

Poets Translating Poets: ‘We share same human legacy’

Poets Attiya Dawood, Amar Sindhu, Afzal Ahmed Syed, Ali Akbar Natiq, Daniela Danz, Andreas Altmann exchanged their poetry



<http://www.dawn.com/news/1220126/poets-share-same-human-legacy>

KARACHI: We may come from different cultures and speak different languages, but human beings do not differ from each other all over the world. This was the consensus on Monday evening among six versifiers who took part in a five-day workshop titled ‘Poets Translating Poets’, initiated by the Goethe Institut, at T2F.

The six poets who discussed the whole process with writer Dr Asif Farrukhi in the workshop’s culminating event were Attiya Dawood and Amar Sindhu (Sindhi),

Afzal Ahmed Syed and Ali Akbar Natiq (Urdu) and Daniela Danz and Andreas Altmann (German).

Before the discussion, Goethe Institut Director Stefan Winkler told the audience that the project launched by Goethe Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai was aimed at developing a platform for South Asian and German poets to translate each other's works. From July this year, it has brought together a total of 48 poets writing in 19 languages and 20 translators from South Asia and Germany over a period of eight months, he said.

Dr Farrukhi put the first question to Amar Sindhu. He asked her about the whole experience. She replied it was exciting for her because she interacted with the German poets and went through the creative process of translation, and at the same time got to know about their culture. She expressed pleasure at the fact that she was able to understand Germany poetry as well.

Afzal Syed said by engaging in the exercise he felt that the kind of issues that poets touched upon was the same all over the world. He added it made him wish that he himself had written some of the (German) poems.

Dr Farrukhi then asked Daniela Danz as to how she felt to be in Karachi. She said she wanted to know about the city. On the project, she enthused that she had not expected that some of the poems (Urdu and Sindhi) that she read would be so close to German sensibility. "It's the same everywhere," she exclaimed.

Attiya Dawood said the whole experience made her realise how important translations were. She told the audience that working alongside the German poets allowed her to question them regarding as to what simile (tashbeeh) they were using and what it meant. Eventually, she said, she got to understand that every culture entailed the same elements.

Ali Akbar Natiq spoke about the metaphors and imageries employed by Urdu and German poets and he, too, found out that there were not many dissimilarities in them, so much so that he said on one occasion when he translated a German poem, one of the German poets hugged him. This led him to understand the fact that all human beings and their poetic legacy had similar attributes — all poets were similar to each other.

Andreas Altmann said it was his first visit to South Asia. Like the other speakers, he was of the opinion that the community of poets had a great many shared qualities.

Responding to a question, Daniela Danz said while translating the poems she thought to herself that she would have liked to write them (as original poems).

Altmann expressed the opinion that the world of poetry should expand. He said his experience of being in Karachi might feature in one way or another in his forthcoming poems.

Afzal Syed was amazed at how everyday life was transformed into a larger metaphor in the German poems. In that regard, he gave the example of one of German poems in which the poet had used honeybees in a political context.

Attiya Dawood mentioned in the same vein about how Iranian tiles featured in one of German poems, giving her the sense of identicalness.

Dr Farrukhi read out a Walter Benjamin quote signifying the role of translations: “Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly... a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux.”

After that poets read out each other's poems and their translated versions. It was enjoyed by the audience.

The speakers also lauded the services of linear translators Shamim Manzar, Nusrat Sheikh (for Urdu-German) and Gul Mohammad Sahito (Sindhi-German).

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