

'Books are at the heart of knowledge economies'

Sahitya Akademi Secretary KS Rao highlights role of book festivals

Progress transcends technology or material advancements. It's about fostering critical thinking and a broad knowledge base, a key building block of knowledge economies. Knowledge economies, built on coherent and logical processing of information, drive rapid social and material development. Books are the heart of knowledge economies, said Sahitya Akademi Secretary Dr K Sreenivasarao.

In an exclusive interview with K Kalyan Krishna Kumar, Dr K Sreenivasarao announced that authors will be able to submit their applications for Akademi Awards directly, marking a significant shift from the earlier process. He highlighted the transformative role of books, the importance of knowledge economies and the 35th Vijayawada Book Festival, besides his major initiatives during his tenure.

Excerpts:

What is the significance of the 35th Vijayawada Book Festival?

The Vijayawada Book Festival celebrates literature and knowledge. This year's theme, 'Let's launch a movement for libraries', emphasises the need to establish libraries, particularly in rural areas, to nurture knowledge societies.

What role do books play in this context?

Books are at the heart of knowledge economies. They preserve culture, ignite creativity, and sustain intellectual growth. They are like mothers nurturing ideas and imagination, bridging generations by passing on rich heritage and traditions.

Are reading habits changing?

Yes, but trends are mixed. While adults increasingly embrace eBooks and audiobooks, there's a worrying decline in reading among children and teenagers. We must rekindle their interest by providing engaging materials.

How is India's publishing industry faring?

It's a mixed picture. While some languages thrive, others struggle. Although the number of writers across Indian languages is rising, book consump-



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tion—both printed and digital—hasn't kept pace, posing challenges for publishers.

What role do book fairs play in promoting reading?

Book fairs bring books closer to readers and serve as platforms for publishers, writers, and readers to connect. They foster a vibrant literary culture, which libraries and bookshops often can't match. The Vijayawada Book Festival exemplifies how such events promote literature and cultural heritage. I hope similar initiatives are taken across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to strengthen our literary landscape.

How can book fairs contribute to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana?

Hosting national-level book fairs in every city would provide widespread access to books and literary events. These fairs not only promote reading but also give writers and publishers more opportunities to showcase their work.

What about libraries in rural areas?

Rural libraries are essential for creating knowledge societies. Beyond superficial projects, we need libraries stocked with diverse books catering to various societal needs.

What efforts has the Sahitya Akademi made to promote literature in rural areas, especially Andhra Pradesh?

The Akademi launched the 'Gramalok' programme four to five years ago to discover and nurture literary talent in villages. We also conducted one such programme in Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh.

Why is the award selection process often criticised?

The criticism stems from local issues rather than flaws in the process itself. The procedures remain unchanged, adhering strictly to fixed rules without deviation. Only one person can receive the award, regardless of the number of applicants.

Is there a possibility of separate awards for Andhra and Telangana?

Awards are given on language basis, not on the basis of State. Telugu, like Hindi, represents one language across regions. For instance, a Telugu book written by someone in West Bengal can qualify for an award if it meets the criteria.

What are the major initiatives of Sahitya Akademi under your tenure?

I am proud of several achievements, including organising the world's largest literature festival with 1,100 writers over six days and Asia's biggest in Bhopal.

I expanded book sales, opened book shops at metro stations, and introduced LGBTQ writers to Akademi platforms. We launched the Gramalok programme, reaching 250-300 villages, and prioritised translating oral literature into mainstream languages.

What are your future plans for the Akademi?

Strengthening translations remains a key priority—bringing global literature to India and Indian classics to the world. Recent efforts include translating modern Indian works into Russian and Chinese, and I aim to expand these initiatives.

Any parting message?

Writers are mirrors of society, and a society that neglects them cannot progress. We must continue to support literature, foster reading, and build inclusive platforms for all voices.