Present Public Library System in Bangladesh:
A Birds Eye View

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Abstract:

Public library is an institution which provides equal opportunity to every citizen irrespective of age, profession, religion for acquiring information of all kinds and for reading and research. There are two types of public libraries in Bangladesh i.e. Non- government public libraries and Government public libraries. After the liberation of the country public library movement got a positive momentum resulting establishment of the department of public libraries in 1983 under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. This paper condenses on the improvement of public libraries in Bangladesh. Currently there are 1376 non-government public libraries run under separate committees form according to their respective constitutions as well as 71 government public libraries covering up to all district headquarters, two upazillas, one special and four branches are running in the country. This paper also discussed on the existing status and activities of public libraries in Bangladesh. Some problems have been traced and as a possible number of recommendations have been put forward and finally government has taken some future plan for developing public libraries of Bangladesh.

***Keywords: Library** movement, Public library, development, Bangladesh*

1. Introductions:

The term Public library is understood in developed countries as a democratic institution, by the people, of the people and for the people, established and maintained under clear authority of law, supported mainly from public funds for free use of all the members of the community. A public library has rightly called 'People's university.' In Bangladesh the public libraries were first established in the middle of the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that the idea of establishment of public libraries is essentially western, and the spread of the public library movement in this part of the world is the direct result of the impact of western culture. The Calcutta public library was established in 1835, while all the non-government public libraries were established after 1850. An active force behind the establishment of public libraries in Indian-sub continent was the public library Act of England of August 14, 1850. The year 1854 is a landmark for the establishment of four public libraries in important district headquarters of the East Bengal, viz. Woodburn Public Library Bogra, Jessore Public Library, Barisal Public Library, Rangpur Public Library *(Ahmad.S.U-1994)[1].*

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[1]Ahmad S. U (1994), Librarianship and the state of Libraries in Bangladesh

The movement got further impetus with the establishment of public libraries at Rajshahi (1871). Dhaka (1874), Comilla (1885), Pabna (1890), Noakhali (1897), Sylhet (1897), Chittagong (1904), Cox's Bazar (1906), Munshigonj (1908), Kishoregonj (1909), Kushtia (1914), Faridopur (1914), Khulna (1914), Dinajpur (1930) and Mymensingh (1930) and these are still somehow functioning. However, the momentum of this enthusiastic start was not sustained. All of these libraries, mentioned above were generally established by one or more philanthropists and supported by public subscriptions and assisted by small financial grants either from the government or local Zamindars. The condition of these libraries was not in a good position. Most of the libraries were housed either in rented or loaned quarters. There was no continued and constant support, either from the government or local bodies. Most of them were non-governmental situated in Dhaka city or in other district headquarters *(Rahman,A.F.M.Badiur,1993)[2].*

At the same time, after they had been established for about a hundred years, Bangladesh inherited these libraries, at the time of partition of India in 1947. The foundation of modern public libraries in Bangladesh was laid a century later, with the laying of the foundation stone of the central public library at Dhaka in 1954. During the period of 1947 to 1971 about 80 new public libraries were established in addition to 25 libraries established earlier. Moreover, libraries and information centers of the Pakistan Council for National Integration of the central Ministry of Information in the major districts and Bureau of National Reconstruction (BNR) of Provincial Information Department were responsible for circulating mostly Government publications. Till the emergence of Bangladesh, the country had about 175 public libraries and information centers. After the independence of Bangladesh, a new phase of library movement started with new inspiration to achieve UNESCO's manifesto by a group of educationists and social workers. In 1983, a Department of Public Libraries was established by absorbing the government public libraries of the country including Bangladesh Central Public Library *(Hakim,Md.Azizul,-1994)[3].* It also houses the Public Library Department which, with 71 public libraries including the Central Public Library in its jurisdiction, is managed by the Directorate of Public Libraries under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Among the government public libraries including one central library, 07 divisional, 56 districts, 01 special, 02 Upa-Zilla and 04 branch government public libraries in Bangladesh.

2. Objective of the Study:
The main objectives of the study are as follows-
   i)   To make out the existing condition of non-government and government Public libraries in Bangladesh.
   ii) To finding out the issues if any facing by these libraries.
   iii) To recommend possible suggestions for solving the existing problem.

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[2]Rahman A. F. M. Badiur (1993). Public Libraries in Bangladesh By the Year 2000 A. D.
[3]Hakim, Md. Azizul (1994). Public Library Movement in Bangladesh

3. Methodology:

Due to the existing pandemic situation, where all the public libraries are closed there is a limitation for physically visit and collect the data. The methodology followed in this study is both survey and interview method. Data has been collected from various publications on the subject recently, from official websites and telephone interviews with librarians and other staff working in the library.

4. Backdrops:

A library that is open to all is called a public library. In Bangladesh there are mainly two types of public libraries- non government public libraries that are owned and operated by local social initiative and government public libraries that are established, operated and maintained by the government. Let us discuss about the details.

4.1 Non- Government public libraries in Bangladesh:

The non- government public libraries were the predecessor of the public library service in this country. It is well–known that most non government public libraries were started out of public contribution and one- time big voluntary donation. All the non-government public libraries were established after 1850. These libraries are situated in both rural and urban areas of the country. The majority of the non-government public libraries had no source of permanent income. The membership fees collected and the government grant taken together are so inadequate and insufficient that this cannot support even a part of salary of the library staff, not to speak of the book budget or maintenance of the building.

The management and administration of the non- government public library are governed by their own constitution. Most of these libraries are run by local committee headed by Deputy Commissioner (DC) / Upa-zilla Nirbahi Officers (UNO) or other Prominent Persons. The National Book Center (NBC) under Cultural Ministry plays a vital role in the development of non government public libraries scatted in various places of Bangladesh. Every year NBC has given grant for selected libraries. It is to be noted that in the financial year 2018-19, out of 770 non government Public library for the development of their library infrastructure, Three core seventy lac taka & eighty thousand copy books were provided. Of the money allocated, 50% worth of books and 50% value checks are provided in the name of the concerned library during the year of 2018-19. About 90 non government public libraries librarians were trained for better service of their library. Side by side this year has allowed money near about four core taka and will be trained about one hundred librarian for their developing skills. According to the Directory of Non- Government Public Libraries published by National Book Center 2017 traced the existence

of as many as 1376 non government public libraries in Bangladesh (*National-Book-Center,Annual-Report-2018-19)[4]*.

T.1: Development of non government public libraries in Bangladesh according to different period

Sl. No	Division wise non government public library	Decade wise development						
		Before liberation to 1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2020	Total	Own Building
01	Dhaka	40	27	48	74	54	243	198
02	Chittagong	21	21	35	98	35	210	159
03	Khulna	33	35	30	75	43	198	144
04	Rajshahi	27	16	40	67	48	206	152
05	Rangpur	22	19	34	89	42	216	183
06	Barisal	17	21	51	69	39	197	149
07	Shylet	10	5	11	6	3	35	28
08	Mymensingh	13	11	9	21	17	71	61
Total		183	155	258	499	281	1376	1074

(Sources :http://ngl.nbc.org.bd/index.php?option=lib_search

From above discussion we have seen that from the early stage to the year of till 1980 the establishments of non government public libraries were 183. Side by side that it had been increasing after forty years (1981-2020) the number of non government public libraries are1376. Actually the conditions of the non government public libraries of Bangladesh are not to the up to the mark *(Karim,A.K.M.Rezaul,-2018)[5]*.
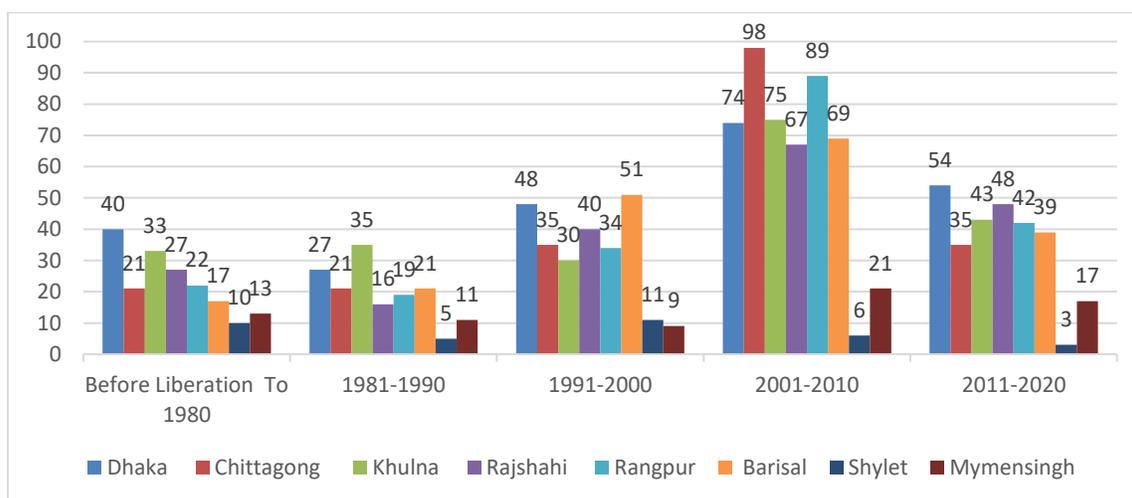

Figure 1: Division and decade wise development of non government public libraries in Bangladesh

[4]National Book Center Annual Report 2018-19 available   http://www.nbc.org.bd/site/annual_reports
[5] Karim, A K M Rezaul (2018) Library Directory 2017

4.2 Government   public libraries of Bangladesh:

The foundation stone for Dhaka Central Public Library was laid on February 5, 1954 at the present campus of the Dhaka University library and its door was opened to the public on 22 March, 1958 with a stock of 10,040 books. After liberation of the country an organization named Bangladesh Parishad was formed under the Ministry of information with amalgamating the information centers. In 1978 the library moved to its building near the Shahbagh intersection from its original building designed by pioneering Bangladeshi architect Mazharul Islam, which went on to house the Dhaka University Central Library. In 1983 a public library network system from the capital to the district level of the country was formed under a government department named Department of Public Libraries under direct administrative control of the ministry cultural affairs of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh *(Majed,-Kazi-Abdul,-Sarker,-Nikhil-chandra-and-Ahmed,A.D.M.Ali-2016)[6]*.   As of February, 2020, the library had 2,85,493 books in its collection, including old and rare books with historical value, along with a small valuable collection of 40 to 50 manuscripts titles for research and reference services. The library remains open from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on all days except fridays and national holidays.
The Central Public Library of Bangladesh known as Sufia Kamal National Public Library is the largest public library in Bangladesh *(Department-of-Public-Libraries;-Annual-Report,-2019)[7]*.

4.2.1 Vision, Mission and Services of Government Public Libraries:

The Central Public Library of Bangladesh vision, mission and services are given below-

- **Vision:** To create knowledge based enlightened society.
- **Mission:**
  - i)   To make the people of the country with science and modern ICT facilities through providing time saving reading & and information service.
  - ii)   To the society with knowledge and wisdom.
  - iii)   To create nourish knowledge and wisdom based society

- **Services :**
  Issue of library materials / Inter –library loan / provide general and specific information / Reader advisory Service / Reference Service / Bibliographical Service / Photocopy Service / Current Awareness Service / Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) Service / Audio Visual Service / Extension Service / Internet Service

4.2.2 Collections:

At present the total number of collections for eight divisional Government Public Libraries, fifty six districts and two upazillas, four branches and one special public libraries are given below *(Collection-status-of-Department-of-Public-Libraries,-2020)[8]*.

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[6]Majed, Kazi Abdul, Sarker, Nikhil chandra and Ahmed, A D M Ali (2016) Development of Public Libraries in Bangladesh : Past and Present scenario
[7]Department of Public Libraries Annual Report (2019) available at
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1c30MSpusiUpLW9qMg4CnvI70fLLMuUxR/view

Table 2: At a glance collections status of Divisional Government Public libraries of Bangladesh.

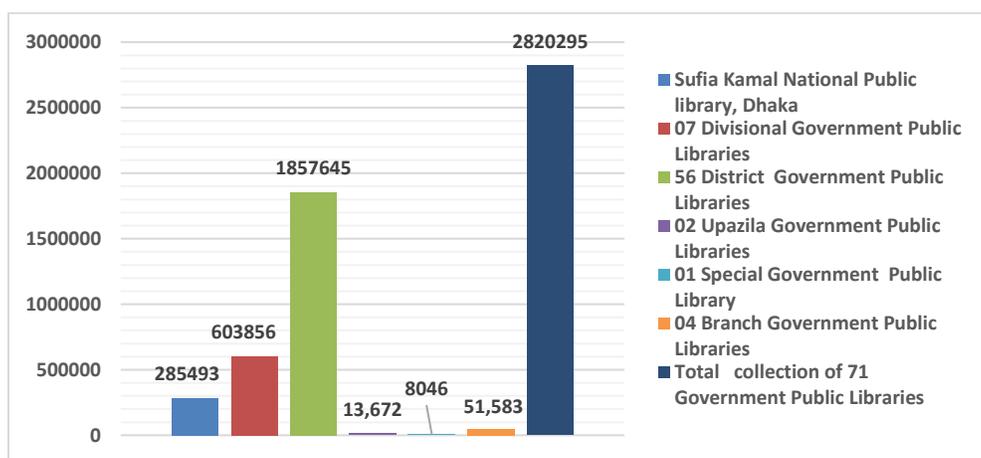| Name of the library	Collections	Newspaper (Daily)			Magazine		
		Ben	Eng	Total	Ben	Eng	Total
Sufia Kamal National Public library, Dhaka	2,85,493	17	8	25	16	05	21
07 Divisional Government Public Libraries	6,03,856	73	19	92	59	09	68
56 District Government Public Libraries	18,57,645	537	65	602	385	48	433
02 Upazila Government Public Libraries	13,672	16	02	18	02	00	02
01 Special Government Public Library	8046	07	01	08	01	00	01
04 Branch Government Public Libraries	51,583	34	04	38	24	02	26
Total collection of 71 Government Public Libraries	28,20,295	684	99	783	487	64	551

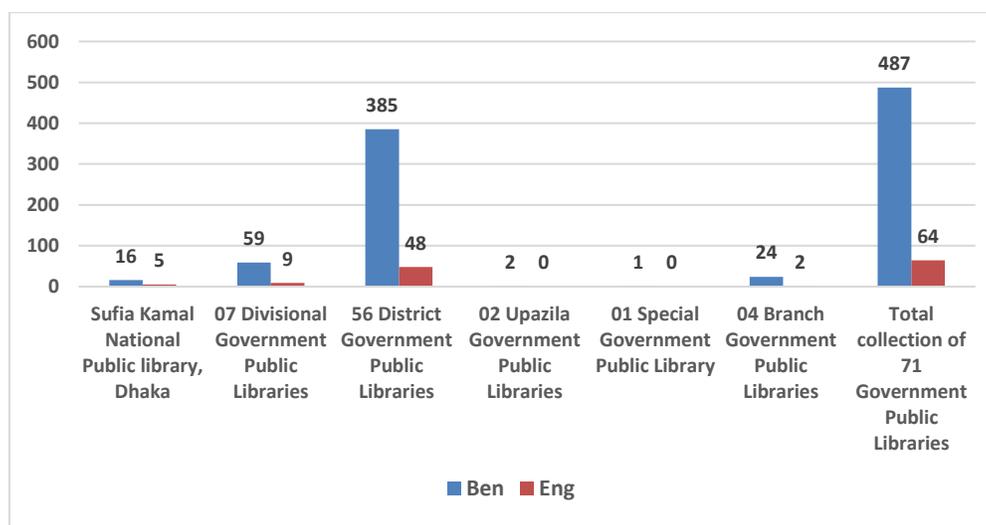Figure 2:   Book collections of government public libraries in Bangladesh

Figure 3: Daily news paper collections of government public libraries in Bangladesh

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8Collection status of Department of Public Libraries   available at :
http://publiclibrary.gov.bd//sites/default/files/files/publiclibrary.portal.gov.bd/page/d3a37a00_9321_442c_8880_a48128792742/2020-04-28-12-54-ea955b9d5276a31582b4e7d7e26c1c6d.pdf
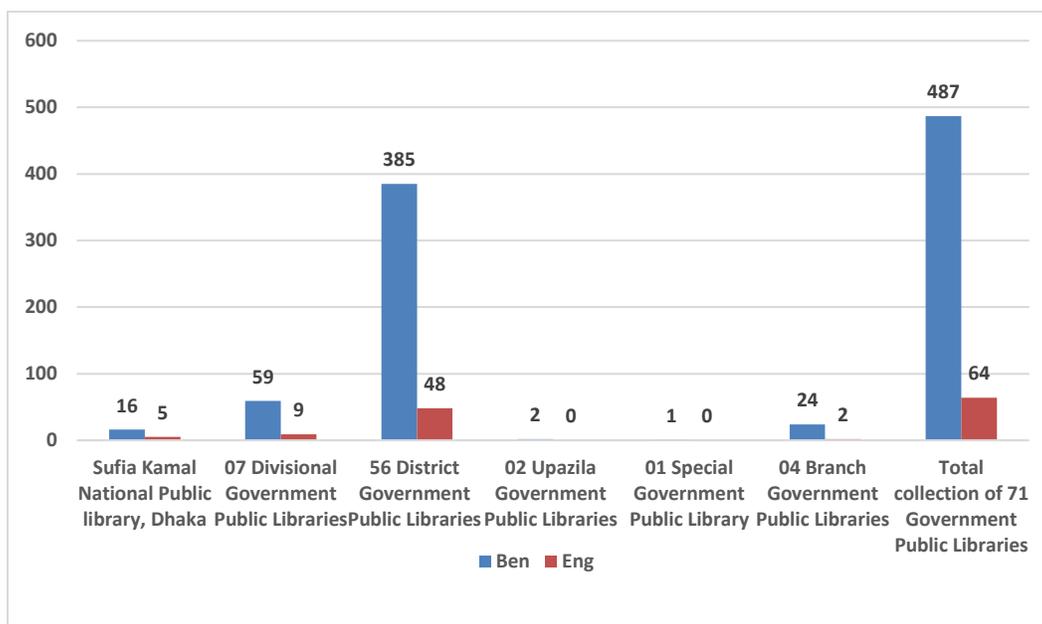
Figure 4: Magazine   collections of government public libraries in Bangladesh

4.2.3   Manpower & others activities:

At present total working-staff of the government public libraries in Bangladesh are 75 in the officer status and 309 general employees and total vacant post of 435. Some other initiatives about technological development are given below:

a) Developed web portal of Development public libraries by the Access to Information programme (a2i) under Prime Minister's Office.
b) Digitized near about 12 lack pages of old newspaper.
c) Completed near about fifty lack eighteen thousand pages of e-books.

4.2.4   Future Plan:

The Government of Bangladesh has adopted a number of plans to make public libraries for publicly which are as follows *(Sarker,-Asis-Kumar,-2016)[9]*.

➢ To build multi storied building at the Headquarter of the Department of Public libraries. The honorable Prime Minister has already given her consent to the proposal to build a 13 storied library complex in the Headquarter of the department of public library and construction of a modern library cum cultural complex.
➢ To establish and develop two divisional (Rajshahi and Khulna) public library of the country.
➢ To establish government   public library in   every district throughout the country frequently.
➢ To establish govt. city public library system at each City Corporation.
➢ To create both technical and non- technical necessary post to strengthen organizational setup of   the department.

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[9] Sarker, Asis Kumar (2016) Directories of public libraries : introductions and activities

➢ To create reading habits of mass population through extension services such as reading circle, recitation of poem and rhyme, essay writing, drawing picture, reading competition etc.

(Sources: official records of the Department of Public Libraries)

5. Issues:

There are different types of issues which are facing by the library authority particularly in the public libraries are as follows:

5.1 Insufficient collection:

There are actual shortages of books, periodicals, journal, and article in the libraries especially and essential books as per necessity of the user are very important. As a result it becomes embarrassing for the library professional to meet the demand of the user of the libraries.

5.2 Lack of professional manpower

Due to insufficient manpower in more or less all the libraries, The employee of the libraries have to face big problem in fulfilling the services as per requirements of the users.

5.3 Lack of modern facilities in libraries

At present the users of the libraries are ready to have IT based services from the libraries. But there is absence or insufficiently IT facilities in the libraries. It creates uneasy situation for the library employee.

5.4 Lack of awareness of the users

Most of the libraries remain under utilized. It becomes a actual challenges for the library professional to motive the potential users to use the library

6. Suggestions:

To improve the provision of useful public library services and accesses to information for the entire people of Bangladesh and the following recommended for taking necessary actions.

i) Collections of library recourses in public library should be developed and arranging resource sharing of these materials be made among the government and non government public libraries by establishing library networks.

ii) Necessary manpower for maintaining libraries be provided both of them. Immediately vacant post should be filled up with professional qualified person.

iii) Arrangement is taken for extensive training of existing library professional on ICT at home and abroad.

iv) The library authority and professional Association should take positive steps in the form of arranging seminars, talk show, extension activities of libraries by improving the services for attracting the potential users to use library facilities.

7. Conclusion:

Finally to say it is time to change the traditional concept of public library system to support national development and ensure the right information service to the right user at the right time through the use of modern information technology in today's world. Now the government has given maximum importance to increase and develop a coordinated public library system up at upazila level, rural level and take other necessary steps of public libraries through online to reach the information of the users for sustainable development. In the end, can't we join the procession of books and public libraries for life, books and public libraries for society, books and public libraries for lifelong learning and books and public libraries for human resource development.

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