In his report he recommended the setting up of three public libraries at Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi—the three divisional headquarters. Subsequently it was decided that one library at each district headquarters, one library at each of the 37 sub-divisional headquarters and one library at each of the Thana headquarters should be provided with lump grants.

It will appear from the above fact that administrative unit of the government has been taken as the basis for gradual expansion of public library services in Bangladesh and that urban areas have come under consideration.

This administrative-unit-basis may suit other development planning of the public service. But strict adherence to this principle will lead us out of the track in public library planning.

The aim of any public service is to reach the entire population as far as possible. But, unlike other public services, public library services aim at educated population only. It must be borne in our mind that public library service is strictly limited to literacy. Unless a particular area comes to a certain standard literacy it will be unjudicious to plan public library service there at this stage. Standard literacy is a sine-qua-non to public library service. When literacy is built up the consideration that comes next is the size of that literate population or the educated population.

The size of the educated population will determine, on the one hand, the category of public library service a particular area deserves, and, on the other,

TABLE 1:

Municipal Area.	Total Population.	Educated Population.	Percentage of literacy.	Category.
Dacca	13,10,976	4,77,631	36.43%	A
Chittagong	4,16,733	1,63,611	39.25%	B
Khulna	4,37,304	1,41,754	32.4%	
Narayanganj	1,76,459	61,848	35%	C
Barisal	98,127	47,240	48.13%	
Rajshahi	96,645	39,828	41.2%	D

the priority to be fixed. Let us, study different municipal areas and observe the anomalous situation that has arisen. (Table 1).

According to the size of the educated population Narayanganj and Barisal municipal areas ought to have come under public library service consideration after Dacca, Chittagong and Khulna. Ignoring these areas we have planned public library service at Rajshahi municipal area. Again Rajshahi with its small size of educated population is not yet ready for the category of service we are imparting in Dacca, Chittagong and Khulna. But being the Divisional headquarters it got the priority under the administrative unit basis. This does not, however, mean that Rajshahi does not need public library service. But it needs the service its size of educated population deserves. So more of such anomalies will crop up if we follow the existing principle and in that case the whole will be like putting the cart before the horse.

It is time that we put a stop to this fallacious principle and its resulting anomaly. This obviates the necessity of specifying standards of (1) the size of the educated population and (2) the category of library services that these different sizes need.

The UNESCO has set a standard for public libraries. In specifying the different standards it took total population into consideration. If we follow the UNESCO Standards it will seem too ambitious a plan to be implemented. At this stage

of our national economy, we cannot aim at that standards. We may have an objective and feasible plan if we set the standard based on our educated population only.

Let us take Dacca Central Public Library with Dacca municipality as its area of service. Dacca municipality has a population of 13,10,976. According to UNESCO Standard minimum book requirement for public library service in Dacca municipality is 19,66,464 titles, (at the rate 1.5 book per capita); the size of the building will be 3,27,500 sq. ft. (floor space). These standards appear to be too high.

If we calculate this minimum on the educated population of Dacca, the book requirement stands at 7,16,446; and the size of the building will be 1,19,250 sq. ft. Though this standards also seem quite high, perhaps, we may take this as an attainable standard.

Majority of our educated population reside in the 134 urban areas. They live in close proximity and in a compact area with better communication facilities than available in the rural areas. Out of these urban areas 72 has municipal administration. On a study of the different size of educated population available in different municipal areas we may set up a standard size for our planning (Table 2).

Corresponding to the above size we may have four categories of public library services:

- Public Library System.
- Public Library System (small).
- Public Library: Single unit (Medium).
- Public Library: Single unit (Small).

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TABLE 2

Standard size of Educated Population for Public Library Service.

- 1,00,000 and above upto 2,00,000 Education Population.
- 50,000 and above but below 1,00,000 Educated Population.
- 20,000 and above but below 50,000 educated population.
- Below 20,000 educated population.

If we correlate these two sets of standards, one single set of standard emerges:

- Public Library System (full size) Ed. Pop. : 1,00,000 to 2,00,000.
- Public Library System: (Small) Ed. Pop. : 50,000 & above.
- Public Library: Single Unit (Medium) Ed. Pop. : 20,000 and above.
- Public Library: Single Unit (Small) Ed. Pop. : Below 20,000.

An explanation is necessary for this categorization of Public Library services. Like any other public services the aim of Public Library services is to carry the service to the doorstep of the users.

The main item of our service material is book. With book we serve the readers. Collecting books for one single building and asking users to come to a single place for the service are against the principle of Public service. Now our object of real service may be realised only when we provide for the service points throughout the thickly populated areas of the locality. These service points or branches will be fed and controlled by the Central Library. For every 10,000 educated population we may have a branch. A central library with branches spread all around will give us a Public Library system. For every two lacs educated population in a compact area we have a system. Dacca municipality (4,77,000) will have two such systems. Khulna and Chittagong municipalities will each have a system and Narayanganj (62,000) may go for a small system.

Public Library service from a single building is centripetal and through a system it is centrifugal.

This approach of public library planning will give us a rationale and will be systematic in carrying the public library service to the entire education population of the nation by a network of Public Libraries.

Once the standard is set the next problem will be one of huge fund required for the establishment of a network of public library system. A big sum of our estimated cost is normally spent on land and buildings. For any expansion programme this therefore is a big hurdle. In my humble opinion we may minimize this cost through optimum use of the existing buildings. Branches of Public Library system and other service points may suitably be set up in the existing government and non-government primary School buildings. These buildings remain unutilized after 2 p.m. Public Libraries can easily utilize these buildings between 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.

If national interest is upper most in our mind there may be an agreement between the public library authority and the public library authority at the government level. The primary school authority, under this scheme, will give the right to use these buildings and the public library authority will provide the staff, books, furniture and the running cost of library service points. Money thus saved could be utilised for books which is the real need for Public Library Service.