

“Poetry from a troubled land”

By Atle Hetland

The renowned Pashtu poet and teacher Ahmad Foud from Swat moderated a session about Pashtu poetry at the Islamabad Literature Festival yesterday afternoon, or “poetry from a troubled land”, as was the title of the session, although it was explained that such a title was not necessarily representative for KPK and other Pashtu speaking areas, and for that matter, it could also pertain to other lands.

Haseena Gul, a poet and broadcaster with PBC, originally from Mardan, was one of the prominent speakers, with a father who is also a renowned poet. From the Pashtu speaking areas in Baluchistan was poet Arif Tabassum, originally from Loralai. Muhib Wazir was the more academic member of the panel, having written a dissertation about Humanism in classic Pashtu poetry. Currently, he is working on his Ph.D. dissertation about political thought in Pashtu poetry. His dissertation will be written in Pashtu and presented at Bacha Khan University in Charsadda in KPK.

Ahmad Foud said that emotions are central in all poetry everywhere. “Pashtu poetry is indeed about emotions, music, peace and beauty”, he said. “But I don’t agree with those who say that the Pashtu culture is only peaceful. The land and conditions are harsh, and people have to defend themselves.”

“Today, people are affected by the circumstances in the Pashtu-speaking areas. This cannot be ignored and better times are to return to our land”, he said.

“Some say that Pashtu poetry and other literature have become less peaceful after 9/11. But I don’t think that is right either. There are certain writers who have become more militant but I don’t think it is a general trend”, he said in a conversation after the session.

“The old two-line Pashtu poetry form known as *tappa* is still alive, and people learn the short poems and sayings by heart. They belong to our cultural heritage, often without any names given to the poet. But many of the *tappa* poets are women, Ahmed Faoud said, “and the men have taken the credit”.

He explained that Pashtu language is a beautiful form of poetry, with rules for rhyme and rhythm. “But today it is also common to write in free style”, he said.

Several poems were recited to the participants’ great appreciation. The poems depicted important issues, such as the woman who didn’t want her young daughter to collect water from the river in the afternoon so that an old man would see and fall in love with her. And another poem about revenge and honour, where the character stressed that if revenge was all there was in honour, he’d rather be dishonourable. And the man (or was it a woman) stressing that ‘we are all fighting a lost battle; we don’t need more arms and weapons and arms’. And the disillusioned writer, who thought that our world today could be likened with a children’s fairytale, where people’s feet were turning backwards.

Speakers and participants alike stressed that it is not easy to publish books in Pashtu in Pakistan. “They are difficult to find in bookshops. It is now easier to find Pashtu books in Afghanistan”, it was said.

No Photos attached.
(Tanveer took pictures.)