



Four of the Ekushey collections published in the sixties.

Ekushey collections slip into oblivion

MIZANUR KHAN

February's one-off publications marking the Language Movement have slipped into oblivion, as publishers, organisations or individuals have not come up with them within the last 10 years.

The publishers bring out over 1,000 books for the Ekushey Book Fair a year but no *Ekushey Shankolon* (collection of poems, stories and essays) dedicated to language martyrs of 1952.

Poet Hasan Hafizur Rahman edited and published the first Ekushey collection in 1953, titled "21st February", which was banned by the then Pakistan government.

The Language Movement theme

song -- *Amar bhayer rokte rangano* -- written by Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury was published in the collection -- the song that has attained a ritualistic significance over the years.

Ekushey Shankolon had long been published, but there is no information -- official or otherwise -- about the number of such publications. Shihab Sarkar, editor of *Falgun*, published three years after independence, said literary youths brought out more than 100 such publications in Dhaka alone.

College and university students, student union leaders, social and cultural workers and local club members dedicated publications to the language martyrs.

"It is disheartening that we don't see these collections anymore," said

Moinul Ahsan Saber, a prominent writer, who published several collections when a student before independence.

"Insensitivity and lack of creativity wiped out Ekushey collections."

Bangla Academy set up a corner for a little magazine -- popularly known as "Little Mag" -- at the fair, but Ekushey collections were absent. Shamim, editor of *Lok*, said: "You may find a few little magazines but no Ekushey collections."

Business houses and government offices do not support the collections by adequate advertising. Wall magazines have disappeared too.

Muntasir Mamun, history professor at Dhaka University, said: "The expansion of the book fair, increased publications and technological

advances in printing removed the Ekushey collections from the world of literature."

Nobody wants to take time to be a writer. Amateur writers wrote for the little magazines in the years to independence and mid-1970s before they came up with their books. Now books are published right away.

"Computers have made publications cheaper, easier and less time-consuming. A young boy who writes poems, rhymes or stories does not wait for Ekushey," said Prof Muntasir who edited several Ekushey collections in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

February is the month for publishers to bring out more than 1,000 books for the Ekushey Book Fair. "How many of those writers do

you know?" Muntasir asked.

Akmal Hossain, editor of "*Orbacheen*", recalled his experiences in the 1980s: he and his friends raised funds for publication, went door to door in search of famous writers to collect articles and spent sleepless nights at the press.

Shihab chimed in: "That was not the end of the story. We went door to door in our local area too and to the Shaheed Minar to sell our publications to the participants of the February 21 morning parades."

"It gave us immense satisfaction when anyone bought our collections. We would forget all hard work. This was how we reaped the harvest of our work."

Some precious pearls of the sixties

CITY CORRESPONDENT

.... Priced at only 50 poisha, the first Ekushey *Shankolon* (collections) -- *Polash Fotar Din* was published in February 1963 by *Srijoni*, a literary and cultural organisation.

The contributors to this collection were members of *Srijoni*.

In 1964, *Srijoni* published another collection -- *Themay Nei*. Non-members of *Srijoni*, too contributed to this collection.

East Pakistan Chhatra Union, student wing of the then Communist Party published another collection in the same year named *Protidhhoni*. Other collections published by Chhatra Union were *Bikkhov* (1965), *Jharer Khaya* (1966), *Suryajala* (1967), *Arani* (1968), *Ninad* (1969) and *Bidrohi Barnomala* (1970). Most of these collections were named by writer Ranesh Dasgupta.

Painter Pranesh Kumar Mandal designed *Protidhhoni's* cover page, Hasan Ahmed for *Bikkhov* and Abdul Muktaadir for *Jharer Khaya*, *Arani* and *Ninad*. Debashish Chakraborty painted the cover of *Suryajala* and Qayyum Chowdhury for *Bidrohi Barnomala*.

Shahidullah Kaiser, Ronesh Dasgupta, Mofazzal Haider Chowdhury, Zahir Raihan, Anisuzzaman, Santosh Gupta, Abdul Halim, Ajit Kumar Guha, Satyen

Sen and other eminent writers contributed to the collections.

Stories, poems and articles of promising writers like Shuvo Rahman, Shahidur Rahman, Rezaur Rahman, Maleka Begum, Mahmud Al Zaman, Mafidul Haque, Manzur Ahmed, Akhter Hossain and Kazi Hasan Habib were published.

To mark the 1969 uprising Chhatra Union published a collection of paintings by Qamrul Hasan, Aminul Islam, Rashid Chowdhury, Hamidur Rahman, Murtaza Basir, Qayyum Chowdhury, Debdash Chakraborty, Nitun Kundu, Rafiqun Nabi, Imdad Hossain, Pranesh Kumar Mandal and many others.

Dhaka University Sanskriti Sangsad published a collection, designed by Qayyum Chowdhury in 1970. Paintings by Zainul Abedin, Mohammad Kibria, Mustafa Monowar were included. Jashimuddin, Sufia Kamal, Sikandar Abu Zafar, Shamsur Rahman, Syed Shamsul Huq, Al Mahmud wrote poetry for the collection.

The *Sangsad* also published Ekushey collections -- *Diner Rowdrey Abrito Dana* in 1968 and *Bojre Baje Banshi* in 1969. Bangladesh Chhatra Union Published *Ishtehar* and *Sanskriti Sangsad* carried out *Sonar Harin Chai* in 1971.

Source: Motiur Rahman, Prothom Alo, 21 February 2004

TWO SHOWS IN PROGRESS



The British Council in collaboration with Shilpakala Academy is holding a photography exhibition named "Common Ground -- aspects of Contemporary British Muslim Experience" at the Academy. The show will continue till March 6 (top). As part of the fortnight long programmes marking the International Mother Language Day, the Bangladesh National Commission for Unesco arranged a painting show at the BIAM Hall yesterday. The programmes will conclude on February 29 (below).

A portal of neglect

SULTANA RAHMAN

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The 'memorial' portal of 1952's Language Movement at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) has long been neglected and is turning into a ruin in the absence of proper maintenance.

The portal, which is situated near the emergency room of the DMCH, is witness to a series of events during the Language Movement to get Bangla the recognition as a state language.

Built during the British regime, the portal now lies abandoned. It leads to the home of the hospital's resident surgeon from one side

but is under locks all the time. Some shops have been established adjacent to it.

The nearly 22-feet-high portal has a signboard narrating its historical background. The authorities only last week replaced the badly damaged signboard. The earlier one was presented by Lalbagh Chemical Company while the new one reads Bhasa Andolan Parishad.

When the then Governor of East Pakistan Nurul Amin banned public meetings or processions on the Dhaka University campus in a bid to resist the Language Movement, students of the university decided to breach the curfew or section 144 of the

Criminal Prosecution Act on February 21, 1952.

This portal saw the activists coming out in small groups: their target to march to the Provincial Assembly building nearby and demonstrate there.

Soon the area turned into a war zone with police opening fire and lobbing tear gas shells on the protesters. The students retaliated by throwing brickbats.

During this confrontation, a number of students gave up their lives to the cause they fought for. Language Martyrs they became. The ensuing riot spread to the campuses of the medical and engineering colleges too.

"The portal was very important

during that time as it was the main gate of the then arts faculty of Dhaka University and was also very close to the Bardwan House, the provisional assembly of East Pakistan. We started marching in 10-member groups from the gate," recalled Gaziul Haque, one of the heroes of the Language Movement.

"It's a shame that we don't care about our tradition and history. The portal should be preserved as inspiration for the next generation. It still stands as a symbol of protest against the state-repressors. Its appeal is still there as our governments do not act democratically," said Haque.



The abandoned portal at the DMCH. The badly damaged signboard narrating its history was replaced last week (right).