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**Press Release**  
**South Asian Festival of Sufism and Buddhism**  
**(23 February 2019)**

The **South Asian Festival of Sufism and Buddhism** which is being organized by Sahitya Akademi, in collaboration with Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (FOSWAL) continued for the second day at the Akademi auditorium in New Delhi on 23 February, 2019.

The Third Session of *South Asian Festival of Sufism and Buddhism* was devoted to Poetry Readings in which Indike Nuwan Thotawaththa (from Sri Lanka), Nur Quamrun Nahar (Bangladesh), Indra Kumari Vishwa (Bhutan) and Russel Rahel (Bangladesh) presented their poems. The session was chaired by Mr. Ashraf Jewel (from Bangladesh). Besides chairing the session, he also presented some of his own poems. The next part of the Third Session was scheduled for paper presentations. It was chaired by Sri Ram Dayal Rakesh (from Nepal) who was also conferred with Sahitya Akademi's Premchand Fellowship in 2013. While referring to the subject and quoting from Nehru, he said – culture widens the mental horizons of people. He talked about the influence and inspiration of Sufism. The whole Bhakti andolan was a by-product of Sufism. Love is the fountainhead of Sufism and material wealth doesn't matter; peace, love, brotherhood, harmony are the essential elements of Sufism. They are means of salvation, nirvana and moksha. Ms. Abdul Haq Lareena (from Sri Lanka) presented her paper on the poems based on Sufism and Buddhism. She said Sufism and Buddhism are lights of love filled with compassion and peace. She raised certain questions relating to women's journey from ancient times to the present day. The next speaker was Rev. Dampahala Rahula Thero (from Sri Lanka). He said that it is our duty to spread humanism which must be protected with all possible means. Sufism is neither philosophy, nor religion; it enlightens us about love which is essential for all. He mentioned about the teaching of Buddha and their relevance. Truth is one, you can't hide truth and sun for a long time, they are bound to enlighten human beings.

The Fourth Session had three speakers to present their papers. It was chaired by Mohammad Nurul Huda (from Bangladesh). Sri Anand Kumar in his paper, gave a detailed account of *Padmavat*, the famous epic. Another speaker, Ms. Kala Ramesh said Buddha talked of *shunyata* – the infinite. Oneness, merging into one pulsating loneliness. She suggested one should be very sparing in using words in writing Haiku, an eight word poem. It will give you a whole world of imagination. She correlated nothingness to Haiku. The next speaker, Mohd. Nurul Huda (from Bangladesh) presented a long poem on Sufism and divine unity. He said that Sufism and Buddhism are the two ways of getting out of sufferings and attaining salvation. The next part of the Fourth Session was chaired by Riyaz Punjabi. Speaking on Sufism, he said that it provides hope in darkness. India is not just to be seen in the context of geography but as an entire continent. India is a land of culture, traditions, Vedas, Upanishads and is a messenger of peace and brotherhood. Let us not forget that the Buddha travelled from one corner to another corner of northern and central India and preached about human salvation. Cautioning about the mad race of human beings to acquire material resources, he said it is our duty to be alert. We have to dig out deep to know what spirituality is. Happiness is an essence of spirituality. When you merge with the universe, you merge with humanity which relays the

message of love and affection. The speaker in this session was Abu Ishahoque Hossain (from Bangladesh) who presented an illuminating paper on the Bauls. He tried to trace the origins of Buddhism. The next speaker was Ahmed Khaliq Mominzada (from Afghanistan). He spoke on the crux of Sufism. Sufism exists in every human being. It leads us to peace of mind, we express our inner world to outside. Love makes us like water which has no colour but reflects every colour. He concluded saying that Sufism means ignoring all the negativity. We enter the ocean where there is no discrimination and we find our creator.

The Fifth Session had two inner sessions of poetry reading. The first was chaired by Deo Prakash Choudhary(India). Mahesh Paudyal(Nepal), Muhib Ur Rahman(Afghanistan) and Kavita Mukesh(India), read their poems. In the next inner session of poetry reading, M.Afsar Rahbeen(Afghanistan) presided, while Anupam Roshni(Nepal) Varsha Das(India) and Tenzin Tsundue(Tibetan Refugee) and the chairman himself presented their poems.

In the paper presentation part of the Fifth Session, S M Faridur Rahman(Bangladesh) showed a short film on a Baul singer in Bangladesh, and how he and his colleagues contributed to Sufism in that country. Next Shaikh Shahbaz Riad, an education professional, made a power-point presentation explaining how Sufism was made use of in the school curriculum between Class III and Class X.

The Sixth Session began with poetry reading. Gul Agha Ahmadi(Afghanistan) chaired the session. Poets Sindhu Rijal(Nepal) and Lareena Abdul Haq(Sri Lanka) recited their poems. Ms.Lareena sang beautiful Tamil lyrics. The second part of the session also was poetry reading, and Rinzin Rinzin(Bhutan) was chairperson. Poets Gulshan Jhumur(Bangladesh), Shreedhar Gautam(Nepal), Mehtas Nur(Bangladesh), read their poems.

The last part of the Sixth Session was a mixed one with poets reading their poems, and academicians making paper presentations. The session was presided over by Professor Niaz Zaman, former Professor English, Dhaka University. Professor H.S.Shivaprakash, presented his poems on Sufism and Buddhism, followed by the paper presentation of Gunathilaka Siriwardhana Caritgh Priyadarshana(Sri Lanka). His topic was "Buddhist Perspective on Society.". Why do we need religion, he asked. There are many kinds of arguments in favour and against religion. Religion is practiced at the individual level. One does not normally have an understanding of the other's religion. Buddhism is a philosophy as well as a religion. The teachings of the Buddha, are in the form of principles readily applicable to society. Religions are all manmade and may have defects and lacunae inherent in them. The Buddha was not a Buddhist, Jesus Christ was not a Christian and the Holy Prophet Muhammad was not a Muslim. Dr.A.J.Thomas and Mr.Tenzin Tsundue were invited a second time to read their poems, which they did. Tenzin sang a beautiful song, like a prelude to a Tibetan opera.

Concluding the session, Professor Niaz Zaman made a presentation on Sufi and Baul influences in Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry. She said though Tagore was influenced by Baul songs, Kazi imagined himself to be a Baul, and his poetry was permeated by Baul influence.

The Festival will continue for tomorrow, 24<sup>th</sup> February, being its last day.

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# SOUTH ASIAN FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE SUFISM AND BUDDHISM

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and

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