

EVENTS, INQUIRIES, NEWS, NOTICES, REPORTS

A NUMBER of Urdu writers and patrons left us during the past eighteen months, among them: (2007) Abdul Ghani Dehlavi, Afsar Jahan Begam Afsar, Ali Baqar, Bashir Akhtar, Gian Chand Jain, Hasan Abid, Hashmat Fatehpuri, Qurratulain Hyder, Jalil Saz, Iftikhar Ahmad Khwaja, Naqī Tanveer, Sarasvati Saran Kaif, Shahid Parvez, Syed Hasan Kaifi, Syed Yawar Husain Yawar, Urfi Afaqi, Zakia Sultana Nayyar; (2008) Abul Khair Kashfi, Khatir Ghaznavi, Latifullah, Asghar Sauda'i, Shamim Akhtar Saifi, Nazrul Hassan Siddiqui, Zeeshan Sahil.

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The following is an inventory of scholars and the papers which they presented at conferences, seminars, and symposia:

60th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (Atlanta, 3–6 April 2008)

AMY C. BARD (University of Florida): “‘Madrasi Urdu’ in the Hierarchy of Linguistic Value.”

CARLA R. PETIEVICH (University of Texas, Austin): “Revisiting that Earth(Dy, Glorious Tradition.”

A. SEAN PUE (The University of Chicago): “From a Space of Solitude to a Space of Community: The Desert in Modern Urdu.”

36th Annual Conference on South Asia (Madison, 12–14 October 2007)

CHRISTINE EVERAERT (University of Colorado at Boulder): “Lost (and Added) in Translation: Exploring the Boundaries Between Hindi and Urdu.”

MIRIAM MURTUZA (University of Texas at Austin): “Sophisticated Satire: Re-Assessing Akbar Alahabadi’s Urdu Poetry.”

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Awards

17th Saraswati Samman 2007 to Naiyer Masud



NEW DELHI: Stating that Urdu has survived the ordeal to contribute to the socio-political life of the country, Vice-President M. Hamid Ansari on Wednesday said the great merit of a democracy is correcting its past mistakes.

Speaking after presenting the K. K. Birla Foundation's "Saraswati Samman" to two distinguished men of letters at a special ceremony here, Mr. Ansari said: "Earlier the Urdu language was described as a foreign language and it was vilified and marginalized. Its spirit was labeled as alien. Thankfully, the language has survived the ordeal."

The Vice-President conferred the 16th Saraswati Samman-2006 on Jagannath Prasad Das for his Oriya poem collection "Parikrama" and the 17th Saraswati Samman-2007 on Naiyer Masud for his Urdu short-story collection *Ṭā'ūs Čaman kī Mainā* (The Myna from Peacock Garden).

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Das, who was in the Indian Administrative Service before opting for voluntary retirement to devote himself to literature, said: "The daunting task of writing may be the reason why I have not been able to write more than what I have done. I have reassured myself that I have at least tried to live a full life outside my writing. If only I had an inkling that it would be a loss to literature if I did not write then I would have tried to write more at the cost of my other lives."

Dr. Masud said: "At the moment, many of my friends who are no more are coming alive in my mind.

They must have been happier than me on this occasion. Among them are my friends Shahenshah Mirza (Editor, *Banjara*) who departed young, and Mahmud

Ayaz (Editor, *Saughāt*, Bangalore). Among my elders, the eminent Pakistani writer Muḥammed Khālid Akhtar is visiting my memory.”

Stating that he speaks his mind through his stories and does not feel like explaining them verbally, Dr. Masud said: “My life, imagination and neighborhood have been peopled by women doing embroidery and alterations, housemaids, masons, potters shaping delicate earthen toys, and buffoons mimicking people in weekly markets. They are reflected in my stories.”

[Gratefully reproduced from *The Hindu* 6 March 2008, Internet edition. Edited for the *AUS*.]

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The following is excerpted from an interview with Naiyer Masud that appeared in *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), Online edition (Sunday Spectrum section, 24 February 2008).

You have recently been awarded the K.K. Birla Foundation's prestigious Saraswati Samman. How do you feel?

Recognition and money is always a good omen. But what I deeply appreciate is the respect it brings to Urdu—the language I write in. That, I feel, is the true worth of this honor. I did not expect the award to be bestowed on an Urdu writer just six years after eminent Urdu critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi received it. I had calculated that Urdu would have to wait for at least another 20, 25 years before its turn came [again].

It is said that your stories not only have a dream-like quality but some of them even unfolded in your dreams.

Yes, that's true. At least three of my stories, “Nuṣrat,” “Aukaḷḷ Miūziyam” and “Shīsha Ghāt” appeared to me in dreams.

Do just the characters make an appearance, or is it the plot or the whole story?

I view the whole story like a movie, not once but several times over. I do add a bit here or there. As a matter of fact, I'm always petrified that someone will accuse me of plagiarism as who knows if these stories materialize due to ideas lying in my subconscious mind after reading something that I may otherwise have forgotten. I remember writing “Nuṣrat” based on a person whom I knew as a child. Soon after I finished writing as it had appeared in a dream, I received a letter from a relative in Pakistan that the person who inspired the story had suddenly passed away just around the time the dream had first appeared, filling me with an eerie feeling.

Tell us about your creative process. How do you write?

Strangely, I cannot write outside this house. My creative juices just dry up outside this familiar environment that I am so attuned to. But otherwise I let the stories flow out. I never work too hard on the endings and beginnings, I just retell a story as plainly as possible. But yes, I do work hard on the verbal choice and shun exaggeration, embellishment and melodrama in both language and content.

Which is your favorite story?

Incidentally the ones that have nothing special to say, like my stories “Murasila” and “Nōsh Dārū.” For, as Shamsur Rahman Faruqi had commented, “they don’t go anywhere.”

You have seen so much change around you. What are the elements whose loss you most regret in your environment?

Well, I’m not a nostalgic sort of person, one who constantly harps about an era gone by. You will not see me lamenting that the earthen *ṣurāḥī* is becoming extinct. Life is a dynamic process and change is the only constant.

Still, is there something in your immediate environment that you would like to bring back?

It is the social values of Lucknow that provided the backbone of its *tehzīb* (culture). These values are becoming increasingly irrelevant in this world. And this is something that pains me.

Don’t you feel bothered that Urdu, the language you nurtured so painstakingly, has few readers today?

That thought does hurt. The situation is far worse in Uttar Pradesh than in, say, Bihar, West Bengal, or even Maharashtra where the younger generation is not totally ignorant of Urdu. Here it is rare to find a young person fluent in Urdu. I see a very bleak future ahead for Urdu as I sense a deep political indifference to this language in UP.

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Another eminent Urdu author, Iqbal Majeed, has been the recipient of the Madhya Pradesh government’s prestigious “Iqbal Samman” award in the field of Urdu literature. He has been writing since the mid-1950s and is considered one of the finest novelists and short-story writers in the Indian subcontinent.

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N O T E : If you have read a paper or published an item or know of a piece of information of interest to Urdu-wallahs, please do not hesitate to send it to us for inclusion in the next issue of the *AUS*. —*Editor*