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Perhaps the easiest, least nuanced route to take would be to the Little Magazine corner at the Ekushey Boi Mela. Perched behind the Bardhaman House, rows of little stalls are arranged for little magazines. A few remain vacant here and there, some of them are unmanned, and some of them are full of new and old volumes. Some of the stalls are occupied by entities that don't resemble anything close to a little magazine. One of the stalls is possibly occupied by some kind of healthcare helpline.

"Be it organised by an institution or a publishers' guild or whoever, the Boi Mela including such independent publications to retain a democratic appearance can be welcomed. However, I think that the politics of the Little Magazine does not ask or demand for any such presence in the Boi Mela," says Rahee.

I chat with Naiya for over half-an-hour at his stall on a weekday afternoon, and we are largely undisturbed save the few interested passers-by who pick up the books and flip through them for a minute or so. As he speaks of the current scene in comparison to that of the 80s', he says that he has heard much about how writers would gather in this corner of the Boi Mela for *addas* in the past.

I ask him what is happening differently now to cause such dampening of the spirits, and he says that the atmosphere is not the same. He tried to organise weekly reading circles around his little magazine but it got too exhausting and attracted few people. His journey as an editor has largely been based on the university and student community, and he says that there is very little space to use for meetings and community networking.

"The Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) is not the same; there's everyday harassment that makes the space unwelcoming. They may cut off the water supply after sunset on some days; or they may remove the tea stalls on other days."

And with increasing digitisation and the fast-evolving face of today's

technology, how much relevance does a culture like this hold anymore? Apart from the state's increasing surveillance of digital content and activity, Naiya worries that expression on social media largely remains "on the surface, unable to critically engage." But as individuals find it easier to publish themselves on the internet, there is a power that they attain for free expression that renders whatever remains of the little magazine culture rather irrelevant, he thinks. Chowdhury, too, sees no particular need for such publications anymore, as he mentions *Earki*, a digital platform for satire containing memes, blogs, and a very active social media presence, with a similar potential to challenge establishments.

Maandar, however, thinks differently. *Jangshone*, the art-literature little magazine he edits now, has existed since 1998 from Jessore. He says *Jangshone* may be produced from Jessore, but is not Jessore-centred and has been open to contributors from all over the country. But he does have a circle that gathers very regularly,

almost daily, on the grounds of the Jessore Public Library.

And while he acknowledges that there is great scope for the little magazine culture on digital platforms, he is sure that the print form will still be around for a while for the tradition that it signifies. After all, the goal was never to make a living out of this. He calls this work a *shadhona*, born of passion.



There is so much more to be traced, documented, analysed, and critiqued about little magazine movements through the decades, what it has evolved to be, and what could have been or still can be made of it. To study this culture further offers opportunities for knowledge generation and critical thinking that can hold on to, as Rahee says, "the political essence of the little magazine, which is to be critical of everything and even themselves."

Reference:

- *Chollisher Doshoker Dhaka* by Kiran Sankar Sengupta & Sardar Fazlul Karim



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The biggest challenge lay in finding teachers in the hill tracts, where being an SSC graduate is a big deal. Another challenge lay in retaining students—while many young girls are pulled out of school to help out at home, the boys are forced into child marriage. But Rupa and her colleagues visit the students' parents when the threat of dropouts looms.

When asked what drove her to take up such a huge initiative in such a remote location, Rupa looks back to her childhood, when her home hosted relatives, friends, and distant acquaintances whenever they needed some help. "You don't need to do a lot to live a full life, as long as you can help out others," Rupa comments simply.

Bilkis Banu

"After dreaming about Mother Teresa one night, I started noticing the children going without food and schooling on the streets around me," Bilkis Banu recalls. "I called and asked them if they'd like me to teach them. Word spread around the neighbourhood in Kurigram, and more

children started coming to me to learn." The number rose to 70-80, and eventually the kids started staying back with Bilkis. It was also around the same time in 1999, on the 27th day of Ramadan, when Bilkis found and adopted the year-old orphan Preetilota, left to live with street dogs, with wounds and infections all over her body. It made Bilkis realise that she wanted to go on taking care of children



Rupa Dutta wants the students at the school in Bandarban to learn to make their traditional accessories.

in need of care and protection.

Bilkis opened the Golap Kha primary and secondary school in Nageshwari upazila of Kurigram by selling her land. She set up classrooms and separate hostels for girls and boys with the support of her husband. As many as 345 children attend the school today, with 78 others living in the school's hostel. The initiative is financed by a market in the

area named after her daughter Preetilota. As the volume of students rises, she's hoping to expand the space further in a larger piece of land nearby, provided she gets enough help from the government.

Hiroko Kobayashi

Hiroko Kobayashi, an 88-year-old Ikebana designer, had been visiting Bangladesh on behalf of the Japanese NGO Hunger Free World when she heard about Khadija Begum's suicide in Kaliganj, Panchgarh in 2003. The incident reminded her of her own financial struggles growing up in a poor family in Japan.

100 underprivileged girls have been educated because of her scholarship since then, covering the costs for their tuition and school supplies, under the condition that they will not marry until they are financially independent. Despite living in Japan, she visits these girls every year in March to remind them to persist in their studies. She hopes that by being educated, each of these girls will in turn spread the message among others in their communities. Hiroko plans to keep the initiative running for as long as she lives.