Anisur Rahman, poet, playwright, literary critic, essayist, novelist, translator and journalist from Bangladesh, ICORN's guest writer in Uppsala (Sweden) from 2009 to 2011.

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1) Why did you have to leave your country ?

I left Bangladesh when she had witness semi-military undemocratic administration 2007-2008. I was involved in a movement against a corrupt deal between Bangladesh and French authorities for sending Bangladesh's museum pieces for an exhibition at Guimet Museum. It was one reality in addition to my ouspoken voice against Islamist fundamentalism centring Jamaat-Shibir and defending ethnic minority communities for instance the Garo communities.

2) Testimony : How I see my time in Uppsala by Anisur Rahman

I want to remind people of two names in exile in 1930s and 1940s in this country. The first one is Kurt Tucholsky---who committed suicide as an outcome of serious depression when he was waiting for a decision from the Swedish migration authority. The other one is Bertolt Brecht who was in exile in Stockholm for one year in 1941. After occupation of Denmark and Norway by the Nazi force, he had to leave for Helsinki and then to USA. Both were from Germany and were very talented writer.

3. Now let me focus on my residency in Uppsala 2009-2011.

We introduced writing workshops that involved published and unpublished writers, literary festivals, the presentation of short plays, poetry on bus and publishing anthologies during my scholarship. In addition to these collective efforts, I took part in literary, cultural and public debate in newspapers, radio and at universities. Thus we achieved a 'win win' situation revitalizing Uppsala's literary scene through ICORN residency system.

The educational association, Studiefrämjandet summarized my activities for a project called Literature Centre in Uppsala City and Country. This model has been followed in other parts of Sweden notably as well as other foreign cities for instance Oslo, Belgrade and Dhaka.

There is no short cut to being a writer and to doing something good for the community. I approached people very humbly. Sometimes I did not even get any response to my e-mails. I did not take them personally. First I am a human being, then a writer or a guest writer. If this becomes one's way of thinking, then it is possible to achieve something collective.

Times are as different for me to what they were for Brecht and Tucholsky. Life is a journey for me. I am now in my struggle for integration in line with internationalization of literature. If Brecht could stay in Sweden in 1940s and Tucholsky could avoid tragedy in 1930s, this part of Scandinavia could benefit from those talents. Oh, if only ICORN residency could have been introduced that early!

From the beginning, Litteraturcentrum Uppsala is a cooperation between Studiefrämjandet (an NGO for the promotion of culture and informal learning), the region and municipality of Uppsala, the libraries, Swedish PEN, Swedish Writers' Union, Swedish Academy, Swedish Arts Council, the civil society and literary enthusiasts.

We are building networks and bridges between actors for the purpose of supporting local readership and the regional literary scene. The centre is based in Uppsala, and is a part of the culture plan of 2013-14 and 2015-2017 of the Uppsala region.

The concept is a result of my literary activities together with Studiefrämjandet during my writer in residency 2009-2011 in the ICORN system. We are interested of both the artistic and social effects of literature. We work locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, and have established productive partnerships with several organizations.

Our centre is now a platform for both professional and amateur writers in diverse mother languages. It is a meeting point for native, foreign, immigrant and exiled writers. We publish more than a hundred writers a year in our literary anthology from our creative writing workshops every year. We host more than a hundred literary events a year.

Our centre in Uppsala together with Litteraturcentrum in Tranås, Litteratur resurscentrum in Norbotten and similar project in Jämtland-Harjedalen is now Sweden's international literary checkpoint when we have growing network and exchange with different continents. All are welcome on board of reading and writing in diverse language in defense of free word and free thought.

Biography

Anisur Rahman, poet, playwright, literary critic, essayist, novelist, translator, journalist

Anisur Rahman is a poet, playwright, literary critic, essayist, novelist, translator and journalist from Bangladesh. Anisur Rahman writes for newspapers in Bangladesh, Sweden and elsewhere alongside participating in debate and literary programmes on various occasions in Uppsala and other cities.

He is a member of the Swedish Writers' Union, the Swedish Foreign Press Association, Writers' Centre in Stockholm and is an honorary member of Swedish PEN. Born in Madhupur, Tangail, Bangladesh in 1978, Anisur Rahman studied English Literature and Linguistics alongside Bengali and History at the University of Dhaka.

He has published two collections of poems in Bengali and another in English. He translates poems and plays from English to Bengali and from Bengali to English. His translation of Henrik Ibsen's poems in Bengali was published in 2006. His Bengali novel Oi Andhakar Ase (The Dark Sounds) appeared in April 2009. Rahman's collection of poems is being translated to Swedish to be published. He scripted two plays - Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis and Ibsen's The Lady from the Sea in Bengali. His latest publication is The Absent Poet and Other Essays - a collection of 40 essays on aesthetic traditions and socio-cultural aspects of Bengali poetry and plays.