

Biswa Sahitya Kendra In Pursuit of a Dream

by Iftikhar A Chowdhury



The Kendra in its idyllic setup.

corners of the country by the year 1998.

As it is claimed, the Biswa Sahitya Kendra does not harbour any political aims in expanding its network, nor does it preach and indoctrinate in any political 'isms'. Although it has been the target of one of the identified fundamentalist parties for its 'suspected radical nature', the Kendra has

always claimed to be free from any political or religious bias. As in this modern age, every individual has a right to her/his own belief, that is why today it is an absurd notion to unite men and women according to their beliefs. The Kendra, if it at all believes in any philosophy, — it believes in the free growth and intellectual enrichment of a human



The old site — where it all started.

all the works and activities that the Kendra performs comes largely under a single task: "Nation-wide Intellectual Excellence Programme". Efforts are underway to establish branches of the Kendra in all the zillas, thanas and towns of the country under this programme.

These branches will help

nurture the hidden talents of young and spirited young men and women throughout the country. Each of these centres perform various tasks in this regard. Each centre gives an individual the chance to read books and acquire knowledge according to their age groups. The school and college level student members, on an average, read 16 books. So, in seven years of their membership they read at least 110 books. They also have the option of reading nine more books each year. That is why its members, before even crossing the threshold of HSC, have an opportunity of knowing about the Bengali language and literature and also have an orientation with the world of knowledge outside our country through the reading of at least 175 books.

To make reading interesting and to add a little incentive to it, the Kendra organises Book Reading Competition between various age groups and gives attractive prizes to winners. The post-HSC and university level student members too have formed 120 'reading circles' throughout the country.

For improving the mutual bond among the members, the Kendra organises various literary discussions, cultural programmes, public speaking and debate on enlightening subjects, cinema screening, music rendition and poetry recitation programmes. All these pro-

We Want to be Big

In an exclusive interview to The Daily Star, the founder of the Biswa Sahitya Kendra Abdullah Abu Sayeed describes how he got it started; how things started to look up, bit by bit, despite constraints and obstacles; and the realm of the Kendra's achievements now.

by Raffat Binte Rashid

The Daily Star (DS): What prompted you to create something like this Biswa Sahitya Kendra?

Abdullah Abu Sayeed (AAS): In the 19th century Hindus in the society were quite well placed. There came up Rabindra Nath, Bankim Chandra and many others. It was then British rule and the renaissance spirit was very high and many a British people who came here had apparently high aspirations, dreams and ideals and many Hindus at that time wanted to be like those 'shahubs'.

This desire to be like those spirited British helped them to become as big as them. Then when our Muslim society opted for education, the Muslims wanted to be as big as those Hindus and many shot into fame — Nazrul Islam, Mir Mosarraf Hossain and a few others.

But after '47 when we were completely separated and naturally education was completely new, we came face to face with a big opportunity. Then again in '71 another thousand doors were opened before us. But unfortunately values, tradition, ideals everything plummeted only into pockets.

DS: The dream that you had, is it fulfilled now?

AAS: My dream or the model that I had in my mind has really been fulfilled. Because now I have 600 students at the intermediate level only. They come to me, read around 32 to 34 books in about 9 to 10 months. Interestingly, the students who walked in and who walked out after completing the course are different. Their change is amazing. And through cultural programmes, they bloom and grow.

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