

Urdu Binds People of All Religions: Sanjiv Saraf

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Pictures by Dr Rafat Husain and Afzal Usmani



“Urdu is a language that binds people of the Subcontinent encompassing all religions and culture”, said Sanjiv Saraf while addressing the 44th Annual Mushaira organized by the Aligarh Alumni Association (AAA), Washington DC on 11th November 2018 in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Mr. Saraf, who is the founder of Rekhta.org, was the Chief Guest at the event that attracts hundreds of Urdu lovers from the Metro Washington area and neighboring states every year. The Association honored him with an award for his innovative approach and dedication to serving the Urdu language and literature through Rekhta.org that has digitized copies of more than 30,000 books of Urdu writers and poets on its website. The Rekhta organization holds a three-day annual *Jashn-e-Rekhta* in Delhi that brings 30-40,000 people of all ages to the program. Saraf, who learned Urdu because of his passion for the language, was very hopeful about the future of the language as most of the audiences coming to his *Jashn-e-Rekhta* are young between the ages of 18-25 years and represent all sections of the society.

Addressing the audience at the Mushaira, he said that the Rekhta Foundation was working out the details of holding similar programs in various parts of the world, including the United States.

The Aligarh Alumni Association, Washington DC started the tradition of holding Mushaira more than four decades ago and it is the oldest South-Asian cultural event in Washington. Starting with a humble beginning, it has achieved international fame. Almost all renowned and stalwart poets from the Subcontinent have participated in this annual event. Every year 5-6 poets from India, Pakistan and other countries are invited to participate in the mushaira. The time constraints allow only a few local poets from USA and Canada to recite their poetry, and a big number of established poets such as Professor Satyapal Anand come to the mushaira as host-poets to listen to the overseas guest poets.

This year's invited poets were Dr Salman Akhtar, Mr. Khushbir Singh Shaad, Dr Sabiha Saba, Dr Nikhat Iftikhar, Mr. Rehman Faris, Ms. Qania Ada, Mr. Saud Usmani, Mr. Hashmat Sohail, Ms. Bina Goindi, Dr Razi Raziuddin, and Dr A. Abdullah.

Welcoming the audience, Association's President Dr Rafat Husain briefly apprised the gathering about the activities of the Association. He mentioned that the Association had been in the forefront of organizing high-quality literary and cultural activities for the last 40+ years. His speech was followed by a rendition of Aligarh University Tarana, *Yeh Mera Chaman Hai*, which was written by a well-known Aligarhian, Majaz Lakhnawi. More than 400 Urdu lovers that included diverse sections of the Indo-Pak community came to this event.

In recognition of his innovative approach and dedication to popularizing Urdu, the Association gave an award to Mr. Sanjiv Saraf. The Association also recognizes people with a Life-long Service Award for their dedicated services to the Association. This year's award went to Dr Aftab Ansari.

A number of dignitaries, including Mr. Imran Arshad, Counsellor (CA), Embassy of Pakistan, Washington DC, presidents and members of the literary and academic associations such as The University of Karachi Alumni Association, The Association of Indian Muslims in America, Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq, the Hyderabad Association of Washington Metropolitan Area, The Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) Metro-Washington, The Hindi Association, and The Center for Pluralism in Washington, DC. In his congratulatory note, Mr. Tariq Husain a senior executive of the World Bank, appreciated the masterful organization and conduct of the Mushaira. Mr. Saud Zafar, a regular patron of the Mushaira for over 30 years expressing his views said that the event was very well organized. All the poets presented exceptionally fine poetry, especially Dr. Salman Akhtar, Rehman Faris, and Nikhat Iftikhar who were very impressive. Dr Navin C. Shah, a noted oncologist and community leader was ecstatic listening to the wonderful poetry and the excellent organization of the event.

The mushaira was presided over by Mr. Khushbir Singh Shaad and skillfully moderated by Dr A. Abdullah, whose golden touch has been a key factor in making the ambiance and effect of these mushairas memorable. "Forty plus years of untiring efforts by our Association and support of the community this Mushaira has been the embodiment of common heritage of all Urdu lovers in this area. It has become a reference for the introduction of Washington in the Urdu world. Preservation of the prestige of this Mushaira is the responsibility of everyone," he added.

This year, the organizers made a new beginning by organizing the event on a Sunday afternoon, instead of in the evening. This was appreciated especially by the seasoned Mushaira-lovers who have been religiously coming to it for decades.

Excerpts from the poetry recited at the Mushaira.

Salman Akhtar, who has heritage of Urdu poetry for several generation and an internationally-acknowledged poet in his own right and a practicing psychiatrist, impressed the audience with his poetry.

*DoosroN ki baton kuchh to sach raha ho gaa
Koe to sitam akhir hum ne bhi kiya ho gaa.
Sirf shikwoN se kahani nahiN poori ho gi
Apne har zulm ki ginti bhi zaroori ho gi
Voh ek ghar ki jahaN umr kaTni thi hameiN
Lagi hai umr vahi ek ghar banana meiN
Kuchh saleeqe bunyiadi dosti meiN kaafi haiN
Char paanch log zindagi meiN kaafi haiN*

Nikhat Iftikhar's scintillating poetry echoed the sentiments of the current #MeToo movement when she challenged the mindsets of powerful men who look at women primarily from a sensual angle and who think that they have the God-given right to make decisions about women in most situations.

*Hairat to yeh hai ki jis se maiN kuchh mangti nahiN
Who kah raha hai aur koe dur talash kar
Rah-e-vafa meiN hosh-o-khirad aik azaab hai
Sar baar-e-dosh koe paththar talash kar*

Qania Ada:

Mujhe zindagi samajh lo tumheiN muft mil gae hooN
BaDe imtihan diye haiN main chita meiN jal mari hooN

Bringing in another viewpoint about the trials and tribulations of life, **Rahman Farris** expressed them in his poetry.

*Ishq TooTa to istikhara kiya
Aur phir ishq hi dobara kiya
MaiN to mahfil se uThne wala tha
Phir kisi aankhne ishaara kiya
Jab khizan aye to patte na samar bachta hai
Khali jholi liyae veeran shajar bachta hai*

Standard satirical and hilarious poetry is very difficult to write but **Hashmat Sohail** has mastered this art.

*Paise jo mile faqeer koek dam jo is qadar
To bola voh aasman ki janib sir uTha kar
Tu bhi hai khoob ae razzaq-e-do jahaN
Deta pate kahaN ke ha aur rahta hai kahaN
Mard ke jism meiN haiN lakh rageiN hahi jazboN ka taana baana hai
Aur sirf biwi hi janti hai yeh kaun si rag ko kab dabana hai*

Razi Raziuddin is an academic research scientist by profession and has a passion for poetry.

*Shaher junooN meiN jane kitne majnuN aashiq aye gaye
Jaan ki baazi dene vale daar par par hum hi paye gaye*

Beena Goindi

*MiTTi ka ek zarra tha sakit paDa hua
Teri nazar ne us ko sitara bana duya
Bahut tabdiliyan hoti hain insanoN ki basti meiN
Parinda koe dekha hai jo apna ghar badalta hai*

Saud Usmani

*Yeh dukh pahle kabhi jheyLa nahiN tha
Akela tha magar tanha nahiN tha
Hava se meri gahri dosti thi
MeiN jab tak shaakh se Toota nahiN tha*

Nazim-e-Mushaira **Dr. A. Abdullah** is a statistician by training but the passion for Urdu literature has turned him into a poet and his poetry reflects his observations of the surroundings. A portion of his recent nazm, Tea Bag, is as follows:

*InsaanoN ki asli rangat, unki aadat aur unke kirdaar ki
Khushboo se hum vaaqif tab hote haiN
Jab voh vaqt ke khaulte paani meiN aa jaen*

Sadr-e-Mushaira **Khushbir Singh Shaad**, who mastered his poetry in Lucknow, eloquently expressed his views on self-respect that is far more basic for survival even in very difficult times than positions of power.

*Vaqt ke rahte koe madava kar sakta tha
Zakhm abhi nasoor tha, bhar sakta tha
Phir se vahi khamoshi hai neend ki
DevaroN se kitni baateiN kar sakta tha*

*Ab andheroN meiN khaufzada baiThe haiN
Kiya khud hi chiraghoN ko bujha baiThe haiN
Bus yahi soch ke taskeen si ho jaati hai
Aur kuchh log bhi duniya se khafa baiThe haiN*

*Samandar yeh teri khamoshiyaN kuchh aur kahti haiN
Magar ssahil pe TooTi kashtiyaN kuchh aur kahti haiN
Hamari aankhoN ne manzar kuchh aur dekha tha
Magar akhbaar ki yeh surkhiyaN kuchh aur kahti haiN
Hum ahl-e-shaheer ki khwahish ki mil jul ke raheN
Lekin ameere-shaer ki dilchapiaN kuchh aur kahti haiN*