



Bearing Gifts: The Camels Bringing Books to Pakistan's Poorest Children

The Brampton Guardian

Summary

- Sharatoon wanted to pursue her education but she had to leave school and her beloved books when she got married at 15. Over a decade later, she continued reading every Friday, a camel comes to her town full of books that she can exchange. She also reads to her 4 children and the other children in town.
- Balochistan (where she lives) is Pakistan's poorest province with a female literacy rate of 24%, one of the lowest in the world whereas the male literacy rate was more than double. It also has the most kids out of school in Pakistan.
- The camel visits 4 villages so all of the district children from 4-16 can read, borrow and exchange books with each other
- When Covid-19 came and closed all the schools, 2 sisters came up with the idea of camels bringing books. They are currently expanding the camel library to other areas. The idea of using camels came from Mongolia and Ethiopia and it suits their desolate and rough terrains

Summary

- The books are donated by Alif Laila Book Bus Society which operates mobile libraries in Lahore
- Sharatoon says that the kids are eagerly waiting and that there should be more science related books so the kids can learn from doing fun experiments
- Anas is a 10 year old boy who also reads each time the camel comes. His favorite is “In Search of Treasure” and he likes to discuss them with friends
- Chraig, another camel, visits 5 towns each week with his handler Ismail. Once when Ismail went to work instead of the village, he got a call from one of the children who was eagerly waiting for the books. He says “Children are so interested in reading and in their studies, but sadly the state does not invest in their education”.
- Jawad (age 10) has hopes of becoming a teacher says that he is learning new things from these books which are in his native language as well as English and Urdu. He also wants more books, libraries and schools.

How Can We Help These Camel Libraries?

<https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/camel-libraries-in-16-villages-for-2000-children/>

Alif Laila Book Bus Society which donates books to the camel library is asking for donations to get more than 2000 children new books and tablets to make learning more fun and interactive.

You can help out by donating books or donating your time to run a book drive and then sending books directly to the camel library in Kenya. Here is a website that tells you where to ship. I think there is an option for some books on amazon to ship to Kenya too.

<https://camelbookdrive.wordpress.com/2005/04/06/donate-books/>





Discussion Questions

Do you think we often take our education system and libraries for granted?

Daniel: No, because our current education system is bad and to be honest, I learn much more off of Google and from tutors. It's bad because everything is super easy until highschool which gets 3 times harder instead of it being kinda hard from the beginning so we would get less work later on. I don't know about libraries since it's been years since I last visited.

Arshan replied: I think there are definitely parts of our education system that we can improve but it's much better than some countries such as Pakistan. I think we do take our education system for granted because school for most people are something we have to do instead of the mindset of "we're so lucky to be here".

Daniel added: There's a reason why everyone thinks that school is something we have to do instead of the other mindset. Granted is defined as fail to appreciate the value and people understand that there is little to no value in school.

Arshan: I think school has a lot of value since it is crucial in our lives later on when we go search for jobs.



Continued

Daniel: Then why are a ton of successful people college dropouts or did poorly in school? Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Larry Ellison, Jack Ma are just a few billionaire examples of dropouts.

Arshan: They all went to very prestigious universities such as Harvard by studying a lot when they were younger and most dedicate an hour each day to reading.

Aariana: Yeah I agree with Arshan and I do think we take it for granted, and although maybe unintentionally we don't appreciate it enough in contrast to those in 3rd world countries who don't have access to the right of education to some degree. I also agree with Daniel that we need to change some parts of our education system. I heard that on average, people at the high school I'm going to this fall have at least 3 hours of homework each day compared to me who receives none.



If there was a camel library where we live, do you think we would be as excited as these kids in Pakistan?

Aariana: I don't think so. We have a lot more advanced transportation and we can visit the library whenever we want since for me it's less than 10 minutes away whereas the kids would have to wait a week. I think that the waiting really builds on excitement because if Apple announces their releasing a brand new iPhone 15 or something tomorrow, not as much people would show up in line compared to them revealing that they're releasing it a week later.

Arshan: I agree with Aariana. I also think that we might not be as excited since not many people I know read books or visit the library. Whenever I visit the library, I only see about 1-2 people other than the librarian there. I think that books have been replaced with e-readers or technology since it's more entertaining and you can also learn from social media. In developing countries, few people have technology and they read to learn and for entertainment.

Daniel: No because like Arshan said, I don't think anyone still reads books since for entertainment and learning we have social media which is much more accessible for us and more engaging. For me, books are like a black and white sleeping pill whereas social media has all these fun photos and colors. Also, these kids have a worse education system where they probably don't have to read in class. Having the wrong teacher can derail your interest in something.

Arshan added: Yea, I agree with Daniel too. I just thought of the quote "you don't realize how precious something is until it's gone". I think that since they don't necessarily have an education system, they really want one so by reading books from the camel library would sort of be a replacement. If we didn't have one, after a few years we would want one too.

Why might the state/province not invest in their children's education?

Arshan: I think I read somewhere to not actually donate money to developing countries government since they don't give it back to the citizens and instead keep it for themselves. Maybe since they live in a state so poor they don't get that much money for doing their jobs and are instead taking tax money for themselves to survive. I also read somewhere that Pakistan was one of the fastest increases on Covid Cases yet they still didn't dedicate more money to healthcare. Instead I think they spent a few billions on defence and only a hundred million on healthcare.

Aariana: Yea I also remember reading that article at school. I think that most developing countries are focused on having a better present than better future. They don't have a ton of money so they're probably thinking of ways to improve their economy. However, I think that investing in education would definitely bring a much better economy so it's like you're spending money in order to receive more money.

Daniel: I remember that article too and it shows how sad and greedy our world can be. I think they're not investing in children's education but there aren't as many children compared to adults which is their main focus group of people. I think they see it as an optional beneficial thing to invest in. As much as I hate school, I think that governments should invest in having a better education system. It's pointless to spend a bit of money having and having a bad education where people don't learn much.