

Translating Manto from Urdu

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- Published at 06:21 pm March 28th, 2019



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Lit news

The Department of English and Humanities of BRAC University organized a discussion about translating the Urdu short stories of eminent author Saadat Hasan Manto into Bangla on Wednesday. In addition to Manto's life and craft, speakers at the program highlighted aspects of Urdu language and literature.

Javed Hussien, the main speaker, shared his experience of translating Manto's stories into Bangla, which have been put together in a collection (*Kalo Shimana*) by Prothoma. He began by debunking the commonly held perceptions about Urdu.

He said, “The main feature of Urdu is that it doesn’t have a certain national origin like Bangla, French or German.”

“The Urdu that Pakistani media promotes is not the Urdu that the general public of Pakistan speaks ,” he claimed.

Referring to Urdu which can be traced back to the 9th century, and later, can be found into books like *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abu'l Fazl, he said, “It was named ‘Urdu’ by the British as a consequence of their conflict with the Mughals. Before that, it was called by different names and widely spoken, mostly, by the common people of the region.”

“It is an irony,” he lamented, “that the language which had evolved by building bridges among the people of greater India became one of the main reasons of its partition also.”

The discussion was presided over by Prof Firdous Azim, chairman of the English Department at BRAC University. Highlighting the role of language academies, she said, “The Urdu Academy of Dhaka University needs to be more active.”

Referring to Javed’s translation, she also said, “Translational works like *Kalo Shimana*, would play a crucial role for both of the language-speaking nations to minimize the gap of appreciating and understanding each other’s language and literature.”

The following lectures were also delivered at the event: “An introduction to Urdu writing in Bangladesh” by Rukhsana Rahim Chowdhury and “The significance of short story in South Asian writing” by Dr Abu Sayeed Noman.