

MARCH 26, 2011

SESSION IV

CONTEMPORARY CREATIVITY AND POLITICAL-SOCIAL CONFLICTS



On the dais, from left : Prof. Abhi Subedi from Nepal, Ms. Sadia Dehlvi, Mr. Partaw Naderi from Afghanistan

The session was chaired by **Partaw Naderi** of Afghanistan, the Guest of Honour was **Sadia Dehlvi**, and **Abhi Subedi** of Nepal conducted the Session.

In his introduction to the session, **Abhi Subedi** said that writers all over the world, and in the SAARC region specially, were turning towards their creative traditions.

He said that there was politics of conflict, both social and individual in South Asia. This region has always been a turbulent zone. He said that while this has been a haven of peace, it has also, paradoxically speaking, been the nurturing ground of all kinds of violence.

Abhi Subedi particularly emphasized that the relationship of the individual and the community is also being redefined. He also posed a question whether subalterns really have a voice?



Prof. Abhi Subedi from Nepal

Prof. K. Satchidanandan, a very popular poet of Malayalam, who has been the Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi and is also Language Policy Consultant to the Ministry of HRD, Government of India, presented the first paper which was about 'Why do we need to redefine the idea of commitment and what are the circumstances that have led to this need?'

He said that there was the politics of the multitude juxtaposed to which was the contemporary writer.



Prof. K. Satchidanandan

He elaborated that a specter of multitude haunts the Middle East today. The masses are asserting their rights. In comparison, SAARC is looked upon as an association of people of the region.

He pointed out that today in the SAARC region a cultural amnesia seems to be taking over and careerism is taking its place. Women, down-trodden masses, tribals, problems of food, are getting marginalised. This has led to the creation of a large body of literature that cannot be easily put in the divide of progressive or committed.

Prof. Manzoorul Islam, an award winning writer from Bangladesh read the second

paper titled 'Suppression of the People's Movements, Madness of the Times'.

At the beginning itself, he pointed out that literature is a changing context. Violence from one region travels to another, creating an abnormality that borders on madness. Traditional discourses cannot address or contain this madness.

Prof. Islam raised the question : "Can there be good or acceptable violence?" There is no comfortable answer to this because a 'yes' would again pose a question—"who decides for whom?"

The third and the last paper of the session "The effect on Performing Arts and Oral Narrative Forms close to the Indo China Border" was presented by **Noor Zaheer**.

In her paper **Noor Zaheer** analyzed the effect of political conflict and war on trade, arts, exchange of ideas and human emotions. The emphasis of her paper was on "Buchen": the narrative theatre form of the Buddhist Tribal region of Kinnaur and Spiti in Himachal Pradesh. The closure of the borders has meant that there are no caravans covering the Tibetan plateau to reach this region from across the border. Because of the economic loss, the dance and theatre associated with the successful crossing have also gradually become extinct.

An ancient traveller to one of these monasteries wrote "In this region reside those who have achieved attainment through theatre and music".

The people have lost theatre, does it not mean that they would now achieve only half the attainment?

After a short break was a panel discussion in which **Nihal Rodrigo** and **Sadia Dehlvi** participated. Sadia Dehlvi, a Delhi based writer and columnist, in her discourse made a



Prof. Manzoorul Islam from Bangladesh



Ajeet Cour in discussion with Delegation from Afghanistan



Ajeet Cour and Dr. Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, listening to poetry in rapt attention.



From left : Prof. Alok Bhalla, Director of the Festival, Ms. Ajeet Cour, Ms. Arundhathi Subramaniam, the poet, Ms. Arpana Caur, the painter.



Dr. Nabaneeta Dev Sen and Ms. Arpana Caur

very important point that the present form of Islam does not accept pluralism at all. Contrary to the times when Prophet Mohammad had allowed non-Muslims to pray in mosques, today Islam legitimizes singularity and hence terrorism in its name.

Ajeet Cour spoke at the end of the session and said that the role of America in perpetrating violence, and condoning terrorism of a certain kind, while condemning the other, cannot be overlooked. It was their single handed maneuvering of the entire United Nations to attack Afghanistan and Iraq that brought about the present state of the so-called Islamic terrorism.

She pointed out that the aggression of the super powers is responsible for the condition of Asia today. The USSR attacked and tried to subjugate Afghanistan, USA is trying to do the same now with both Iraq and Afghanistan.

She praised the writers all over the world who have been protesting. During the Freedom Struggle in India, what ignited the human spirit to fight aggression, were simple songs, like :

*'Sar Firoshi kee tamanna ab hamaare dil mein hai,
Dekhna hai zor kitna pazoo-e-kaatil mein hai?'*

and...

*'Pagri sambhaal jatta
Pagri sambhal oye!
Lutt liya maal tera
Lutt liya maal oey!'*

And a few days back, people reading poetry and singing songs in Tehrir Square, during protests, surrounded by tanks and machine-guns, their spirit soaring high for a better life!

She mentioned how she herself had sent signed letters by so many writers and Resolutions whenever the freedom of writers was throttled anywhere! But no one listens to the voice of sanity.

SESSION V

POLITICS OF PARTITION, VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM

This session was chaired by the well known writer of India, Padma Bhushan



Ms. Sadia Dehlvi



Dr. K.S. Duggal

Dr. K. S. Duggal. In his inaugural speech he talked about the paradox of independence. He said that 15th August 1947, which should have been a glorious day for all Indians, played a trick with his generation by the partitioning of the country.

Working in the All India Radio as Director, just after the partition, when the exodus began, he was everyday faced with people coming to have their names announced on the radio, to locate their family who had come from across the borders and had become separated.

These kind of wounds that humanity had to bear was only because people refused to accept that religious lines can never divide humanity.



Prof. Alok Bhalla

Prof. Alok Bhalla who presented a paper on Partition Literature began by saying that he belonged to the first generation that grew up after the partition, and that one of his earliest memories was of a Muslim being killed outside his house in Kashmiri Gate Delhi.

He pointed out the fact that politics of identities is always paranoid and arrogant and its consequences are always genocide. He said it was impossible to assert one's religious and cultural identity without acknowledging the same of the others.

His research work on the literature of

partition that is being published in four volumes, is an effort to not just collect and assimilate what was written about the partition but also to analyze the writings. One of his important conclusions was that writers have very categorically stated that in an upheaval like partition, anyone and everyone can be a predator, and in the same way anyone and everyone could be a victim.

Prof. Sukrita Paul Kumar, well known poet from India writing in English, presented a paper on 'My Favourite Writers of the Partition.'

She said that the literature of partition is not just historically marked at 1947. It is the continuities through the decades that we have to think about. It is a source of inspiration, an essence of humanism, and is a lesson in plurality.

Partition has become like a repressed memory that must be discussed or else Lahore shall continue to bleed. She quoted '*Aag ka Dariya*' by Qurutullain Hyder and '*Kitne*



Dr. Sukrita Paul Kumar

Pakistan' by Kamleshwar as efforts to understand the human psyche and stop something that just might keep recurring.

In her intervention **Ajeet Cour**, because of her close links with Pakistan, made a very illuminating point. She said that the greatest blow that has been given by partition was the violence against our languages and culture.

The imposition of Urdu both on Punjab and Bengal of Pakistan, where it is not the mother tongue, nor is it consistently spoken, resulted in the War of Liberation of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. This struggle is the only example in world history where people have fought for their cultural and linguistic identity. Denying their religious distinction they struggled for their culture and their language.

Sharing her surprise, **Ajeet Cour** said Punjabi is neither the medium nor a subject taught in schools in West Pakistan which is why Punjabi language is not developing as a medium for great literature in Pakistan.

A Panel discussion followed in which **Rakhshanda Jaleel** of India, **Jharna Rehman** of Bangladesh, **Zahid Abbas** of Pakistan participated.

Rakhshanda Jaleel made a point that the new Urdu Story that had come into being and was groomed with the formation and ideology of Progressive Writers Association, reached its zenith with the Partition of the country.

However the same did not happen with Urdu poetry. No such exceptional poems were produced by the greats of Urdu poetry. Was the partition too big for them to handle?

Jharna Rehman reminded everyone that it was on 26th March that Bangladesh received its freedom. She said that painful histories need to be recalled so that they are not repeated.

Zahid Abbas said that this was a platform where we can understand and analyze history, be apologetic for our past, and move on.

After the break a film by **K.K. Muhammad**, who is an eminent archaeologist, was shown. The film was "Discovery of the Ibadat Khana."



Mr. K.K. Muhammad, eminent Archaeologist, delivering his Power Presentation.
Audience listening with rapt attention

While introducing Mr. K.K. Muhammad, Ajeet Cour said that he was one man who was worshipped in every temple and mosque and monastery in India. Once when he wanted to excavate in Chambal, a region known for its dacoits, and his friends tried to dissuade him, he took the bold step of going and living with the dacoits. Then the senior most dacoit said that he personally would provide him with protection.

The documentary that was shown highlighted the Akbar period where paintings of Hindu mythology were made on order of the emperor and the *Ibadat Khana* too was a place where regular discourse on various religions and their teachings could take place.

It also showed the first church of north India built in 1561 on Akbar's instructions.

SESSION VI

POETRY FESTIVAL

The poetry session was chaired by **Udaya Narayana Singh**, a well known Indian poet who writes both in Bengali and in Maithili (a dialect of Hindi) and was presided by Mahboubha Ibrahimi of Afghanistan.

In his opening introduction **Mohan Singh Mitwa** who conducted the Poetry Reading Session, said that friendship emanates out of the amalgam of thoughts and ideas.

A variety of poets were present here to read from their recent writings.

Savita Singh read out her poem '*Urdu Meri Bhasha*', a romantic poem on a place where there is no need for a language to communicate.

Arundhati Subramaniam, well known poet who writes in English, read out her poem



Mr. Manmohan Singh Mitwa, compering one of the Poetry Reading Sessions. On the dais, from left : Ms. Mahbooba Ibrahimi : eminent Poet from Afghanistan, Prof. Udaya Narayana Singh : eminent poet and Scholar, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor Visva-Bharati University, Shantiniketan, Mr. Suneet Chopra : eminent Poet and Art Critic.

“To the Welsh Critic”. This poem is addressed to the voices who are all the time telling us how to belong. How to be a woman, an Indian, a Hindu, a South Asian etc. She thanked the organizers and in particular Ajeet Cour and Alok Bhalla for making this congregation of writers as warm and as inclusive as possible.

Zahid Abbas, from Pakistan made an important point through his poem on the problem of illiteracy that is prevalent all over the SAARC region. Alok Bhalla translated the poem to English.

Shail Gulhati an eminent poet of Dogri who has recently brought a book with Arpana Cour, the well known painter, read his new poems.

Sukrita Paul Kumar, one of the important female poets of the region read her poems of English. This was followed by **Manu Manjil** of Nepal, who has been awarded this years Young Writers Award of the SAARC, read his poems in Nepali.

Mahboubia Ibrahimi who presided over the session is a young Afghani poetess. She read her very meaningful poem addressed to her daughter who is five years old. The poem is like a prayer for peace so that this child and others like her can grow up in a free world without fear.

In the same Session **Partaw Naderi** from Afghanistan, **Anjum Saleemi** from Pakistan, **Suman Pokhrel** from Nepal, **H.K. Kaul**, **Kuber Dutt**, **Arkamal Kaur** from India also recited their poems.

Ajeet Cour spoke in the interlude between the first session of poetry reading and the second one. She talked about how she had proposed the founding of a SAARC University and the SAARC Cultural Centre in 2001. Both proposals were accepted by the SAARC Secretariat. The SAARC Cultural Centre was launched in Colombo, the Proposal for SAARC University was accepted by the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, who announced it in the SAARC Summit of 2007, as Chairman of the SAARC Summit.

SESSION VII

POETRY FESTIVAL

Prof G. K. Chadha chaired this session of poetry reading.

Prof. G.K.Chadha, who was Vice Chancellor of Jawahar Lal Nehru University was made the Vice Chancellor of the SAARC University. The university was given an office in the JNU building and has yet to get its own building.

The poetry session of the evening was conducted by **Suresh Kohli**, who is himself a well-known critic and translator.

Poets from all the eight countries read out their poems and some poets like the poet from Sri Lanka also sang out their poem in the traditional format of rendering it.

Important poets from India like **Kuber Dutt**, **Leeladhar Mandloi** of Hindi read out their poems.

Nabaneeta Dev Sen read a poem to her first child, a girl. She thanked **Mehboubia Ibrahimi** for her poem to her daughter.



Mr. Kuber Dutt presenting his poem. On the dias, from left: Ms. Perveen Sultana, eminent fiction writer from Bangladesh; Prof. G.K. Chadha, Chief Executive Officer SAARC University; Dr. Soundarie David, Deputy Director SAARC Cultural Centre, Sri Lanka; Ms. Sonam Ongmo, eminent Scholar from Bhutan/USA.

K. Satchidanandan, eminent poet of Malayalam, read out his poem that he had written right after the Gujrat riots. It was about the genocide of the Muslims.

This in-fact is the concept and the basic idea of having this conference of the SAARC writers, to make everyone from each of the eight countries feel a part of the whole SAARC community. It is the effort to wipe out the feeling of dominance or subjugation and to propagate a desire for equality and unity.

Bushra Naz, a young poetess from Pakistan, who has been writing in Urdu and has only recently switched to Punjabi was lauded by **Ajeet Cour** for her choice. This change on the writer's part was a choice that she wished to side with a language that was being marginalised by the authorities in her homeland.

However **Ajeet Cour** did correct the pronunciation of a word in her ghazal, that the poet gracefully accepted as guidance from a senior and popular writer, Punjabi scholar and fellow writer. This shows the popularity and love that Ajeet Cour enjoys all over the sub-continent.

A Lepcha poet **Lyansong Tamsang**, recited his poem in a sing song lyrical manner. This poem he explained was written in the traditional folk format and hence has to be recited in the ritualistic pattern of the region. He highlighted the role of the Himalayas in influencing the culture of the region. In his opinion the presence of the highest mountain range is felt in all the eight countries, even though some of them like Sri Lanka and Maldives do not possess a portion of it geographically.

The session was concluded by a long poem on the nomadic life of the gypsies by well known Hindi poet **Pankaj Singh**.

At the end of the session **Ajeet Cour** pointed out that though the poem by **Pankaj Singh** was both beautiful and romantic, there is no romance in the life of these nomadic tribes who are not even recognized as the citizens of the country. They do not move from one place to the other because they have a zest for adventure, but because they are forced to by the police and other forms of authorities. They have no ration cards and no voter IDs.

This kind of churning of thoughts and the way they are used in verse and in writing as a whole, is the primary aim of this writers meet. Where the romantic writing meets and tussles with the committed, where beauty and aesthetics are re-analysed and re-defined, and ideas converge to a single point only to diverge and burst forth into many springs.

Other poets who read out their poems and registered the presence of their respective countries were : **Naz Fatima** and **Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Siyal** from Pakistan, **Chamali Kariyawasam** and **Piyasena Wickremarathne** from Sri Lanka, **Mr. Basanta Kumar Doley** from India.

SESSION VIII

POETRY FESTIVAL : 'DIALOGUE'

DIALOGUE is a monthly evening of verse and prose writing which is held at the Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, for the last 36 years. It is held on last Saturday of every month.

Since the last Saturday of this month was falling during the days of the Conference, Dialogue was held at the same venue, as a continuation of the poetry session.

Mithilesh Srivastava who is in charge of the 'Dialogue' took over conducting the 'Dialogue'.

Mr. Ibrahim Waheed of Maldives presided over the session.

Ranjeet Verma read out his poems and **Vinod Kumar Sinha** recited a poem and sang a ghazal.

Pankaj Singh also read some more of his poems.



Mr. Mithilesh Shrivastava, eminent Hindi poet, presenting his poem. On the dais from left : Mr. Ranjeet Verma, Mr. Ibrahim Waheed from Maldives, Mr. Leeladhar Mandloi, Mr. Pankaj Singh, Mr. Vinod Kumar Sinha