HARVARD UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES

AND THE LAKSHMI MITTAL SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE

(IN ASSOCIATION WITH SOUTH ASIAN POETS OF NEW ENGLAND, INDIA DISCOVERY CENTER)

TWENTY NINTH ANNUAL

INDIA POETRY READING

May 18, 2025

Theme- *Peace शान्ति*

Report by Anand Ramanujam

On the radiant afternoon of May 18, 2025, the revered Tsai Auditorium at Harvard University blossomed into a sanctuary of verse, where the air hummed with dreams and the pulse of peace. The 29th Annual India Poetry Reading, a luminous tapestry woven by the Department of South Asian Studies, The Lakshmi Mittal South Asia Institute, South Asian Poets of New England, and the India Discovery Center, unfolded its beauty - each poem a strand, each voice a hue, painting a vision of harmony. Here, in this sacred convergence, poets from distant shores and ancient tongues gathered, their words rising like incense, mingling the echoes of India's myriad languages with the universal yearning for tranquility. Amid a world scarred by conflict, this gathering stood as a beacon, its verses a soft rebellion against conflict, kindling hope in the shared heartbeat of humanity.

INAUGURAL SPEECH

DR. BIJOY MISRA



Dr. Bijoy Misra inaugurated the event with a heartfelt speech, celebrating India's vibrant linguistic and cultural heritage. He traced the event's origins to 1997, inspired by Kathy Galbraith to mark India's 50th independence anniversary, encouraging Harvard students to cherish their native languages. This year's theme, Peace, responds to recent global conflicts, inviting poets to explore harmony through India's diverse languages. Dr. Misra honored key figures—Kathy and John Galbraith, Swami Sarvagatananda, and Brother Blue and Ruth Hill—for their lasting contributions, emphasizing poetry's power to unite and inspire a compassionate world.



PEACE (TAMIL)

ANAND RAMANUJAM

In his bilingual recitation of Swami Vivekananda's "Peace", Anand Ramanujam wove a radiant tapestry of verse. His translation shimmered gently between English and Tamil, painting peace as a timeless, transcendent force— unaffected by life's dualities of strength and weakness, joy and sorrow. With vivid imagery, he described peace as ethereal light amid darkness, the sacred silence punctuating speech, drawing listeners into a serene introspection and a vision of universal harmony.



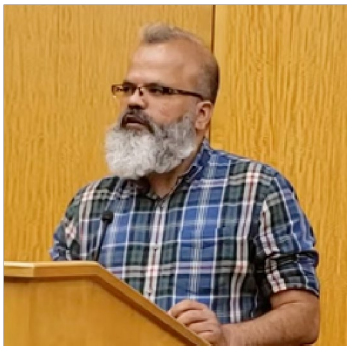
IN SEARCH OF PEACE

MANORAMA CHOUDHURY

Hailing from Odisha, India, Manorama Choudhury delivered a compelling recitation of her original English poem, "In Search of Peace". Her vivid imagery crafted haunting scenes of conflict, from Kashmir's wounded valleys to Gaza's ravaged streets. Reimagining peace, she portrayed it not as the mere absence of sound but as "the presence of understanding"—a lively, unifying force. Her heartfelt verses followed humanity's longing yet hopeful journey toward serenity, inspiring us to embrace peace as a gentle yet powerful healer.

SECRET IN A TATTERED BAG (HINDI)

DR PARMIT KUMAR SINGH



Dr Parmit Kumar Singh enchanted the audience with "The Secret in the Tattered Bag", a poetic tale, written in Hindi, exploring inner strength against society's empty desires. His verses unveiled a weary yet resilient man, followed by a crowd curious about his worn bag. In exhaustion, the man finds peace, growing into a Buddha-like figure through reflection and release. Society, blind to his transcendence, chases empty promises, though some stir, turning "Buddhist," hinting at a dawning shift toward reflection and surrender. By spinning this thoughtful allegory, Dr. Singh urged introspection, suggesting that true peace blooms quietly within the seeker's heart rather than in society's restless pursuits.

WHERE IS PEACE? (BENGALI)

ALOK DE



In soulful Bengali, Alok De sketched a moving picture of global conflicts that scar nations and even taint mythical heavens with demonic unrest. Amid this turmoil, he unearthed Shanti—peace—in the tranquil depths of literature, the boundless sweep of sky, the vast embrace of the ocean, and a radiant spirit pulsing with eternal joy. His resonant chants of Om Shanti echoed through the hall, a universal invocation for harmony, affirming peace as nature's enduring whisper.



A CALL FOR PEACE (HINDI)

NEENA WAHI

With gripping eloquence, Neena Wahi revealed war's bleak futility in a heartfelt Hindi poem, while awakening humanity's deep wish for peace. Rejecting war as a false sign of progress, her poem mourned the lost futures of generations, and lifted peace as a universal cure for conflict. Stark images of suffering, paired with her strong delivery, ignited a fervent call for compassion and reflection, leaving listeners stirred with an aching, luminous hope.

POPE AND PEACE

ARUNDHATI SARKHEL



Arundhati Sarkhel's "Pope and Peace" wove a vibrant tapestry capturing dreams whispered in life's final breaths. Illuminating migrant struggles with heartfelt emotion and spiritual depth, her verses called passionately for peace, emphasizing compassion and shared humanity. She closed with a luminous nod to Tagore, her voice lifting his timeless line, "Be sprinkled with peace on earth," like a melody of hope soaring over a quieted world.

CLOUDS OF PEACE (PUNJABI)

AMANDEEP SINGH



Amandeep Singh's "Clouds of Peace", crafted in eloquent Punjabi, created a bright dreamscape, imagining a world free from war's flames, where gentle rains of healing replace destruction. With a soothing rhythm, the poem questioned humanity's spread of hate, urging an end to cruelty and a return to moral clarity. Its hopeful images and calm flow wrapped the audience in comfort, sparking visions of a peaceful dawn.



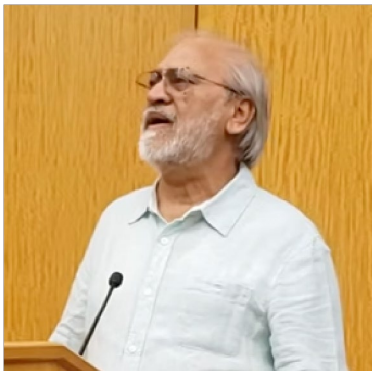
WAR AND THE WANT OF PEACE

GEETHA PATIL

In 'War and the Want of Peace', Geetha Patil skillfully revealed conflict's heavy toll, her words painting haunting scenes of devastation while celebrating human resilience. With deep passion, her poem called for an end to hatred, declaring that love and divine grace can overcome ignorance to build lasting peace. This strong plea envisioned a world healed by compassion, where justice rises above war's senseless destruction.

OUR FUTURE WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (HINDI)

PREM NAGAR



In his striking Hindi poem "Our Future with Artificial Intelligence", Prem Nagar warned of peace's fragile dance amid technological upheaval. Vividly envisioning a stormy future where technology disrupts human calm, he invoked timeless Indian wisdom—from Buddha's compassion, Jainism's nonviolence, Sankhya's discernment, Vedantic unity, and Upanishadic introspection— to champion lasting peace. Amid this tension, hope rises like the sun, a radiant beacon guiding humanity toward peace.

SOURCE OF PEACE IS LOVE (BENGALI)

MAYA DE



In her moving poem composed in Bengali, Maya De, drawing from the wisdom of Ramakrishna and Tagore, mourns the erosion of societal and familial values amid the technological surge of the Kali Yuga—a shadowed age of division and narrowed minds. With elegant poise, her words rise above barriers of caste, creed, and gender, calling for unity as the sacred path to peace. Her reflective verses left listeners stirred, their hearts alight with contemplation and a quiet hope for harmony.



SILENCE OF PEACE (HINDI)

PREETPAL SINGH

With warmth and gentle humor, Preetpal Singh explored the elusive nature of peace in his Hindi poem, showing our futile chase for it in material comforts, finding only brief contentment. His thoughtful reflection, charming yet profound, revealed peace as life's ultimate mystery—perhaps fully embraced only in the silence of our final breath. His vibrant performance, blending wit and wisdom, enthralled the audience, echoing the timeless, universal quest for inner serenity.

PEACE BEYOND BORDERS (TAMIL)

DR SARAVANAN THANGARAJAN



In Peace Beyond Borders, a stirring Tamil poem, Dr Saravanan Thangarajan eloquently contrasted divisive fires at conflict-torn borders with the Cauvery River's gentle breeze. His vivid imagery highlighted peace's transcendent, boundless essence, urging humanity to abandon enmity and embrace harmony, illuminating a vision of collective unity. The poem rose to a bright declaration: true peace lives not in borders but in the shared song of human hearts.

GHALIB GHAZAL (URDU)

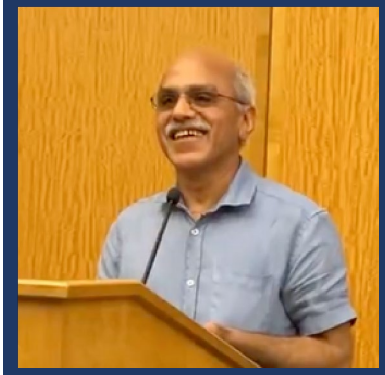
AARYA KAUSHIK



In a soulful recitation, Aarya Kaushik breathed life into Mirza Ghalib's timeless Urdu couplets, weaving a tapestry of remembrance, separation, and grief that stirred deep emotions. Her striking delivery illuminated the delicate dance of beauty and sorrow, portraying grief as an intimate, familiar shadow. Through vivid imagery of deserted towns and faded memories, the poem unveiled the fleeting nature of human pursuits, yet culminated in a profound serenity, embracing peace amid life's intricate complexities.

GHAZAL (URDU)

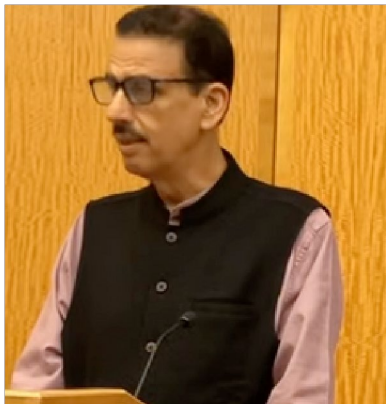
SHAHAB AHMED



Shahab Ahmed's stirring Urdu Ghazal, born in the heart of Pakistan, transcended its roots to become a universal hymn of peace, weaving threads of collective unity and human solidarity. With graceful words, it urged listeners to turn scattered crowds into united groups, calm societal strife, resist oppression with knowledge, and build strong moral character. The poem beckoned all to actively cultivate peace, planting seeds of harmony and sharing the radiant dawn of hope with future generations. It culminated in a bright vision of wise leadership guiding humanity toward global tranquility and mutual understanding, His resonant call lingered, blooming in listeners' hearts as luminous hope.

PAIN (KASHMIRI)

VERINDER RAZDAN



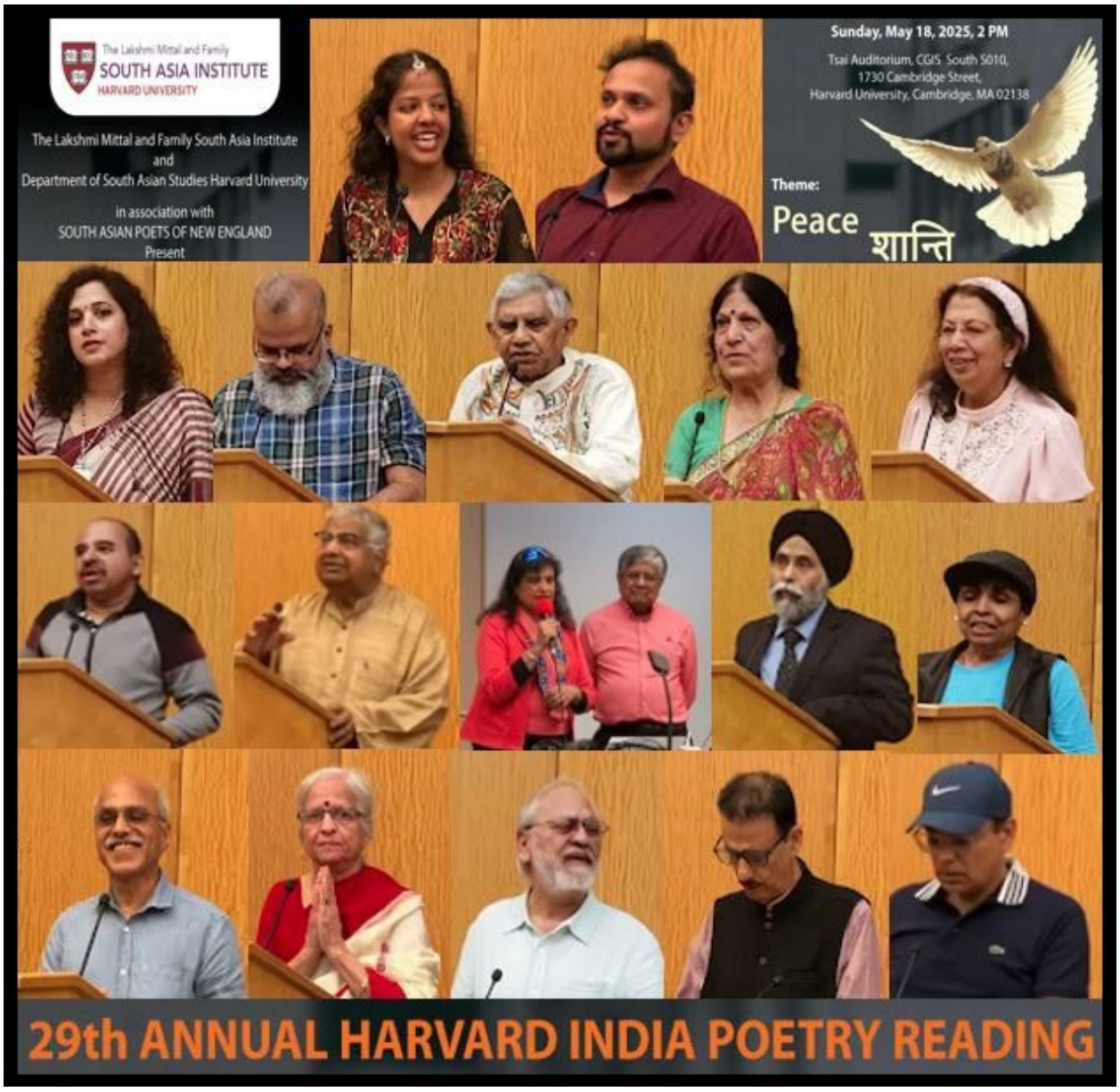
Hailing from Kashmir, Verinder Razdan delivered a heartrending recitation of Dagr (Pain), a poem penned by his late father, the revered Padma Shri Motilal Saqi, a luminary of Kashmiri poetry, history, and culture. Crafted in the shadow of exile, the poem pulses with raw longing and sorrow, weaving the anguish of forced migration from Kashmir. Through vivid imagery, it traces an unbreakable bond to the ancestral land, where generations carved monuments, temples, and monasteries. Yet, amid the sting of displacement and helplessness, the poem rises with resilient hope, seeking spiritual solace and the promise of enduring peace.



A PRAYER FOR PEACE
(SANSKRIT, FROM THE VEDAS)
DR. BIJOY MISRA



Dr. Bijoy Misra closed the event by delving into the essence of peace beyond linguistic boundaries. Vividly illuminating peace as fearlessness and interconnected human emotions, his presenttaion reflected on how diverse languages and cultures come together at the poetry meet to express shared human experiences. Drawing from ancient Indian Vedic texts, Dr. Misra explored the origins of language through primal human sounds, demonstrating how these acoustic syllables express fundamental human emotions like love, fear, and security. He recited and translated verses from the Atharva Veda, showing that true peace arises from feeling safe and protected from internal and external fears. The presentation concluded by affirming the universal nature of human emotions and the common spiritual root shared by all languages and cultures.



We would like to thank all the participants who graced the occasion with their creative presentations.

The video of the event is posted at

https://youtu.be/bUPD7IVSsV4