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PRESS RELEASE South Asian Festival of Sufism and Buddhism

The third and last day of the South Asian Festival of Sufism and Buddhism, organized by Sahitya Akademi in collaboration with FOSWAL, started with the Seventh Session. The first part was a poetry reading session with Ms Kala Ramesh, representing India, in the chair. She read a few Haikus and a Tanka which reminded the audience of how unity creates a resonance that keeps poetry pulsating. Ms Nahida Ashrafi from Bangladesh read a few English translations of her poems, such as “Eraser” and “All Sparkling Dawns of Earth are Celebrated for You.” Mr Eak Prasad Duwadi also read his poems in this session. The next part of this session was another poetry reading which was chaired by Ms Lufta Hannum Salima Begum from India who read two poems—“The Autobiography of a Chair” and “You Are There,” a poem on Mirabai. Mr Binod Khaitan read some very interesting poems, including one on Van Gogh. A few poems were also presented by Mr Balbir Madhopuri (India) and Abu Ishahoque Hossain (Bangladesh). Papers were presented as part of this session, by Mr Abdur Razzaque Khan (Bangladesh) and Mr Mohammad Mansoor Nasimi (Afghanistan). Mr Mohammad Mansoor Nasimi chaired this session and spoke in detail on Sufism and the characteristics of a true Sufi. Mr Abdur Razzaque Khan spoke on the importance of love in spiritual communication. He urged all to be selfless as selfish desires are an indication of the emptiness of the soul. Ms Geetali Borah from India read a chapter from her novel on Lord Buddha’s wife.

The Eighth Session started with poetry readings by Mr Muchkund Dubey (India), Mr Saleh Mujahid (Bangladesh), Rajendra Parajuli (Nepal), Mr A. J. Thomas (India), Mr Mohammad Nurul Huda (Bangladesh) and Mr Kaushal Dutta (India). Mr Saleh Mujahid said he believed that true Sufis do not discard any religion or faith as they consider everything a learning lesson. Mr Kaushal Dutta read a poem on anti-terrorism, Mr R. Parajuli’s poem was titled “Had I Been with You.” Mr A.J. Thomas presented his reflections on “Mystic Poetry” and Mr Mohammad Nurul Huda read out a powerful poem on the witch Sycorax, the mother of Ariel in *The Tempest*. At the end of the session, Mr Muchkund Dubey read out some of his Hindi translations of Fakir Lal Shah’s poems. In the next part of the Eight Session, several well-known scholars—Ms Niaz Zaman from Bangladesh, Prof Anand Kumar, Prof. Riyaz Punjabi and Ms Asha from Sri Lanka—assembled to share their views on Buddhism and Sufism. Prof. Riyaz especially talked on how Guru Nanak went from village to village looking for and collecting traditions of different faiths, and how his efforts resulted in a synthesis of all available mystical aspects, in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The first part of the Ninth Session was devoted to poetry readings. The Chairperson was Ms Kavita Singhal (India) and poems were read by Mr Yasawardanage Nimal Jayaratne (Sri Lanka), Uttam Bahadur Limbu (Nepal) and Mr Mithilesh Shrivastava (India). Papers were presented in the next part of the Ninth Session by Mr S. M. Faridul Rahman on behalf of Ms Shaila Rahman Tithi (Bangladesh) and by the chairperson Mr Ahmad Farid Sultani (Afghanistan). Ms Shaila’s paper concentrated on Buddhism and its contribution to peace building in the SAARC countries. Mr Sultani’s paper was on the biography of a Sufi poet of Afghanistan. Mr. Shamsul Haq Hairan presented a heart-wrenching picture of Afghan children and their dream to live, through his poem.

The Tenth Session began with the poetry reading chaired by Mr Keshav Sigdel (Nepal) who also read his poems. Mr Subhash Neerav (India) presented his poems in Hindi. Rev. Dharmapala Rhula (Sri Lanka) began saying that he is not a poet, yet he wrote down certain lines. They were mostly aphorism-like. Mr Bhisma Upreti (Nepal) presented his poem in English. Mr R. S. Aurora (India) presented his poems in Urdu. Mr Ashraf Jewel (Bangladesh) also presented his poems. The second part of this session, chaired by Mr Abul Momen (Bangladesh) was devoted to paper presentations. Mr Momen's paper dwelt on love, humility and compassion, and how the points of dissent among countries can be erased with the application of these qualities. The other paper presenter was Mr Tajendra Luthra (India). As a positive psychology practitioner, he spoke on meditations and how meditations borrowed from India have helped countries of the west flourish. He was of the view that India has lagged behind because we have not followed our own contemplative practices and meditations that we lent to other countries. The last part comprised poetry readings and chaired by Ms Tarannum Riyaz (India) who read some of her poems in English in her unique style. She also recited some of her trademark Urdu ghazals. Mr Manpreet Singh (India) presented some of his ghazals, and Mr D. M. Nadun Yasitha Dasanayaka (Sri Lanka) and Ms Meenu Minocha (India) read out a few of their poems.

In the Valedictory Function, the vote of thanks was delivered by Prof. Anand Kumar and Ms Ajeet Cour. Prof. Kumar began his valedictory speech remarking how each morning brings man to think of the darkness ahead, but asserted that he is an optimist, who believes in human evolution. Man is the only being who can interfere in his own evolution. This is done by meditation and transcendence, transforming or evolving the self into higher states. Yoga brings out the deepest self within us and helps perfect it. He further quoted the sloka in the Rig Veda which says that there is only one truth, which many people see in many ways. Those who say that they are the custodians of truth, pave way for strife. The Upanishads also mention about all parts making up one whole; all rivers reach the oceans and merge with it. Likewise, humanity joins together as one stream. Ms Ajeet Cour thanked everyone and every country for attending and participating in the Festival, and sought everybody's cooperation in building peace in the world. She declared that there would be another literary festival organized by FOSWAL in October this year, and if Pakistan is able to join, then it would be called a SAARC festival, if not it will be a South Asian Festival of Literature. She invited all to participate in that Festival as well.

Representatives from the participating South Asian countries—Mr. Hettige Nihal Anurasiri from Sri Lanka, Mr Rinzin Rinzin from Bhutan, Mr Shamsulhaq Hairan from Afghanistan, Mr Mohammad Nurul Huda and Mr Alim-ur-Rahman from Bangladesh, Mr Keshab Sigdal from Nepal, spoke a few words representing their literatures. Dr. Anand Kumar called upon Mr A. J. Thomas from India to speak a few words on behalf of Sahitya Akademi. He thanked the participants for their active cooperation and FOSWAL for organizing such an event in collaboration with the Akademi. Finally, Mr Ashraf Jewel read the Resolution of the South Asian Festival of Sufism and Buddhism, which promotes peace, harmony, humanity and mutual understanding, and has been endorsed by the South Asian countries.

As the last item of the Festival, the film *Ramleela of Kheriya*, directed by Prof. Molly Kaushal, was screened.

K. Sreenivasarao

SOUTH ASIAN FESTIVAL OF SUFISM AND BUDHISM

February 22-24, 2019

Sahitya Akademi Auditorium
Rabindra Bhawan, 45 Preeti Chowk Road, New Delhi

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**SOUTH ASIAN FESTIVAL OF
JAINISM AND BUDDHISM**

January 22-24, 2019

Sri Lanka



Buddhist