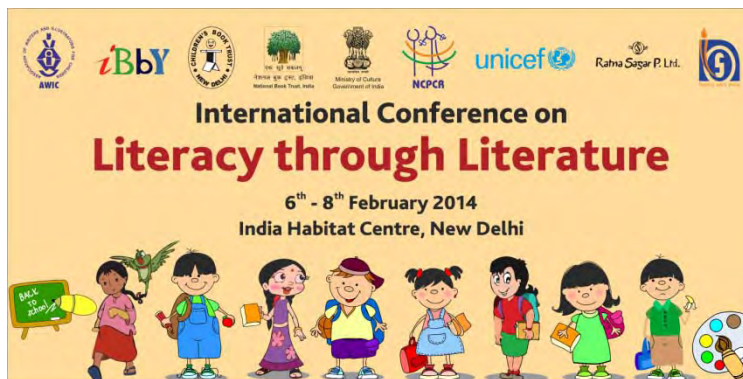


Report of the Conference

International Conference on Literacy through Literature
6 to 8 February, 2014 at New Delhi Organised by the Association
of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC), the Indian Section of IBBY



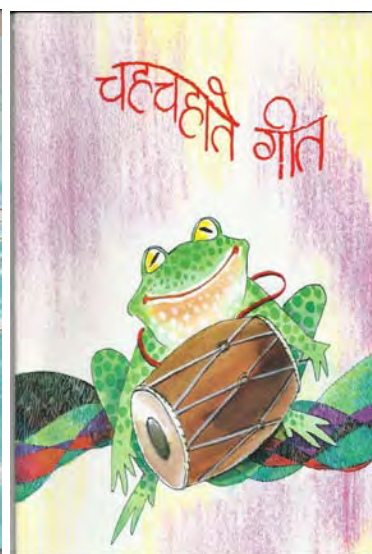
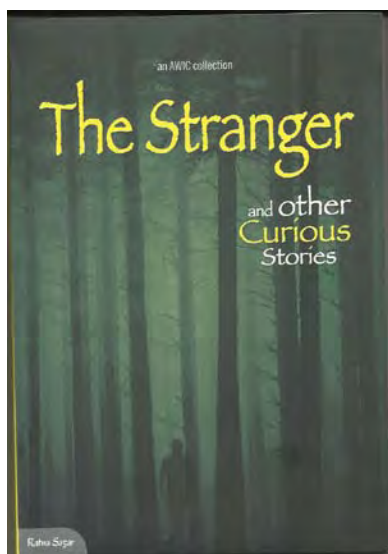
Foreword by Indira Bagchi-Convener

Literacy is a global issue today. The **International Conference on Literacy through Literature** was organised by AWIC to provide a platform to eminent scholars, writers, storytellers and researchers to share their views with fellow delegates, teachers and all those who are involved in the field of education. We are extremely proud of the fact that in this Conference there was a conglomeration of well know authors, storytellers and illustrators as participants. Apart from our guests from all over India, we also had writers and educators from countries, across the world, who shared their views and experiences with the others. Along with eminent authors dealing with literature for children and young adults, there were experts in the field of technology to share their views on importance of technical literacy in today's education system. Workshops on crafts, creative writing and storytelling provided ample material for teachers and librarians. The exhibition of alphabet books and first books under the title 'Steps to Literacy' highlighted the evolution of learning.

In the cultural aspect of literacy, the fusion of storytelling with puppets and Indian classical dance by a group from Mumbai, and a dance drama on Gandhi for Children by a well-known dancer and her troupe showcased the role of the performing arts in spreading literacy.

Members of AWIC had been working meticulously and diligently for past year and a half to organise this Conference. They had to face many hindrances like the Assembly Elections, the economic conditions of all the funding agencies and long winter vacations in schools. Organising a Conference of this magnitude required a fair amount of funds, which was difficult to procure. In spite of these difficulties, the untiring spirit of our members ultimately gave shape to this great event. .

There were over two hundred participants from India as well as from different parts of the world - the USA, Japan, Australia, Finland, Indonesia, Singapore, Turkey, Greece and the Maldives. Teachers from the Kendriya vidyalayas (Central Schools) came in large numbers from the far flung areas of different states in India.



Books by AWIC members

Report of the 3-day International Conference on Literacy through Literature By Nilima Sinha President, AWIC

Chief Guest, Shri Rajarshi Bhattacharya, Secretary, HRD Ministry, Guest of Honour, Shri Keshav Thirani, IBBY Treasurer Mr. Ellis Vance, distinguished guests present in the audience, friends from the media and dear children,

I am happy to present before you a report of the 3-day International Conference on Literacy through Literature that has just ended a while ago. We had three days of lively discussion on the different aspects of the subject. Besides panel discussions there were activities such as storytelling, workshops, skits, dance performances and songs. We had delegates from 9 countries, including Australia, Japan, Finland, Greece, Indonesia, Maldives, Turkey, Singapore and the USA.

The Conference was inaugurated by the chief guest Ellis Vance, the treasurer of IBBY and the guest of honour Feisal Alkazi, an eminent theatre personality by lighting the inaugural lamp. This ritual was accompanied by the chanting of Sanskrit hymns. Feisal Alkazi spoke on the importance having the local language and culture in literature meant for a particular region. Mr. Sikandar of the National Book Trust talked about the importance of books in the promotion of literacy. Their words were much appreciated by all. Mr. Ellis Vance informed the audience about IBBY and its activities.



Nilima Sinha welcomed the guests most warmly and spoke about the low level of literacy in underprivileged school kids, as mentioned in reports by ASER and UNESCO. She informed the guests about Secretary General Manorama Jafa being the recipient of the Padma Shri. This news was greeted by loud claps from the audience.



Mrs. Jafa being awarded Padma Shri by the President of India.

Manorama Jafa talked about AWIC and its activities. This was followed by the presentation of AWIC Honor Awards to those who had distinguished themselves in the field of children's literature. Ira Saxena introduced the awardees – Lifetime Achievement Awards went to Madhu Pant and Dr. Satyavrata Sharma, author awards to Arup Kumar Dutta and Dr. Darshan Singh Aasht and Illustrator Award to Suvidha Mistry.

The Release of books written by AWIC members was next on the agenda. The books were ***Chahachahaate Geet***, published by AWIC, and ***The Stranger and Other Curious Stories***, a collection of short stories, and ***Children of the Magic Pen***, a play scripted under the supervision of Feisal Alkazi and published by Ratnasagar.



The function ended with a vote of thanks from Convener Indira Bagchi, after which the guests were treated to a colorful display of books at the “**First Steps to Literacy**” exhibition, arranged by Shail Tiwari.



Mr. Shashi Tharoor at the Book Exhibition.

Session 1 on the **Importance of Literacy and the Role of Books** was chaired by Shri Vineet Joshi, Chairman, CBSE. Author Arup Dutta opened the discussion by stressing that we must nurture imagination to promote creativity. Literacy enabled a person to use words to activate the individual's creative imagination, he emphasized. Tajima Shinji, President, International Centre for Literacy and Culture, Tokyo, speaking on Literary Literacy spoke about literature leading us to experience the possibility of being better human beings. He said literacy was important for a better quality of life. Nandini Sahu of IGNOU advocated the establishing of courses on children's literature at University level and pointed out, among other things, the need for having some evaluation criteria for children's books. Shefali Raizada from Amity University spoke about the importance of books suitable for rural areas.



Shri Vineet Joshi, Chairman, CBSE



Tajima Shinji

Chairperson Vineet Joshi concluded by pointing out that parents and guardians were very career oriented. Success in examinations and text book learning mattered more to them, though the development of creativity and imagination were equally important in education, he emphasized.

Dr. S.S Jena, Chairman of the National Institute of Open Schooling was the Chairperson of **Session1B**. He informed the audience that vocational skills have also been incorporated in the Open School courses. Panelist Prof. V. Mohan Kumar spoke about imparting writing skills and creating a learning

society. Dr. Agarwal mentioned that education rather than literacy was provided through the Alternative Channel of Open Schooling.

Later, storytellers Rosemarie Somaiah from Singapore, and Valentina Trivedi related stories to children. In the Hall downstairs also, children listened in rapt attention as Simi Srivastava and Kiran Babal told them stories. Dina Tuasuun from Indonesia held a workshop on how to make simple devices for storytelling.



Storytelling by Valentina Trivedi

The day ended with a fusion performance on Hanuman's Ramayana by Usha Venkatraman and her team.



Fusion of storytelling with puppet and Indian classical dance.

The **second day** began with a very impressive address by the Honorable Minister of State, HRD, Dr. Shashi Tharoor, which more than made up for his absence at the Inaugural Function the previous day. He expanded on the various ways through which literacy could be promoted, including through comics, graphic novels and digital media. He showed great interest in the books in the exhibition, even picking a few to read.



At **Session 2 on Creating the Right Literature**, Dr. Varsha Das, Former Director, NBT was the Chairperson. She emphasized the fact that the right literature, right in content, language, format and medium should be created keeping in mind the reader, whether literate, semi-literate or illiterate, rural or urban, adult or child and so on. Navin Menon of CBT spoke about the pictorial presentation of text, as children are sensitive to pictures even before they can speak. Deepa Agarwal, author, described what was most appropriate for various age groups. Jason Quinn of Campfire, spoke about graphic novels attracting even the reluctant reader. Chitose Suzuki described the publication of Alphabet books by AWIC with support from Japan, while Suddhasatwa Basu, illustrator, spoke about how early memory is in bits and pieces and these fragment memories should be contextualized to turn them into logical narration that makes sense. Hem Bhatnagar said the use of poetry, rhymes and songs helped in developing interest in books.



Session 3 was on **Reaching Books Where There Are None**. Sunisha Ahuja from the HRD Ministry chaired the session and gave the keynote address by stressing the importance of libraries in reaching books to the underprivileged. Meenu Thomas, the first speaker, spoke of innovations made by NGO Muktangan for language development while Abha Ahuja from Muktangan in Pantnagar talked about the mothers' libraries run by her for promoting literacy in the community. Jo Henwood from Australia and Rosemarie Somaiah from Singapore talked about the importance of storytelling and drama in promoting Literacy. Niklas Ake Bengtsson described the different forms in which books can be produced to attract the reader's attention.



Session 4 was on **The Role of NGOs**. Mr. Amod Kanth, founder, Prayas, chaired the session by presenting an overview of how literacy can be promoted in the case of drop-outs, the girl child and the disabled. Mr. Mundayoor of the VT-AWIC Youth Library described the reading promotion activities practiced in remote libraries in Arunachal Pradesh. Manisha Chaudhry of Pratham Books dwelt on how the joy of reading should be available to all in a democratic manner. Dr. Rita Malhotra of Amar Jyoti talked about the multi disciplinary approach of special education and integration of normal and handicapped children.

Now it was time for activities. Jo Henwood of Australia drew great applause with her story, as did the team from the Youth Library from Arunachal Pradesh. Surekha Panandiker demonstrated ways of telling stories more effectively.



Children from VT-AWIC Youth Library –North East India

Simultaneously, in the downstairs Hall, the children from the AWIC Libraries enjoyed stories told by Ambika Goyal and Shail Tiwari. This was followed by a workshop on creative writing for children by Dr. Sarika Singh and Bharati Bhide.

The third day began with the session on **Technological Literacy**, chaired by Margaret Zeegers, Associate Professor, Federation University, Australia. She shared with the audience a hilarious film on IT and its applications. Dr. Amitabha Bagchi explained how programming was done in his presentation on 'computer literacy'. He felt that programming was a skill that should be introduced early in life, at school stage. Sugat Jain of Ratnasagar publications explained how digital books were designed and used, through an interesting power point presentation. Dr. Aparna Khanna from Lady Irwin College spoke about drug addicted adolescences and how they could be made more literate through talking books and pens. Somya Dave, author, spoke about the parents' perspective on technology and raised issues that needed to be thought about.



Sugat Jain talking about E Books

The last session was a conclusive one, dedicated to **A better tomorrow**. Dr. Ellis Vance, IBBY treasurer, was in the Chair. He presented before the audience several books based on various moral and other values. Bina Kapoor spoke about gender and social issues, Dr. Pravesh Saxena dwelt on ancient traditions that protected our environment and how parents can help create awareness about it. Neelmani Bhatia spoke about how civic sense can be inculcated through books. Ranjit Lall, author, talked about taboo subjects in Young Adult fiction and the need to equip children with awareness about what is 'out there' and which can often damage and affect children. Subjects like gender insensitivity, drugs, violence and other social issues must be talked about so that children may learn how to deal with them. Murti Bunanta, President, Indonesia told the audience about a magazine for children based specifically on health and hygiene. Atiya Zaidi of Ratnasagar, the last speaker, made the concluding remarks about the role of parents and authors in confronting stereotypes in literature.



A workshop on the selection of reading material was held by Vishv Books in the hall. Author Mudit Mohini and Bhavna Saxena, editor, gave valuable tips on how the right books may be chosen for readers of various ages and tastes.

At the same time there was an Open Story-telling session downstairs. Veerbala Rastogi related an interesting story greatly enjoyed by the children. A Nukkar Natak (street play) was also performed by Rajshri Banerjee.

This was followed by the Valedictory Function. Mr. Rajarshi Bhattacharya, Secretary, HRD Ministry, and Dr. Keshav Thirani, Chairman, Campfire Graphic Novels, were welcomed by Manorama Jafa. Girija Rani Asthana introduced the EC members to the guests. Nilima Sinha presented a Report on the three days of the Conference. Honoured Guest Dr. Thirani addressed the audience after this. This was followed by the Valedictory Address of the Chief Guest. He congratulated the AWIC for the impressive work done by them and wished them success in their attempts at nation building. He said the government must help and support such organizations.

Indira Bagchi concluded the Valedictory Function with her vote of grateful thanks to all those who had helped make the Conference a success.

Finally, the Cultural program presented by Shovana Narayan on “Mohan and Rambha” was greatly appreciated by the audience. It presented a beautiful and satisfactory ending to the three days of intense discussion and hectic activities.



It was a most fruitful and satisfying 3 days for all of us. We heartily congratulate each of the chairpersons, panelists, storytellers, and everyone who made the conference so interesting and successful! We thrashed out an important issue – how books can help those who do not have the opportunities for a good education that the privileged have. The child in the small town, the village, may not have access to the better schools that are there in big cities. He may not have the money to dole out for a private school. But every child, poor or rich, has the right to a good education.

How do we ensure that there is democratization of the ‘joy of reading’, as mentioned by Manish Choudhri of Pratham? How do we ensure that every man, woman and child receives a good education, so that he can become a better citizen, a better human being, not only in our country but in every part of the world?

We have tried to discuss and come to some conclusion but it is not that easy to do so in the time that we had. Nevertheless, here are a few points that, I feel, have emerged from the deliberations. We will put them down as the Recommendations that we feel should be followed, for the good of children around the world, specially the underdeveloped.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Every citizen has the right to become literate, in every sense of the word, i.e. morally, socially, technologically and politically.
2. Governments must ensure that all citizens learn not only the three R's but are also educated about issues such as health, hygiene, civic sense, moral values, environment, technological skills as required, and vocational skills.
3.
 - i) Creators of children's books – authors and illustrators – must be encouraged to develop books with the values mentioned above.
 - ii) Literature to which children from rural areas and small towns can relate better should be published. Writers and illustrators from rural backgrounds could be motivated through workshops to write such books.
4. Books and other media in all major and local languages should be made available through libraries - in every school, village and mohalla. This will ensure that learning is extended with the help of self-motivated and joyful reading.
5. Teacher training curriculum should include information about children's literature and how they may be used to develop reading skills and literacy.
6. Seminars and conferences should be held in rural areas in every region to motivate teachers, librarians and educationists to promote literacy through the reading of suitable books.
7. Computer literacy in schools should be supplemented with information about the latest advances in technology.
8. Voluntary organizations and NGOs working for the promotion of literacy should be helped and supported by the Government.



Acknowledgements

**The Organising Committee
of the International Conference on Literacy through Literature
is grateful to the following-**

Children's Book Trust (CBT)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Gail India Ltd.

National Book Trust (NBT)

The Ministry of Culture (GOI)

India Habitat Centre

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)

National Commission for Protection of Children's Rights (NCPCR)

ReNew Power Ventures Pvt. Ltd.

Just Dial

Ratna Sagar P. Ltd

BOSE Corporation

Datamation Research Services Pvt. Ltd.

Institute of Rural Research and Development (IRRAD)

Tiwari Sweets

Goldy Projects Pvt. Ltd.

Life Line ICCU & Saurin Maternity & Nurshing Home

Backbone Activity for Conferences and Events (BACE)

And all those who have supported us.

Reflections

Mr.M.A.Sikander
Director
National Book Trust
New Delhi-110070

A well organized deeply conference.

Mr.T.N.Chaturvedi

Extremely impressive & worthwhile, Thanks

Chairman
Central Board on Secondary Education (CBSE)
New Delhi

-----**Mr.Vineet Joshi**

Excellent!

Mr.Shahi Tharoor

Ministry of Human Resource of Development (MHRD)
New Delhi

A pleasure to be here to inaugurate your Conference a Literacy through Literature –all the best for its success!

Mr.Rajarshi Bhattacharya

Secretary
Ministry of Human Resource of Development (MHRD)
New Delhi

A wonderful effort which contributes to mention building and growth through nurturing the International, Dreams & aspiration of children through & storytelling .

Mr.Keshav Thirani

Chairman,
Campfire Graphic Novels
New Delhi

A cause that deserves all our support, individually and collectively as a community, and great 'appreciation' for your selfless devotion to promote literacy in our nation.

Reflections of the participants

I loved the conference and am so happy to have been part of it. Thanks to you and thanks to Mrs Sinha, Mrs Jafa, Mrs Bagchi, Mrs Saxena, Divya Jain and everyone else in the organizing committee.

Neera Jain

it was good experience to attend the Panel discussion and to present paper in the Conference.Thanks for welcome and hospitality.

Dr Shefali Razada

The seminar was absolutely wonderful. I must congratulate you and all the members of AWIC, for all the hard work you people have put in to conduct the seminar.

Best regards,

Dr.Nandini Sahu

Thank you so much! I enjoyed moderating the session and attending the other events at the conference.

,Devika Rangachari

AWIC-IBBY conference in 2014 was a success. I myself learned that India and Indonesia have both similar problems in many issues of matters connected to reading and children's literature. These are matters belong to many the "so-called" developing countries. Therefore sharing of this issues in a more further discussion and cooperation are worth to talk by giving time for a meeting concerned groups.

Congratulations to friends from AWIC as organizer. Delegations from Indonesia were happy to be part of the conference.

MurtiBunanta (Indonesia)

Thank you one more time for the excellent Conference.

Thank you very much

Maria Kritikou (Greece)

Many thanks for your kind words regarding the conference. I may account for my constantly smiling face by the fact of this being one of the most enjoyable and intellectually satisfying conferences I have ever attended (and I have attended many in the course of my career). You and the organisers achieved a most remarkable thing in successfully blurring distinctions between presenters and audience, so that we felt united in our mutual efforts to advance the cause of literacy through literature, something very close to all our hearts. Of course the conference was well organised and ran like clockwork, which is always much appreciated by delegates, but it had the extra dimensions of warmth, welcome, and vitality to which we all responded so positively.

I thank you for a most professionally and personally rewarding experience.

Regards

mz

Dr Margaret Zeegers

Associate Professor

Faculty of Education and Arts

Federation University Australia

PO Box 663