

Rooted in reality, he spoke his mind



SANJIV SARAF

IMET Munawwar bhai at a few Jashn-e-Rekhta events. A humble man rooted in reality, his magnetic charisma as a shayar unfolded abundantly in TilidlatOS, where he was a popular figure because of his hold on the audience's pulse. He not only (Aimed the stage, but the audience as well.

Munawwar *bhai* could get them immersed in his magic in no time because poetry was not just an intellectual exercise for him. It was truly heartfelt and emotional. And that reflected in his renditions, which were straight from the heart and instantaneously reached the audiences' heart and they would get moved to tears. Munawwar himself would get teary-eyed, his voice would choke while reciting his poems.

Most of the time, this connect did not remain limited to mushairas. He would form life-long bonds with many in the audience. There are many in his huge circle of friends whom he met at such events. We have a common friend based in Dubai who met him 30 years back at a *mashait* in Delhi but has become family now.

Munawwar wrote in Urdu and Hindi (Awudhi) in simple, easy-to-understand language although his works have been translated into many languages. All his works have a beautiful blend of these two languages and touched a chord with the masses.

In the literary fraternity, everyone acknowledges Munawwar's unique contribution to Urdu poetry; often known to eulogise the *mash* okra (beloved). He is, perhaps, the only Urdu poet who made 'mother' his muse. His collection '*Mad*' is widely appreciated among his contemporaries as well as readers. It is not just a tribute to all mothers, but also talks about family values and traditions.

Rooted in social realities, his poetry was all about the common man but exposed society's hypocrisy as well.

Wisi ko ghar mild hiAT mein yaa koidukkan aayee

Mein mime ehhotta than mere hive mein maa aayee'

Munawwar wrote extensively. In 2014, he was honoured with the Jnanpith Award as well as the Sahitya Akademi Award for '*Shand-aba*', though his seminal work on Partition, '*figuliajirnarna*', remains one of his most read and loved works. My personal favourite is '*Safed Jangali Kabootar*'.

Not just his poetry; his every action was straight from the heart. When his daughter got married, the invitation that was sent out in his mother's name had these lines:

'Muammar ki beti ki sheath hai. Vbdai ki ghadi bath ninshkil ki ghadi hogi. Doston ka saath retina bahut zaroori hai.'

To know him was an honour. He was a very dear-hearted man and



1952-2024

**Renowned poet
Munawwar Rana,
who died recently,
wrote in Urdu and
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never cared for money. Many poets of less stature would charge ₹10 lakh to ₹15 lakh for participating in *TilidlatOS* but Munawwar bhai never demanded any money.

I remember once an organiser didn't have the budget to invite him. When Munawwar got to know about it, he called him and said he would not take any money, "*Bass ghar bola ke Haleem ke chawal khila dens.*" That was Munawwar *bhai*.

His transport business was also not doing well. Because of this, he was short of funds in his final days but never asked anyone for anything.

He never forgot a favour or his friends. In his final days, when he was on a ventilator, some friends recorded a message for him. His daughter told later that they could sense some movement in his eyes. Even in an unconscious state, he remembered his friends.

Munawwar bhai was also quite outspoken and courageous. He spoke what he saw and felt. This honesty and raw courage also reflected in his *shayari*. Because of this, he would get into trouble with authorities but that never deterred him. He even returned his Sahitya Akademi Award to protest the growing religious intolerance in India.

Not just his fans. Munawwar bhai was equally loved and respected by his contemporaries, which included many well-known names like Nida Rah and Rahat Indori.

Javed Akhtar *sahib* was also a huge admirer of his *shayari* and persona. He even went to Lucknow to pay his last respects to Munawwar *bhai*. Javed bhai called his death "a big loss for Urdu poetry and culture". His emotional tribute expressed the immense loss felt by his friends and the entire literary community.

— *The writer is the founder of Relhla Foundation (As told to Rena SudSinha)*