

WELCOME ADDRESS BY AJEET COUR

Rather than reading my Paper, because all of us know too well that all Papers are routine, bone-dry pieces of wordsmiths and scholars, I will like to share with you some anecdotes.

I thought of it last night.

So why not ?

Anecdotes !

THE FIRST ANECDOTE

In 1982, Amrita Pritam rang me up early morning. She said, “Do you know Sibtul Hassan Zaigham”?



I said, “Who does not know him? Particularly Punjabi writers !”

He was the only Punjabi scholar living in Pakistan who used to write letters to all of us in Gurmukhi script. All others wrote in Shahmukhi, which is Punjabi in Persian script.

I said, “Of course I know him !”

She said, “I just got a call from him. He is crying at Nizamudin Aulia Sahib's tomb.”

“What is he doing there?”

“He came here for the Urs of Aulia Sahib, presuming that once he reaches Delhi, he would keep roaming around and meeting everybody. But he is heartbroken because he is surrounded by gunmen and security

guards, and nobody is allowing him to come out. He came here only to meet us.”

I replied, “I will try”.

So I went there and tried to talk to top bosses of the security personnel.

I said, “Look, he is a writer, and he is not going to create any terror here”.

“No”, they said, “This is the law. If anybody comes for the Urs, he has to remain right here, at the Dargaah. All the time ! He cannot go out. He cannot step out of this tent and out of the security cordon”.

I tried to flatter them and said, “Of course it is for their security !”

I told Sibtul Hassan Zaigham also, “Our country is very concerned about your security, that is why all these gunmen are here to keep you safe !”

With choked voice he said, “But I want to go out. I want to meet friends. I want to buy books.”

The security people said, "If you can bring permission from the Home Ministry, you can take him out for a stroll."

But then, as in a flash, I remembered I was carrying my press card. So I told the security boss, "Here is my press card. I am not wearing any jewellery which I can keep as 'zaamini' with you. So you can keep my press card. You know I cannot afford to lose it. It has Home Ministry's own clearance at the back. Stamped and signed ! If you feel it is enough guarantee, I will take this man out, get him to meet all the writers, deposit him back with you, and take my press card back."

They had long, red-taped consultations. For an eternity ! Eventually they relented.

For the next three days, this was repeated.

He met all the writers, bought all the Punjabi books that he wanted from Chandni Chowk, bought all the Urdu books from the book shops facing Jama Masjid.

He was so happy ! I took him wherever he wanted to go !

That made me think ! I asked him why he had not come as a writer ! Why did he not get visa as a writer ! Why only for the Urs ?

He said, "Do you not know that ever since partition, no writer has been given a visa, no singer has been given a visa. That is why we have to come on this pretext, Urs of Nizamudin Aulia' and of Khawajasaab Gharibnawaz Sahib' at Ajmer. We come on these pretexts, and similarly your people also go in the Jathas to visit gurudwaras. But in fact it is the nostalgia which carries us across the borders."

He went back to Lahore. Fully satisfied ! Brimming over with love and affection ! Overflowing with gratitude and genuine happiness.

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After this painful experience I went to the Ministry of External Affairs and said "Forty years have passed after Partition. Why don't you allow writers and singers, and creative people from Pakistan to come with dignity, and give them visas?"

'No', they said, 'we cannot. That is the policy of both the governments towards each other'.

"But do not worry. There is some confederation being formed which shall be called SAARC. Heads of States are meeting each other, and when SAARC is formed, it may have some provision for visas for writers, singers and creative people."

I waited. Three years passed. Ultimately, the SAARC Charter was signed in December of 1985. I read it eagerly in January 1986. There was no provision for cultural exchanges!

It had apparently been jotted down by bureaucrats who were more interested in opening up trade barriers, resulting in more trade with each other.

Obviously by some business-minded babus!

Signed in goodwill, ostensibly, by the Seven Heads of States.

There was no provision for cultural exchanges !

The Charter also mentioned, that the seven SAARC countries will try to eradicate each other's poverty.

Interesting, isn't it ? Not our own poverty, but 'each other's poverty' !

Then, there were other very amusing provisions saying 'unless five countries declare war with each other, it cannot be discussed in the SAARC Summit.... Unless five countries are affected by the sharing of the river waters, that too cannot be discussed'.

How will one poor river, emanating from one country, go loitering and taking a stroll in five countries?

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Perhaps at that point of time all my stars were in very very bad constellation, and I started my own little war.

I said, "Why not"?

And that was the moment when my mad dream was launched. Dream of bringing writers and the creative fraternity from all these SAARC countries together.

Closer to each other, for their creative exchange of views !

To share their common voice for peace. Because peace is the quest of all the people across the borders. Not only people, but also all living beings breathing on this planet. They want to live ! For life, peace is the primary pre-requisite !

With my dream, my endless battles were also launched.

After one and a half years of my endeavour to convince all the concerned authorities, particularly from the Ministry of External Affairs, I succeeded in quashing the hard nut of their conception that writers and creative people can do no good to anybody, to any country, or anything constructive for creating peace and tranquility across the borders !

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Ultimately, I got 10 visas for writers from Pakistan.

I wanted to start with Pakistan, the contentious neighbour about which we never hear anything pleasant. So many infiltrators have crossed our borders! So many of our military men have been killed ! So many of the infiltrators have been killed.

I thought it best to start with Pakistan.

So I got 10 writers from Pakistan in September 1987.

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THAT WAS THE LAUNCH OF THE FIRST-EVER INDO-PAK WRITERS CONFERENCE IN NEW DELHI.

The first time after Partition that writers from Pakistan set foot on Indian soil.

To see Urdu and Punjabi writers in person, to hear them actually speaking and talking face-to-face whom all the lovers of literature had been reading for forty long years after Partition, with books and music cassettes travelling from one country to the other via U.K. and other

countries where common friends lived, thousands of people came from Hyderabad, Aligarh, Lucknow; from all over Punjab and Haryana !

It was conceived as a Conference of Pakistani and Indian writers, but ended up being a huge Festival.

It was quite hard, because I didn't know, and I still don't know, how to raise money.

So I spent every penny I had.

But it brought in floods of love, affection, goodwill, among writers of both countries.

They went back loaded with memories which they cherished and shared in their writings, in their speeches.

They went back as 'Goodwill Ambassadors of India.'

The year was 1987.

The month : September.

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Then these conferences went on : mostly with writers of Pakistan, but also with those of Bangladesh and Nepal and Sri Lanka.

For every conference, I had to fight, and fight hard for getting visas for the writers from Pakistan.

For over twelve years, I took every penny that my painter daughter earned from her paintings, and spent it on my mad dream.

As a result, a strong Think Tank of writers from across borders has come into force, bringing awareness to the people of their countries, that people in the neighborhood were not enemies ! That people wanted and longed for peace, everywhere !

SECOND ANECDOTE

Eventually, in 1999, the then **Joint Secretary SAARC, Meera Shankar**, currently our Ambassador in the United States, invited me to South Block

She called me "Please come to South Block. I have something important to discuss with you."

I said I do not know where South Block is, I have never been to power corridors.

She said, "I am sending my Director. He will pick you up and bring you here.

I was taken to her room. She got up and hugged me, and I being a writer, got very emotional too. "We need you to do a SAARC Writers Conference in which you should invite all those writers from neighbouring countries whom you keep inviting for all your literary initiatives. **We need a non-government organisation to do this for cultural connectivity in the SAARC region**".

I was surprised ! Such a creative visionary suggestion coming from a seasoned bureaucrat !

But in the rules-bound, red-tape-wrapped bureaucracy, some officials do emerge rarely who go beyond their briefs, and listen to the voice of future which only the

heart can hear.

I said, “I can ! Because this is my dream project. But I have no money for such a big event.”

“Who has been supporting you since 1987 ?”

“My own daughter !”

She was quite astonished !

Had I been doing this enormous work without a penny of help from the Ministry ?

“I never knew ! I never applied ! I am a stupid naïve ! I know nothing about official matters and financial matters !” I confessed.

She organised some support from the Ministry of External Affairs, and helped with some more from other international organisations for funds, and the rest came from Arpana.

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That launched The FIRST-EVER SAARC WRITERS CONFERENCE in April 2000, which was proclaimed by UNESCO as 'The Flagship Event, globally' during 2000, the UNESCO Year of Culture.

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“We are the mad dreamers of the SAARC region. Let governments do their political and diplomatic work. Let us, the writers and the creative fraternity of the region, endeavour to create bridges of friendship across borders, and beyond borders” : declared the 2000 Resolution.

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Though we have been building bridges of cultural connectivity with all the countries of the SAARC region since 1987, through gathering of writers and scholars, historians and academics, litterateurs and intellectuals, scholars of Buddhism and Sufism, former diplomats and opinion makers, academicians and media persons, performing and visual artists, folklorists and historians of the unique civilization of the region, theatre artists and cultural activists, peace and gender activists, and the creative-intellectual fraternity in general, in our SAARC WRITERS CONFERENCES, we also traced the centuries-old civilisational and cultural links even beyond SAARC region, extending to **Afghanistan and Burma.**

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In April 2000, in our First-ever SAARC Writers Conference, two poets from Afghanistan participated and sang their lyrical poems in Pushto and Dari.

This participation of Afghan poets **eventually culminated in Afghanistan becoming the eighth member of SAARC in 2007.**

Now, writers from Burma also participate.

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Everybody realized at the highest levels, that it was a **major step of Track II, Public-**

Diplomacy Initiative in the region, and it had produced miraculous results.

The **SAARC Charter** was therefore **amended during the 13th SAARC Summit in Kathmandu, and 'cultural exchanges' included in the SAARC constitution.**

FOSWAL was given the honour of SAARC RECOGNISED BODY by the SAARC SUMMIT, on January 1-2, 2002.

Our Status has since been **elevated to SAARC APEX BODY.**

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ANOTHER EPISODE :

When I took a delegation of SAARC Writers to Pakistan in 2002, the event was overwhelmingly emotional with unforgettable experiences !

When we crossed Wagah, over five thousand people were waiting on the Pakistan side of Wagah.

Amidst showering of tons of flower petals, emotional embraces, the TV channels and newspaper journalists hovering over us for a sound-bite, the flood of emotions, nobody could hear the footsteps of time passing !

After about two hours of this overflowing love, we got into our coaches, and in about half an hour reached our hotel.

Kishwar Naheed, our Coordinator, got a frantic call from the Immigration Officers at Wagah. "In all that emotional outburst for your guests, we also got drowned, and forgot to stamp their passports."

Kishwar said, "Everyone is so exhausted ! We cannot bring them back. You better come here and stamp their passport."

They agreed and pleaded "But please don't let anybody go out of the hotel till we come."

In less than an hour the Immigration Officer arrived with his stamp and stamping pad, and stamped our Passports.

Can there be a similar incident happening anywhere else in the world ?

AND ANOTHER !

And the next day, I got a telephone call from Hamid Mir, the Chief Production Director of GEO TV, the most popular TV channel in Pakistan.

I had seen Hamid Mir on international TV channels, interviewing several international dignitaries. His interviews were sharp, chiselled, and peeled off all the veneer of all the so-called powerful and mighty.

He said, "I want to interview you. It is a Prime Time Interview of one hour, to be telecast live !"

"Why poor me ? Who doesn't know about your butcher's knife ? I have many famous writers from all over the SAARC region accompanying me. Anybody would be delighted to be interviewed on GEO TV."

"I have grown up reading your books. I know only you ! And I'll interview only Ajeet Cour !"

“Can I bring somebody with me whose serials the whole of Pakistan has seen ? 'Buniyad ' and 'Hum Log '. But nobody has seen the man who wrote them. Manohar Shyam Joshi ! At least he'll be able to protect me !”

He laughed. “Of course ! If you say so !”

“Then why don't you invite two Pakistani writers too ? It will be a lively chat !”

He asked, “Which Pakistani writers are your friends ?”

“All of them,” I said.

“But there is one condition,” I said, “You won't mention Kashmir”.

He agreed.

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And then, the evening of the Interview, which was a Live Show.

He had invited Fahmida Riaz whom I knew very well ever since she had taken asylum in India. I had also invited her to our First SAARC WRITERS CONFERENCE in April 2000.

The other one was a new face. I was introduced to him, “This is our Munnoo Bhai. He writes columns in all important newspaper. And writes plays too.”

After a very lively interview and very creative interaction, during the last four-five minutes, he said with a straight face, without blinking an eyelash, because he was breaking a promise, “What do you think about Kashmir ?”

He didn't know that nobody can ever catch me off-guard and get away with it. I smiled, looked up, as if I was having a vision of Allah Himself, “It is Allah's own '*tohfa*' to this '*zameen*' that He created. Haven't you heard 'if there is *jannat* on this earth, it is here, it is here, it is here !” I recited the couplet in original.....

“But what is the way out ?”

“Out of *Jannat* ? Do you want to abandon Allah's own '*jannat* ' to go somewhere else ?” – I laughed.

And then Munnoo Bhai took over, “*Arre Bhai, pehle idhar wale Kashmir ko jannat bana lo, phir udhar wale Kashmir ke bare mein Ajeet Cour our hum baith kar saara masla suljha denge !*”

In translation, it meant, “First improve the fate of our own part of Kashmir, and make it the heaven that it was. When your job is finished, let us know. I Ajeet Cour and I will sit together and sort out all the problems of Indian Kashmir.”

The interview ended on this high note, which took a seasoned TV journalist like Hamid Mir off his feet.

Coming out of the studio, he hugged me and said, “You are my Ammi !”

From that day onwards, I have a world-known and internationally admired son in Pakistan: Hamid Mir.

RESPONSES OF THE PARTICIPANTS FROM THE SAARC REGION

अध्यक्ष : डा. मनमोहन सिंह
भारत के प्रधानमंत्री
Chairman : Dr. Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India
उपाध्यक्ष : श्रीमती तारा गांधी भट्टाचार्य
Vice Chairperson : Smt. Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee
निदेशक : डा. मणिमाला
Director : Dr. Manimala



गांधी स्मृति एवं दर्शन समिति
GANDHI SMRITI AND DARSHAN SAMITI
गांधी स्मृति, 5 तीस जनवरी मार्ग, नई दिल्ली-110 011
Gandhi Smriti, 5 Tees January Marg, New Delhi-110 011

March 30, 2011

Dear Ajeet Caurji

It was a rare privilege to be invited for the SAARC Festival of Literature 2011 so magnificently arranged by dear Ajeet. I hugely enjoyed it.

As a member of the Saarc region as well as a citizen of the world I want to congratulate you and also express my gratitude for your human, intellectual and philosophical approach to our consciousness of our identity.

The 3-day event represented by delegates from 8 Saarc countries was a blessing for me. It was a beautiful symbol of our unity as well as a celebration of our diversity. This union of close and distant members of the same family represented the unseen millions and also the unanimous individuals of our countries.

Ajeetji, you are known for your refined, sensitive intellect and creative organizational talent. But what has touched me the most is your human approach.

I want to thank you, Aparna and all your colleagues for the beautifully selected gifts for the delegates.

Please convey my special regards to Prof Alok Bhalla whose reminiscences of my mother were deeply touching for me. My greetings also to our very dear friend, Mr M M Mitwa, whose alertness and wit charmed everyone.

With all of you I pay homage to the greatest creative and spiritual forces of man and nature, of the past and the present that have kept the spark of eternal love glowing in each one of us.

Yours sincerely,

(Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee)

Ms Ajeet Caur

हिंदी से हम जुड़ें, हिंदी हमें जोड़े ।

प्रशासनिक कार्यालय : गांधी दर्शन, राजघाट, नई दिल्ली-110 002
Admn. Block : Gandhi Darshan, Rajghat, New Delhi - 110 002
Phones : 23392710, 23392278, 23392709, 23011480, 23012843 Fax : 91-11-23011480, 23392706
e-mail : mkgandhi@del2.vsnl.net.in

Dear Ajeet ji

I absolutely enjoyed the conference! Such varieties of topics and so many deliberations, and such lovely poems! It was remarkable how you did manage this huge gathering of writers! My stay was great and comfortable.

I will always be with you. I have great regards for you always!

Regards,

Abhi Subedi, Nepal



My dear Ajeet,

Thanks again for inviting me and Chitra.

I did not deserve the Award, but take it as really meant for the Sri Lankan people who have achieved peace. It's in the front varandah at home and everyone who comes home asks what it is ... I ..I reply and say, "thanks to one Ajeet across the Palk Straits and Ram Sethu."

Love from us both

Nihal Rodrigo, Sri Lanka



Dear Ms. Ajeet Cour,

This is in response to your kind message of thanks sent on April 01, 2011. I am extremely touched with your kindness and magnanimity in writing such kind and warm lines. Kindly accept my heartfelt felicitations for organizing such a successful SAARC Festival of Literature.

In fact, it was unique opportunity for me to attend such an august ensemble of literati from all parts of the SAARC region and benefit from their insights and get oneself familiarize with their creative efforts as well as contemporary literary trends in the region.

On a more emotional note, it was not just a visit but a pilgrimage to India for an old and staunch supporter of Pak-India friendship and regional peace like myself. Incidentally, it was my first visit to India and it was after 63 years that any member of my family set foot on the Indian soil. It was a travel on the road but a journey inside.

I only hope that your dream of turning literature and art into an instrument of peace and friendship in our region comes true. Our region has seen enough of misplaced and un-called-for hostility. It is time that we promote better understanding, respect and friendship among ourselves.

Thank you once again for your wonderful hospitality and kindly do not hesitate to ask for any thing which you believe can further strengthen SAARC Writers Association.

Deepest love and warm regards

Wajahat Masood, Pakistan

Dear Didi,

A million of thanks for you. And I am convinced that you are incredibly unbeatable.

It pained me a little that we could not talk in private. I do understand the constraints. Inevitable. I regretted that I should have stayed back 1 day more in Delhi on my own to spend some time together with you, Arpana and Alok. Anyway, it was a marvellous festival with such warm meeting of minds. It was really wonderful.

I will send my impressions at the earliest. I promise I won't make much delay. Have trust in me.

Again, THANKS, THANKS and THANKS for you and Arpana.

Shafi Ahmed

Bangladesh



Dear Ajeet ji,

The experience of being amidst the wonderful group of scholars, activists and persons of such high accomplishment was an enriching one for me. One could see that the unique combination of acumen, wisdom, idealism and affection that you embody, took everyone under a magical spell. I have admired your abilities in the past, but this time I came back convinced that you are unmatched.

I will send you my paper !

with warmest regards for you and Arpanaben.

Ganesh Devy

Vadodara



Madam Ajeet Cour jee,

I just can't make out my gratitude and reverence to you in terms of language. I feel that you are really great, one of the best great mothers of our country. Your innovative way of thinking and planning has not only influenced me but also put up a beacon light to give a rethinking over the issue of Bangladeshi refugees of 1971 to Assam. I am profoundly grateful to you for giving me this new horizon of outlook by inviting me to the Delhi SAARC Festival of Literature, 2011 as a delegate. Once again, I do extend my gratitude to you

Basanta Kumar Doley

Silapathar, Assam, India



Dear respectable Ajeet Caur (Maa Jee),

I hope you are doing well.

I thank you for inviting us to the great festival of literature and very warm hospitality

during our stay in Delhi.

As soon as possible I will talk with Mr. Hewadmal Sahib and will send you the request for becoming the chapter of SAARC Foundation of Writers and literature, as we had discussion about.

I wish you all the best and again thanks for your beautiful books and other valuable gifts.

Your son

Abdul Ghafoor Liwal (Ghafoor Jan)

Afghanistan



My dear Ajeet mam,

Lots of respect and sweet remembrance

It was a great experience to be part of the 32nd SAARC FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE held in New Delhi for me, an ordinary poet of eastern Nepal. I do not have words to express my gratitude to you dear mam for providing me an opportunity to be exposed to wisdom of the creative minds of South Asia, some of whom are moving legends. I loved the words and aura of intelligence of the respected Kapila Vatsyayan, Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, Sadia Dehlvi, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Mani Shankar Aiyar, Malashree Lal and all the others including my Nepali professor and poets. All sessions were excellent and lively to me. I feel myself enriched since I have met and listened to those living idols, to meet whom could be possible only in my dreams. It's all because of your kind Invitation, thank you so much. At this moment, I would also like to thank Prof. Abhi Subedi who introduced me to FOSWAL, which has been a gateway for me to literary world of the SAARC.

I respect and love you so much.

Sabita Gautam Dahal

Biratnagar, Nepal



Dear Ajeet di,

Thank you for inviting me, and making me a part of the SAARC literary festival. It was an enriching experience, to say the least. I also had the privilege to meet many distinguished personalities, including Prof Alok Bhalla, with whom I now have a deep friendship. I admired his scholarship, and his grace, and the way he conducted the proceedings. It was of course a pity that we didn't see as much of you as we expected, but you had to do so many things.

I will send my impression as soon as I write them down.

I also had the good luck to talk to Arpana jee, and visit the museums and her permanent gallery. I have been an admirer of her work for a long time.

Hope to see you again soon.

Regards,

Manzoorul Islam
Bangladesh



Dear Ajeet Jee

Accept my warm greetings,

Thank you very much for inviting the Afghan delegation to SAARC FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE held in India and many special thanks for the warm hospitality we have received from your side.

We think under your leadership we have seen many improvements. You have given a new look and beauty to SARRC cultural and literary relations.

I also thank you on the selection of two Afghan writers including me that were awarded in SAARC FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE . We have broadcasted the news through the State Television of Afghanistan (RTA).

Many thanks,

M. Zarin Anzor
Afghanistan



My dear Maasi ji,

It was a pleasure to meet you in person. An honor for me to be a part of FOSWAL; a prestigious platform for any intellectual. I am ever so grateful of you for choosing me to witness such an auspicious conference. I am truly thankful for your grace, generosity and kindness towards me and my group members.

I have brought back beautiful memories home. Stories to tell my children, they had so many questions to ask me about you. I am ever so thankful to you for your trust in me.

Thank you so much for the beautiful gifts Maasi ji. I loved the colors.

Prayers for your long life and May God Bless you even further. You indeed are a woman of substance and a true inspiration for females of Sub continent. Love to Arpana ji.

Warm Regards,

Ayesha Zee Khan
Pakistan



My Dearest Didi,

You are always great and unparalleled!

You are my role model. Always I become inspired with your spirit, stamina, talent and wonderful personality.

Didi, It is my great experience to join the SAARC Festival of Literature for the 3rd time. Every time I achieved many valuable things from this festival as new experience, new thoughts, new dimension of the relation between SAARC country, new friends, marvellous remembrance etc.

Definitely FOSWAL is working as a cultural bridge between SAARC countries. And you are the dreamer of that! I salute you!

I tried my best to represent my language culture and heritage in SAARC festival of literature as I am a proud citizen of Bangladesh. You gave me that opportunity. I am so grateful to you.

I feel so honoured to be a part of SAARC family. Again my gratefulness to you.

I was very fine at Delhi with accommodation and other entertainment like visits of Dilli haat and Humayun's Tomb.

I was introduced with the extra ordinary talented Prof Alok Bhalla in 2010 at Delhi. He was doing, really a wonderful job for 3 days! I enjoyed VERY MUCH his translation on Tagore. He is really a genius.

Averee Chaurey and Prof Minoti Chatterjee were excellent in their colourful performance.

About Mr Mitwa, I've never seen such a talent and genius! You are really rich with his assistance and love. I remember his delightful presence very much.

Here I like to say specially about two dear persons. They are Jaggi and Tamanna. They are your real assistants with their skill of work, responsibilities, and all type of cooperation to the guests. My THANKS and best wishes to them.

For you my warmest LOVE.

Jharna Rahman
Bangladesh



My Dear Madam Ajeet Cour,

I want to express my sincerest appreciation for your warm welcome and hospitality accorded to me in India . I am pleased to proclaim my heartiest gratitude to you and your team for organizing such a wonderful event. The compering of Mr. Alok Bhalla and the performance of two ladies were marvelous and majestic.

I am honored to be a part of SAARC Family and will always be with it in thick and thin. I also take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks for your love and care that you have extended during my stay.

Madam it was a bit of stress caused due to my lost passport as I have to go to many ministries in India and now even in Pakistan but with the utmost efforts of Ms. Ayesha,

Mr. Puri, your volunteers Anup, Juggi, our minister Hina Rabbani Khar and my friend Mr. Bishwajeet of Aajtak TV, all the possible arrangements were made .

Moreover, I would love to write '**Creative Impression**' of the conference. I'll send it to you soon.

Very Best Regards,

Ammar Kazmi
Pakistan



My dear Ajeet Cour and staff,

The purpose of my writing these few lines is not only to appreciate your untiring efforts that you and your team have been putting in for the last so many months for arrangements of such an outstanding and spectacular SAARC Literary Conference but also to extend my heart felt feelings on those very fabulous moments.

For me, it was the first time to see and hear Ajeet Cour, a legendry figure. Your devotion, love and pain for this great cause was very much impressive. It is really a hard task to bring the literary minds of South Asian countries under one roof.

It was really a very pleasant experience to listen to articles on Nuzrul, Tagore, Ghalib, Faiz and many others covering multi dimensions of their poetry.

No doubt, you have shared a heavy and sensitive responsibility very smoothly and successfully.

In the end, I must write a few lines about Arpana, a lucky mother having a daughter like her. So pleasant, so humble and taking care of everyone.

My love and lot of appreciation for Alok Bhalla.

Salma Awan

Pakistan



Dear Madame Cour,

What a pleasant experience it was to participate at the SAARC Literature Festival at New Delhi, 2011. I appreciate the dedication, hard work and all the other arduous activities in facilitating the event and looking after a huge amount of delegates from eight countries. Your capabilities in organising are incomparable and the Maha Brahma has created you with a big heart, to develop and strengthen the writers of SAARC.

We must express our heartfelt thanks to Arpana and all the other members of the staff.

I am contributing an article to the local press in this country, and will be thankful if you can send Chamali one or two photos of the inauguration.

My best,

Tissa Kariyawasam

Sri Lanka



My dearest Mother in India, Ms. Ajeet Cour,

It was an honor to have been invited to, and so graciously welcomed at, the SAARC FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE.

As you have asked, I hope to be “in thick and thin, in poverty and richness, in health and illness ! ALWAYS !”

You stated that you “*couldn't spend exclusive, quality time with me*”.

I am part of a closer family who no longer need looking after that much! The proximity of great minds met for the first time, and the opportunity to be with writers and poets who have now become bosom friends.... that was what I enjoyed.

Didi Arpana Caur, with her wonderful smile and sweet words of encouragement is also on my list of the very very special.

I seek your forgiveness for any mistakes I might have made!

Mother may you always be safe, healthy and happy!

“Love ! “

Your Son,
Ibrahim Waheed
Maldives



Dear madam Ajeet ji,

It was indeed a great pleasure to meet you and your daughter Aparna - whom I hold in high regard. Thank you once again for all the effort you have put into the organization of this great event.

I would truly appreciate it if you could send me pictures from the event and the published version of the papers presented.

Warm regards

Sonam Ongmo
Bhutan / USA



Dear Ajeet jee,

Introspecting on the whirlwind of activities I happened to be engaged in of late, I reflect on the experiences I was immersed in as I decipher the learnings that ensued. One of the most remarkable memory of accomplishment has been the insight I gained through

my invitation to the SAARC Festival of Literature held from 25-27 March, 2011 in Delhi—organised by FOSWAL & the Ministry of External Affairs. The exhilarating experience of civilizational and age-old cultural linkages brought home the truth that man with his bountiful creativity, talent and genius is the same the world over. It is only the mind's boundaries whose parameters must extend and cross over to newer & fresher pastures; in the pursuit of unity in diversity. That, I truly found in the course of our deliberations (both academic and informal) with people from such a wide array of regions. So whether it was Afghanistan poets reading their emotionally- fraught poems or the young amateur Nepali poets making their foray, or the seasoned politicians, academicians and social activists delivering their piece, it all accrued in broadening and strengthening my mind. Even the small things like the regional costume, or a dash of regional language built up child-like fascination.

Here we were voicing ourselves without man-made censorship, critical at times but defending Human Rights, & sometimes just relaxing in the NCUI & enjoying the poetical fantasies with hard truths at the core.

We were fortunate to hear highly acclaimed people like Kunwar Akhlaq M. Khan "Shahryar", Kapila Vatsyayan, Abhi Subedi, Nihal Rodrigo, Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, G.K. Chadha, Udaya Narayana Singh, Sohail Hashmi, Sadia Dehlvi, Sukrita Paul Kaur, K. Satchidanandan etc. (sorry can't mention all). It was an honour to see and hear the Guest of Honour Sardarni Gursharan Kaur, First Lady of India followed by Dr. Karan Singh who gave the Keynote Address. We were equally captivated by the Address given by Dr. Abid Hussain, Mr. Mani Shakar Aiyar, Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, Ms. Kiran Mehra-Kerpelman and Ms. Ajeet Cour, the grand lady behind FOSWAL who narrated the physical and emotional odyssey of the organization through the years.

Each day heralded new thought-provoking themes with panel discussions to ignite the minds.

Voices of the Margins: The Oppressed and the Excluded, Contemporary Creativity and Political-Social Conflicts, Politics of Partition, Violence of Terrorism, New Voices of Young Writers and SAARC Identity and Global Culture. Each of these seminars was followed by Poetry Sessions like Homage to Faiz and Ghalib (also video clipping), celebrating Rabindranath Tagore and Nazrul Islam with innovative style of readings & songs.

The Director of the Literature Festival, the highly learned academician Prof. Alok Bhalla needs a special mention. The dynamic Manmohan Singh Mitwa and Prof. Bhalla enlivened the long hours of concentration. One could see and feel the strong presence of Ajeet Cour at every juncture as she moved about to maintain decorum. Her artist daughter Arpana worked behind the scenes looking into nitty gritty details, as did the office staff.

In the end I must say, we all made good friends and enjoyed the lighter moments—clicking photos; brushing aside the many differences and that is the important DIALOGUE.

Thank you for the warm hospitality and the memorable togetherness.

With best wishes for future ventures.

Dr. Rani Massey

Lucknow



My Dear Ajeet,

Thank you very much for the kind, appreciative and encouraging words.

Literature Festival was a great success and also a well-organised event. Frankly, I haven't noticed any lapses or any shortcomings during my stay. Everything, accomodation-food-lodging-transport etc. were comfortable and perfect. Acutally I enjoyed a very comfortable stay in your city. Over the years I was well aware of your great literary skills, but it was during the Lit. Festival that I was convinced of your organising ability & skill. It is simply great.

As you mentioned correctly, we did not have much time, or rather no time at all, to talk 'this and that' about writing & writers personally. But your smiling - charming face answered all of my questions. A rare quality what I have noticed on you, during those three-days was your straight-forwardness and sincerity.

I totally agree with you about the comments on Tagore presentation. For me it turned out to be the most enjoyable session of the itinerary and what a marvellous presentation it was.

It is a great honour for me, at least to think that I have been admitted to the Saarc Literary family headed by you. This is something like simple Kapoor being elevated to Kapoor Sahib like in your 'Happy New Year' story. So any given time hereafter, I'll be with you, dear Ajeet.

One last request. Pl. convey my warm regards to Prof. Alok Bhalla and Aparna. Prof. Bhalla gave a much-needed intellectual touch to the whole festival.

Once again, Thank you, Thank you, Thank you.

Neil Wijerathne

Sri Lanka



Dear Ajeet,

I hope you're enjoying a much-needed reprieve after the demands of the SAARC conference.

I enjoyed meeting you and Arpana – your warmth is quite contagious! Thanks for the lovely gift – the necklace and the stole. Do tell Arpana I'm particularly glad to have her catalogue and have spent these past couple of days looking at her very striking and beautiful images. Her form and her preoccupations interest me.

Thanks again, Ajeet. Stay well, stay vibrant and stay in touch!

Warmly,

Arundhathi

Coimbatore



Dear Ajeet ji,

Thank you very much for your very generous hospitality and for inviting me for the SAARC Literary Festival. I enjoyed it very much. I also managed to meet some friends that I have not met in 25 years!!

We also managed a quick trip to Arpana's gallery/museum. It was wonderful to see her paintings.

Once again thank you very much for your warm generous hospitality and wish you all the very best and many more literary festivals.

With love and best wishes,

Chitra

Sri Lanka



Hello,

I wish to thank you for the days passed recently during SAARC Festival of Literature in Delhi from 25-27th March 2011. I believe, the community of writers around the region should get together like SAARC festival or in any other occasion in any place to share ideas and experiences to contribute to the nation for the benefit of mankind.

I like to remember our personal meeting, discussions and literary presentations in the festival sessions that have brought us so close to each other. I, with this opportunity like to thank the organising authority of the SAARC festival, and particularly Ms Ajeet Cour for her efforts and workload she has taken to make it successful.

Look forward to hearing from you and I believe, our relation will be strengthening more and more in future days.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bimal Guha

Chairman, LEKHOK SAMPRITI (a forum for writers' amity)

Dhaka, Bangladesh



Dear Ajeet Aunty,

This is to thank you for putting up such a wonderful event and let us meet such wonderful people, yet again!

I am sure everyone who attended is still reeling with the love and vibration of the impeccable Festival hosted single handedly by yourself.

I am very proud to be a part of your writers' family and, indeed very honoured to be associated with a great personality like yourself.

We all enjoyed not only some scintillating readings, of poetry from eight countries, but also lovely and informative interjections by you for the better understanding of things.

We also were very much at home with all the arrangements done by FOSWAL.
Thank you once again

your, Shail

Jammu



Dear Ajeet ji,

Thanks a lot for inviting me in SAARC FESTIVAL OF CONFERENCE. No doubt it was a great occasion, a platform to interact with the intellects of the region. I appreciate the labour and the efforts done by you ,Arpana ji and the team for this wonderful event. We have to move forward for peace and harmony in the region and paint colours of love and harmony on a broader canvas. My personal thanks to you, Arpana ji, Alok Bhalla and specially to Manmohan Singh Mitwa ji.

I will definitely send you an article about the event. My love to all !

Farheen Chaudhry

Pakistan



My dear Ajeet Cour

I am really grateful to you that you invited me and gave an opportunity to present my thoughts in front of noble and learned people. I feel proud to be a part of your August organization (SAARC) where I learned a lot.

Regards

Maheen Hisbani

Pakistan



My Dear Ajeet G,

Thanks for your letter date 1st April.

I am really thankful to the entire team of FOSWAL, and surely your good self too under whose leadership such a nice festival was arranged. Hats off and Cheers for the team

work of the entire team.

I am really thankful to you for inviting me and providing me an opportunity to be part of the SARC family and that of FOSWAL.

I am also thankful to you for providing me an opportunity to meet the friends of other seven countries of SARC which in fact was only possible with this kind of an opportunity.

I offer my Special appreciations for Ms. Avereer Chaurey, and Prof. Minoti Chatterjee, for their out class presentation. Not to forget our beloved baby Ayesha Zee Khan, a bridge between us and FOSWAL. Brilliant member of the family we are to be proud of.

Best Regards and heartily expression of Love.

Zahid Abbas

Pakistan



My dear Ajeet,

Many many thanks for looking after Chitra and me so well .

Am now working on my paper which you will have, perhaps, even in advance of the April 25 deadline: you are entitled to shoot me dead, if not.

In the Conf. was particularly involved in Academic Seminars (I) Voices of the Margins; and (IV) Contemporary Creativity and Political-Social Conflicts. I therefore will be repeating/elucidating what I said.

- a. Add fresh up-dated comments on those themes ?
- b. Comment/support very, very briefly on significant comments of others ?
- c. As the themes of session V (partition, violence , terrorism) are related to Sri Lanka's situation, could I also cover some points on them as well ? and
- d. Comment on the overall contemporary relevance/value of the Festival

Waiting for your response to light my lamp.

Thanks again and Love from Chitra and me to you and Arpana

Nihal Rodrigo

Sri Lanka

