

## EVENTS, INQUIRIES, NEWS, NOTICES, REPORTS

A NUMBER of Urdu writers and patrons left us during the past eighteen months, among them: (2010), Wazir Agha, Mukhtaruddin Ahmad Arzoo, Azeemuddin Azeem, Ayub Mirza, Anis Nagi; (2011) Bakhtiyar Adeeb, Mansoor Ahmad, Rizwan Ahmad, Izhar Asar, Azad Gulati, Fazl Ilahi Bahar, A. Hameed, Ishrat Qadri, Raza al-Jabbar, Muhammad Ishaq Jalalpuri, Rashid Abdus Sami Jalil, Akhtar Jamal, Majaz Kanpuri, Qazi Dilshad Nishtar, Aqeel Shadab, Rafat Siddiqi, Wajida Tabassum, Muzaffar Warsi, Israr Zaidi, Sajida Zaidi, Zahida Zaidi.

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

#### **39th Annual Conference on South Asia (Madison, 15–17 October 2010)**

JAMEEL AHMAD (University of Washington): “The Ghazal and Its Legacy: From Nineteen-Century India to the Shores of America.”

ZAINAB CHEEMA (University of California, Irvine): “The Tawaif and Her City: Performance and Medium in Nineteenth-Century Lucknow.”

JENNIFER DUBROW (University of Chicago): “Debating Urdu’s First ‘Novel’: The Critical Reception of *Fasana-e Azad* in Late Nineteenth-Century Lucknow.”

SADAF JAFFER (Harvard University): “Ismat Chughtai’s Autobiographical Struggle for Self-Definition.”

PASHA MOHAMAD KHAN (Columbia University): “Marvelous Histories: Between Qissa and Tarikh in Late Mughal India.”

DAVID LUNN (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London): “*Jinbe Naz He*: Sahir Ludhianvi, ‘Secular’ Urdu, and the Vicissitudes of Genre.”

GEETA PATEL (University of Virginia): "Margin Calls: Marginalities and Fiscal Sovereignty."

C. RYAN PERKINS (University of Pennsylvania): "Constructing the Public in Late Colonial India: Sharar, Chakbast and *Gulzar-e Nasim*."

SAYYEDA RAZVI (University of California, Davis): "Urdu as the In-Between: Language and the Politics of Translation in Colonial India."

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**Association For Asian Studies, Special Joint Conference with the International Convention of Asian Scholars (Honolulu, 31 March–03 April 2011)**

KAVITA S. DATLA (Mount Holyoke College): "Urdu Nationalism: Nation, Region, and Literary Variants."

MEHR A. FAROOQI (University of Virginia): "Literary Paradigms in the Conception of South Asian Muslim Identity: Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Hasan Askari."

LARYSA MYKYTA (North Carolina State University): "Lifting the Quilt: Ismat Chughtai through the Lens of Contemporary Feminism."

ROBERT L. PHILLIPS (Emory University): "'All Were Delighted by This Sight': The Ramayan of Khushtar in Word and Image."

AFROZ TAJ (University of North Carolina): "Tainted Literature: Women's Writing in Mid-Twentieth-Century Urdu Magazines."

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**Birth Centenary Conference on Ahmed Ali and  
Fourth Ahmed Ali Memorial Lecture**

An International Conference to celebrate the first birth centenary of Ahmed Ali (1910–1994), entitled "Ahmed Ali, Progressive Writers, and Bilingual Creativity," was held 10–12 February 2011 at Lucknow University. It was sponsored by the Sahitya Akademi, in association with the Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies and the Department of English, Lucknow University.

Among others, scholars from the United States, United Kingdom, University of Lucknow, Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi), Aditi Mahavidyalaya College (University of Delhi), HNB Garhwal University (Uttarkhand), and Lady Shriram College (University of Delhi) read papers on different aspects of Ahmed Ali's works.

Twenty-one papers were presented, but more were submitted and quite a few research scholars, including those from Pakistan, could not attend due to their inability to obtain visas in time.

The Conference opened in the Great Hall of Learning with a lighting of the Lamp of Knowledge followed by a welcome speech by Gitanjali Chatterjee, Deputy Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi, and a short welcome by the Head of the English Department of the host university, Dr. Madhu Mehrotra. Harish Trivedi, Chairperson of the Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies gave an introduction to the “Themes and Issues” and this was followed by an inaugural address by the Vice Chancellor, Manoj K. Mishra.

Ahmed Ali’s son Orooj and daughter Shahana also spoke on the occasion and at the valedictory session. They were greatly appreciated by the scholars, faculty members and audience at large for the personal insights they offered on Ahmed Ali’s life as a man, a writer and a father.

Orooj Ahmed Ali delivered the first keynote address, “The Light of the Lamp: Professor Ahmed Ali, A Personal View.” He spoke about (1) the many facets of Ahmed Ali as a husband, father, writer, poet, critic, translator, diplomat and entrepreneur; (2) his pioneering role in the development and shaping of the modern Urdu short story; (3) his switching over to writing in English, producing his classic novel *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and subsequently *Ocean of Night* (1964) and *Of Rats and Diplomats* (1985); (4) how Ahmed Ali, the only truly creative writer among the founders of the Progressive Writers Movement, was alone left to bear the brunt of the storm caused by the publication of *Añgārē*; and (5) his parting of ways with the Progressives over the editorial policy of *New Indian Literature* (the English-language organ of the Progressive Writers) because he believed in the autonomy of literature—as opposed to using it for the explicit purpose of propaganda as demanded by the communists who had taken over the Association—and the resulting hostile campaign against him in India and Pakistan, and the presentation of a one-sided history of the Progressive Writers Movement and Association since.

Orooj Ahmed Ali also discussed Ahmed Ali’s role as a successful diplomat, first in the People’s Republic of China, where he was a Visiting Professor of English at National Central University (Nanking) until the events of 1947 intervened and obliged him to opt for Pakistan and work for the new country in China as a diplomat; and next, in 1951, in Morocco.

The presentation concluded with a discussion of Ali’s translations into English from Chinese, Persian, Urdu, Indonesian and Arabic, especially his *Al-Qur’ān, A Contemporary Translation*.

The second keynote address, “Ahmed Ali’s Private and Public Worlds,” was delivered by Alistair Niven (Director, Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, U.K.). He discussed how Ahmed Ali was both a psalmist praising the inheritance of the Islamic Subcontinent and an intuitive observer of private behavior and relationships. Niven attempted to make sense of the possible contradictions in Ali’s fiction and to claim him as a writer very much in tune with today’s world.

Ashish Roy (St. Stephen’s College, University of Delhi) presented “The City as a Heterotopic Site in Ahmed Ali,” connecting the author’s two novels *Twilight in*

*Delhi* and *Ocean of Night* in an existential-historiographic context, and arguing that the relative obscurity to which the author has been consigned is symptomatic of the way Indian historiography has lost out on that literary movement by appropriating a valuable cultural-civilizational matrix in extreme “orientalized” forms and creating an exorcised space which, in fact, the two novels radically address.

In his paper “Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*: A Comparative Study in the Postcolonial Perspective,” S.Z.H. Abidi (Lucknow University) stated that although *Twilight in Delhi* contains nostalgia in self-representation, it also contains searing criticism of a segment of the Muslim population for its political collusion with the British against India. He also argued that both novels are examples of anticolonial resistance and an assertion of Indian nationalism.

Another excellent paper, “Imag(in)ing the City; Towards a Chronological Notion of Time and Space in Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi*,” was presented by Nishat Haider (Lucknow University). She commenced with “... [Ahmed Ali] is a ‘Muslim fourth to the Indian big three of the 1930s—Rao, Narayan, and Anand’” and discussed how he was not only one of the most active participants of the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association in 1936, but also one of the signatories of the first Manifesto of April 1933. She also discussed how he broke away from the paradigmatic Marxist stranglehold of the Progressive ideology and pursued the elusive world of individual consciousness in his creative works. Employing a Bakhtinian chronotope lens to examine the space-time relationships in *Twilight in Delhi*, she attempted to establish just how effective that method is for analyzing the novel in terms of characters, setting, time period and events.

“The ‘Progressive’ Urdu Afsana: Towards a New Aesthetic,” was presented by Fatima Rizvi (Lucknow University). It focused on Ali’s role as the front-runner of the modern Urdu short story in that his fictional work prepared the ground for the future development of the experimental short story in Urdu.

Harish Trivedi’s paper, “Twilight and ‘Blackout’: Ahmed Ali and British Censorship,” drew attention to the author’s courage and artistic integrity: even though an aspiring and unknown author at the time, Ali refused to delete any portions against the British Raj in the novel, as demanded by the British censors. Trivedi had gathered his evidence painstakingly from the records of the Hogarth Press, London.

The remaining papers, whether presented or submitted for the Conference, discussed the author’s English novels, his translation of the Qur’ān, his bilingualism, his role as the cofounder of the Progressive Writers’ Movement, and his pioneering efforts to usher the Urdu short story into the modern age. Comparisons of Ali’s pre- and postcolonial role as a writer of fiction with that of other leading writers of the Commonwealth countries were also made. The Conference was well balanced in its coverage of different aspects of the author’s work and remained interesting from its inauguration through its conclusion with queries, comments and brief but lively back-and-forth between the participants and the audience. The presence and active participation of the author’s son and daughter at the Conference made it all the more interesting and impressed upon the scholars that Ahmed Ali was much more than a research subject and that he was a warm and gentle human

being with life-long friendships and relationships—someone who carried a consciousness of his heritage and valued the traditions of his ancestors.

The participants and listeners were unanimous in the view that interest in research on Ahmed Ali has suffered because his works are no longer in print. The Conference revived interest in studying different aspects of the author's works and personality, as well as his importance to Indo-Pakistan letters and Commonwealth literature and language studies.

The Fourth Ahmed Ali Memorial Lecture, "The Truth of Fictions," was delivered by S.R. Faruqi on 23 February 2011 under the auspices of the English Department, Jamia Millia Islamia (Delhi). Both Shahana and Orooj Ahmed Ali participated and spoke about their father. The Vice Chancellor, Dr. Najeeb Jung, after inaugurating the Memorial Lecture, had to leave in a hurry to meet the press since one day earlier Jamia Millia Islamia was given a minority status by the Indian Government, although this institution has been fulfilling the quota of twenty-five percent admissions from the underprivileged sections of society, being perhaps the last nail in its coffin as it were.

—SHAHANA AHMED ALI  
Karachi, 10 March 2011

## II

### Awards

It was announced on 24 September 2010 that Indian Urdu poet Akhlaq Khan Shahryar is the recipient of the 2008 Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary award.

Indian Urdu critic, poet and fiction writer S.R. Faruqi received the 2010 *Sitāra-e Imtīyāz*, the highest civilian award granted by the Government of Pakistan.

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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*