

Delhi launch of Syed Waliullah's Tree Without Roots

LITERARY CORRESPONDENT

Zubaan organized a book launch of Syed Waliullah's *Tree Without Roots*, the English translation of Syed Waliullah's classic Bengali novel, *Lal Shalu*, at its premises in Hauz Khas, Delhi, on 12th September.

Urvashi Butalia of Zubaan welcomed the audience to the first book launch that it had organized of a book published in Bangladesh. Speaking on the occasion, Niaz Zaman explained that writers.ink had commenced publication with *Tree Without Roots* because of the importance of the book. Not only does it provide a picture of rural Bengal in the early forties, it also provides an insight into the psyche of Muslim Bengal today. She further noted that though Indian books were visible in Bangladesh, Bangladeshi publications did not cross the border. She hoped that with this book launch, more Bangladeshi publications would make it to book stores in India.

Dr Shobhana Bhattacharji, while reviewing the book, noted the lucidity of Syed Waliullah's language as well as his narrative quality. 'Syed Waliullah does not tell the reader,' she said, 'instead, he does what a good novelist should do: he shows the reader.' Dr Radha Chakravarty also commented on the swift-flowing nature of Syed Waliullah's narrative and pointed out that the book was not about fundamentalism.

Among others present on the occasion were Jaya Bhattacharji, Dr Rani Ray, and Margaret McDonell.



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From (L) Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury, Professor Kabir Chowdhury, Professor Afia Dil, Professor Anwar Dil and Professor Sultana Zaman at the event.

By Rubaiyat Khan

An international symposium on the Life and Works of Syed Waliullah was held at the RC Majumdar Auditorium, University of Dhaka on Sunday, February 19th.

Organised by Intercultural Forum, San Diego, USA and writers.ink, the event took place on the occasion of the publication of « *Night of No Moon* », a translated rendition of Syed Waliullah's *Chander Amabasya* by Professor Afia Dil.

Professor Dil received her B.A. Honours and M.A. degrees respectively in English Literature from the University of Dhaka, Master's in English and Applied Linguistics from the University of Michigan, and Ph.D. in Linguistics from Stanford University. She is currently Professor Emeritus at Alliant International University in San Diego, California.

Professor Dil had also translated Waliullah's *Taranga Bhangra*, which was published as « *The Breakers* » by the Bangla Academy in 1987.

Guest speakers at the occasion included Professor Anwar Dil, Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury, Dr. Sultana Zaman, Mr Syed Abul Maksud, Professor Niaz Zaman, Ms. Shaheen Westcombe, Mr. Mortuja Baseer, Professor Rafiqul Islam and Mr. Nurul Karim Naseem. Professor Kabir Chowdhury was the Chief Guest while Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid presided over the symposium.

The speakers provided an eclectic mixture with some impromptu speeches, some written, interspersed with personal anecdotes of having known Waliullah the award-winning novelist, playwright, essayist and short storywriter.

Dr Sultana Zaman, the author's literary agent and relative and Shaheen Westcombe, Waliullah's niece, not only spoke of him as a great writer but also as a person who possessed a generous spirit, while Mortuja Baseer reminisced over his experiences as an illustrator of Waliullah's books.

Syed Abul Maksud also presented an original manuscript, containing unedited portions of the writer's work, at the symposium. Professor Kabir Chowdhury spoke at length of *Chander Amabasya* and of Waliullah's craft.

The writer's works, he mentioned, are infused with internal drama, long monologues, introspections and the likes and Waliullah is said to delve deep into the psyche of the characters he etches. Professor Chowdhury also highlighted the fact that Waliullah had consciously introduced the absurdist technique in his plays, a novel technique in Bengali drama at the time.

All speakers at the symposium lauded the author as a storyteller of the highest rank, as one of the most socially conscious writers of South Asia, and as a visionary who within the short span of his life had made a significant contribution to Bengali Literature.