

# SHAPING NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS:

The Words and Works of Khwaja Ahmed Abbas



Date: **29 February 2020**

Time: **10 AM – 5:30 PM**

Venue: **Lecture Room - II (Basement)**

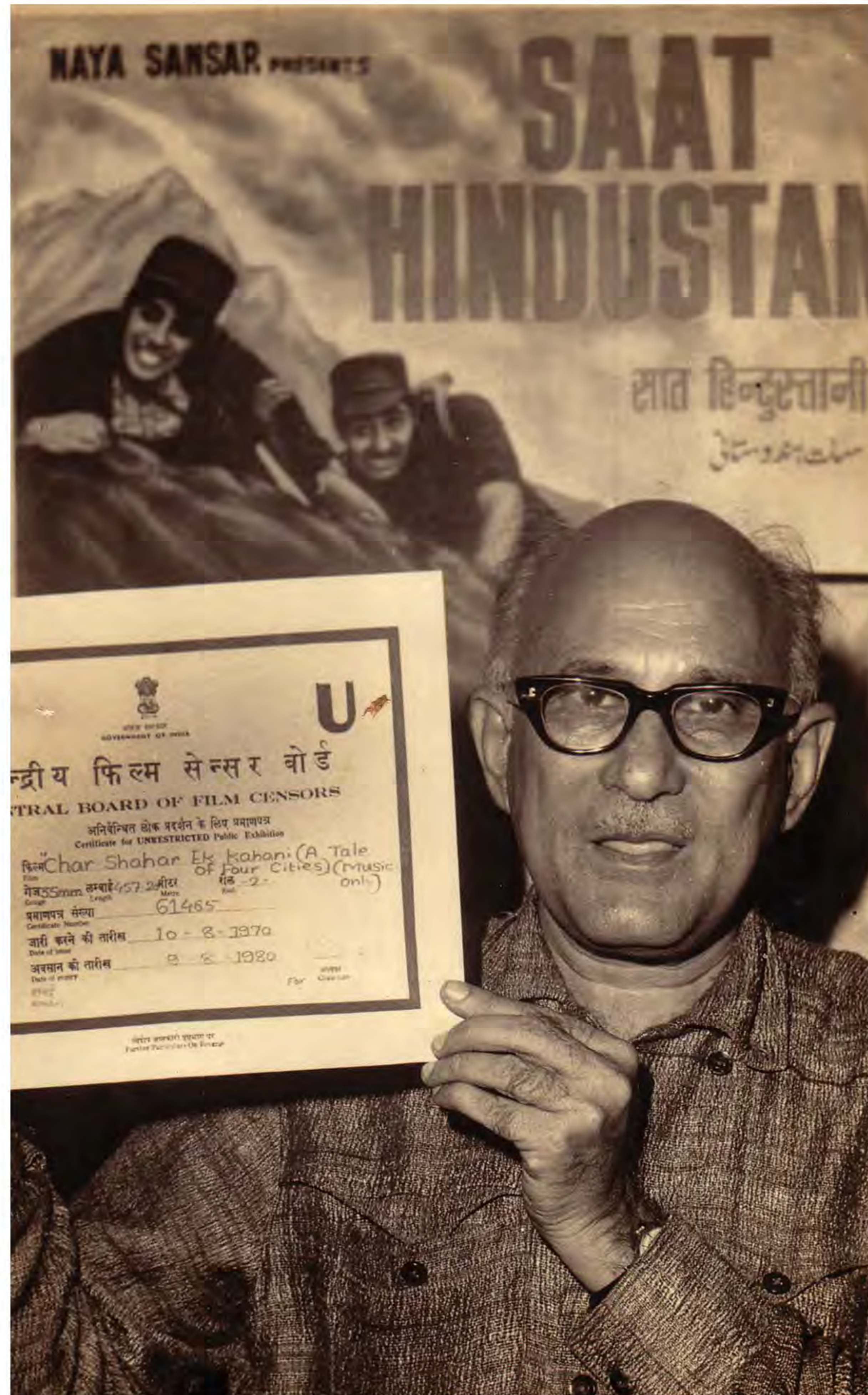
India International Centre (Annexe), New Delhi



Khwaja Ahmed Abbas Memorial Trust



INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE



**Khwaja Ahmed Abbas** (June 7, 1914 – June 1, 1987) was a man of many talents who has contributed immensely to the world of literature, journalism and cinema. He was a filmmaker, novelist, screenwriter, journalist, short story writer and playwright.

In a career spanning over half a century, Abbas emerged on the Indian and global scene as a communicator of great repute. He wrote more than 74 books. Besides numerous short stories, he also wrote several plays and stories for the film industry. As a journalist, his column 'Last Page' was the longest-running column in the Indian history of journalism. The column began in 1935, in the Bombay Chronicle and moved to the Blitz after the Chronicle's closure, where it continued until his death in 1987. His work flows in three languages- Urdu, Hindi and English.

As a writer, he consciously depicted the tales of ordinary people who accomplished heroic deeds simply by virtue of their undaunted spirit and sheer will to survive. Along with his concerns for the man on the street, he was, like the thinkers of his time, immersed in the vision for a newly independent India.

As a director and screenwriter, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas is considered one of the pioneers of Indian parallel or neo-realistic cinema. He penned a number of neo-realistic films, such as *Dharti Ke Lal* (which he directed), *Naya Sansar* (1941), *Jagte Raho* (1956), and *Saat Hindustani* (which he also directed) and as a screenwriter he is also known for writing Raj Kapoor's best films including the Palme d'Or nominated *Awaara* (1951), as well as *Shree 420* (1955), *Mera Naam Joker* (1970), *Bobby* (1973) and *Henna* (1991).

\* \* \*



## ANWAR ABBAS

This is a picture of Khawaja Ahmed Abbas. No, it isn't, look again. At best it is the alter ego of our hero this morning.

As I have written elsewhere, I was born in K.A. Abbas's house and having lived most of my life in an Abbas home, I was a close watcher of his life and work.

I have often wondered what his greatest contribution to humanity is in sum, it is not the 73 books- novels, biographies, collection of short stories- in Urdu and English that he penned. Nor the film scripts that he filmed himself or allowed others to do so.

The numerous awards that came his way in the field of journalism, in his long and enduring public life mattered little to him. The recognition he received relatively late, as compared to the other younger and less competent, made no difference to him.

It is that he practiced what he preached. That he travelled with his film crew in a 3rd class train compartment or asked for his gold medal to be given away to a household attendant to prepare the jewelry of his daughter's marriage, and not differentiating between his co-workers. When actor Simi Garewal protested that her attendant should carry her make up box since she was paying the salary of the attendant - "In that case" Abbas said, this will not happen in Naya Sansar.

Even as he rubbed shoulders with the high and mighty in the world of politics, showbiz and journalism, he did not waiver in his rightful criticism and neither cowed down before them.

He did not hesitate to ask thorny questions as a journalist even to the Chief Executive of his country. In an interview with Rajiv Gandhi for the book, "The Last Post", he asked:

1- Is it true that your mother had dictatorial tendencies and

2- Do you think that a super computer is more important than milk for school children.

The young leader got up in a huff and left the room ignoring Abbas' s extended hand to say goodbye.

"Why did you do that Mamoojan? "

"Did what?"

"Asked those two questions at the end. He could have given you a fellowship, a chair for journalism or films in any university.

"Oh, come on, he cannot even give me death, only HE can do that," in a rare gesture of Faith.

Through his newspaper columns, short stories and films, Abbas waged a constant battle against communalism, casteism, inequality of wages and any system that challenged norms of a civilized society.

I am glad that the K.A Abbas Memorial Trust is keeping alive the memory of a man so human, dedicated and talented - far ahead of his times. This is something his peers failed to do and this should contribute to the continuation of Abbas' values in the world. I wish the Trust all success.

With best wishes for the seminar and blessings for its brainchild "Syeda Hameed".

## SHAPING NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS: The Words and Works of KA Abbas

10: 15 AM- 10:30 AM	Tea
<b>Welcome</b> 10: 30 AM	Introductory Remarks Ms. Ruth Zothanpuii
10: 30 AM	Opening Remarks Dr. Aquil Ahmad Director, NCPUL
10:40 AM	Film – KA Abbas by Iffat Fatima
10:50 AM	Welcoming the Former Vice-President and introducing KAAMT  Dr. Syeda Hameed Chairperson, KAAMT
<b>Keynote Address</b> 11:00 AM	Hon'ble Mr. Hamid Ansari Former Vice President of India
11:20 AM – 12: 30 PM	Moderator – Prof. Anil Mishra  <b>Session I</b> “Mujhe Kuch Kehna Hai”: Examining the writings of KA Abbas  Presenters: KA Abbas ki taqleeqat mein qaumi yak jahti insaan dosti aur huqooq aur ehteram-e-insaani: Dr. Taqi Abedi  Contemporary relevance of Abbas' Kaala Suraj Safed Saaye: Justice Aftab Alam  Khwaja Ahmed Abbas – A Novelist of Indian soil: Dr. Abu Bakar Abbad

12:30- 1 PM	Q & A
1 PM – 2 PM	Lunch Break
2 PM – 3 PM	Moderator – Prof. Shafey Kidwai  <b>Session II</b> “Liberty and Love”: Journalistic writings and the films of Abbas  Presenters: Khwaja Ahmad Abbas: His revolutionary activities and forays in journalism while a student at Aligarh as revealed through his memoirs Prof. Jamil Urfi  An Abbas retrospective of commercial films: Ravikant  Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, the chronicler of the late colonial Bombay: Mr. Robert Rahman Raman
3 PM-3:30 PM	Q & A
3:30- 3:45 PM	Tea Break
3:45-4:45 PM	Moderator: Ms. Sukhpreet Kahlon  <b>Panel discussion</b> “Takhleeq ka Safar”- Contemplating the relevance of Abbas’ ideals in contemporary India  Panelists: Dr. Syeda Hameed Mr. Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri Ms. Iffat Fatima
4:45- 5:30 PM	<b>Cultural Programme</b> ‘Zulm hadd se badhega to ghat jaayega’: Songs from Abbas’s films  Ms. Rene Singh
5:30 PM	Concluding remarks and thanks  Dr. KL Mehra

**Session I: "Mujhe Kuch Kehna Hai": Examining the writings of KA Abbas**

Moderator – Prof. Anil Mishra

**KA Abbas ki taqleeqat mein qaumi yak jahti insaan dosti aur huqooq aur ehteram-e-insaani****Dr. Taqi Abedi**

Khwaja Ahmed Abbas's concern for social justice is the foundation for human love and human dignity upon which his entire literary corpus is anchored. He once said, "Mein qalam ka mazdoor hoon". His stories, novels and plays are testimonies to dignity of the mazdoor, whether on construction sites, factories, roads or sewers. In this respect, his canvas extends across many continents. He was a small built man with a big intellect and a bigger heart.

**Contemporary relevance of Abbas' Kaala Suraj Safed Saaye  
Justice Aftab Alam**

Abbas wrote Kaala Suraj Safed Saaye as a long short story soon after the assassination of Patrice Lumumba first president of independent Congo, in 1960. Written by the author in both English and Urdu, Abbas uses this tragedy to question the meaning of freedom, of white supremacy, of the United Nations which concedes failure and never takes the big nations to the dock. The paper explores contemporary relevance of Abbas' story which inspired Sahir Ludhianvi to write his poem 'Khoon phir khoon hai tapke ga to jum jaayega'

**Khwaja Ahmed Abbas – A Novelist of Indian soil****Dr. Abu Bakar Abbad**

The central idea of the writings of Khwaja Ahmed Abbas are the issues of common people like poverty, women's rights, the rights of farmers and labour rights. He took inspiration from Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi and also from Karl Marx. Although his contemporaries also wrote on love, but Abbas' writings on love are very close to reality. Abbas never surrendered before hard times and situations. Unlike several other people, he did not change his ideological position and never followed any political leaders or religious leaders blindly.

**Session II: "Liberty and Love": Journalistic writings and the films of Abbas**

Moderator – Prof. Shafey Kidwai

**Khwaja Ahmad Abbas: His revolutionary activities and forays in journalism while a student at Aligarh as revealed through his memoirs****Prof. Abdul Jamil Urfi**

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas was a student at the Aligarh Muslim University during the 1930's. While a student he was involved in several revolutionary activities and made forays into journalism. Responding to a request from this author, who was editor of the Aligarh Magazine 1982 issue, Abbas penned down his memoirs entitled 'My Aligarh Adventures'. This presentation describes some of those adventures by quoting from Abbas' essay, especially how he got a scoop for the Hindustan Times. Abbas' Aligarh memoirs provide a fascinating description of the cultural and political atmosphere of the university campus in British India as well as a riveting account of some important personalities of those times.

**An Abbas Retrospective of Commercial Films****Mr. Ravikant**

It is well-known that Abbas was as prolific a filmmaker as he was a writer of films, and if we combine both these roles his oeuvre would be enormous, larger than any one person's who ever wrote for and directed Hindustani films. His singular act of providing a break to several future superstars would qualify him as a major talent-hunter in Indian cinema. This presentation, however, will analyse some of his own commercial, mainstream but relatively little-known ventures - *Aasman Mahal* (1966), *Char Dil Char Rahein* (1959) and *Gyarah Hazaar Ladkiyan* (1962). This is to make the claim that in raising these issues and their cinematic treatment, the progressive filmmaker was ahead of his times. The first was a 'Muslim Social' with a modern twist, the second was a medley of diverse yet successful love stories cutting across caste and community hurdles, and the third one was about negotiating violence that working women faced within households and at workplaces. These themes remain relevant in contemporary times and we may gain a few insights from a revisit.

## Session II:

### **Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, the chronicler of the late colonial Bombay Robert Rahman Raman**

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, popularly known as K.A. Abbas has been mostly remembered for his contribution to Indian Cinema, particular as the story/screenplay writer for Raj Kapoor's films and as the filmmaker who introduced Amitabh Bachchan to Hindi films. While Abbas's contribution to the Indian cinema has received both popular and academic recognition, his role and influence as a public intellectual has sadly been overlooked. His column 'Last Page' holds the distinction of being one of the longest running columns in the history of Indian journalism which begins in 1935 in The Bombay Chronicle and moved to the Blitz where it continued until his death in 1987. Along with his column in The Bombay Chronicle and other works like 'Bombay my Bombay' and 'I am not an Island', Abbas chronicles the distinct history of late colonial Bombay. Through his gaze, Abbas tries to capture the everyday life in the city along with how the city navigated through the exciting yet troublesome decades of 1940s witnessing war, political mobilisations, mutinies, partition and finally Independence. This paper aims to study this interaction between a writer and the city during the 1940s.

### **PANEL DISCUSSION: "Takhleeq ka Safar"- Contemplating the relevance of Abbas' ideals in contemporary India**

A filmmaker, novelist, screenwriter, journalist, short story writer and playwright, KA Abbas used every medium at his command to communicate his thoughts. With 74 books, 40 films, several short stories and thousands of articles to his credit, his pen touched upon almost every social issue that people of a newly independent India faced.

The themes of communalism, social inequality, caste and gender discrimination, reverberate in his work, as he persevered in expressing his desire for a more egalitarian India. More than 70 years after India's independence, his thoughts, ideas but perhaps most importantly, his speaking truth to power, remains more relevant than ever.

Moderator: Ms. Sukhpreet Kahlon

#### Panelists:

Dr. Syeda Hameed

Mr. Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri

Ms. Iffat Fatima

#### **CULTURAL PROGRAMME:**

'Zulm hadd se badhega to ghat jaayega':

A presentation of songs from Abbas's films

by Ms. Rene Singh



### Abu Bakar Abbad

Abu Bakar Abbad is Assistant Professor in the Department of Urdu, University of Delhi since 2002, with an experience of teaching and research of more than eighteen years. He received the Graduate Sir Syed Trust Scholarship, UK in 1988, Departmental Post-graduate Merit Scholarship (1990-92); and has been awarded by the Delhi Urdu Academy, U.P. Urdu Academy, W.B Urdu Academy and Bihar Urdu Academy. He is the author of six books and his works have been published widely in different leading national and international journals. His areas of interest are fiction criticism, poetry criticism, classic literature and creative writings (short stories and poetry).



### Taqi Abedi

Taqi Abedi has worked for approximately 38 years in different countries as an internist, cardiologist and pathologist. He has written around 60 books in Urdu on classical poetry and literature. He was appointed as a visiting fellow in the Department of Urdu in Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India since September 2011 and nominated as a visiting professor to the Department of Urdu of Telangana University in Nizamabad, India 2014. He has received several prestigious awards in recognition of his work and has numerous articles published by well-known literary Urdu personalities about his poetry and research work.



### Aquil Ahmad

Aquil Ahmad is Director, National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language and has a teaching experience of over 22 years. He has written several books ranging from short stories, monographs, and critical works. His articles in Urdu, Hindi, and English have been published in various journals and newspapers. He has also received several awards including the Delhi Urdu Academy Award for the book *Mughisuddin Faridi* and *Qatat-e-Tareekh*, published in 2003, and the Delhi Urdu Academy Award for the book *Adab, Astoor aur Aafaq*, published in 2009.

### Aftab Alam

Aftab Alam was designated a Senior Advocate at the age of 36. He became Additional Standing Counsel of the Government of India in the High Court and thereafter was elevated as a permanent Judge of the Patna High Court. In 2007, he became the Justice of the Supreme Court of India and after retirement was appointed as Chairperson of the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal. He works as an arbitrator/ mediator in various commercial/ non-commercial disputes. Besides his legal career, he is an eminent scholar of classical Urdu with knowledge in Persian poetry and sufism.



### Mohammad Hamid Ansari

Mohammad Hamid Ansari, former Vice-President of India has had a distinguished career as an Indian ambassador, Chairman, National Commission for Minorities; Chairman, Rajya Sabha, and Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University. His academic pursuits include contemporary politics, West Asia, citizenship and society. He is the author of *Travelling Through Conflict: Essays on the Politics of West Asia (2008)* and the editor of *Iran Today: Twenty Five Years After the Islamic Revolution (2005)*.



### Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri

Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri is either an 'accidental' editor who strayed into publishing from a career in finance and accounts or an 'accidental' finance person who found his calling in publishing. After five years at Penguin, he moved on to HarperCollins Publishers India. Books commissioned and edited by him have won the National Award for Best Book on Cinema twice and the inaugural MAMI (Mumbai Academy of Moving Images) Award for Best Writing on Cinema. In 2017, he was named Editor of the Year by the apex publishing body, Publishing Next. He is also a published author, with two books to his credit: *Whims – A Book of Poems* (published by Writers Workshop) and *Icons from Bollywood* (published by Penguin/Puffin).





### Iffat Fatima

Iffat Fatima is an independent filmmaker from Kashmir, based in Delhi. Her films include *Lanka: the other side of war and peace*, on the history of overlapping conflicts in Sri Lanka; *The Kesar Saga*, on storytelling in Ladakh; *In the Realm of the Visual*, on Dashrath Patel; *Boojh Sahey to Boojh*, on the contemporary understanding of the thirteenth-century Sufi poet and scholar Amir Khusro. Her video installation, *Ethnography of a European City: Conversations in Salzburg*, questions some of the assumptions in the east vs. west polarity/dichotomy/disparity. Her most recent film, *Khoon Diy Baarav (Blood Leaves its Trail)*, explores issues of violence and memory in Kashmir.



### Syeda Hameed

Syeda Hameed is a social and women's rights activist, educationist, writer and a former member of the Planning Commission of India. She is the Founder Trustee of the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA) and was a member of the National Commission for Women (1997-2000). She served the Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) as its Chancellor. She has written several books, including the compendium *Bread, Beauty, Revolution: K.A. Abbas*. She was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India in 2007. She is the Founder Chairperson of the Khwaja Ahmed Abbas Memorial Trust (KAAMT).



### Sukhpreet Kahlon

Sukhpreet Kahlon is a Ph.D candidate in Cinema Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her research work examines private film collections and film archives. She has worked as a programmer for prominent film festivals in the country and has curated film exhibitions. She currently heads cinema research for a film website. Her areas of interest include independent cinema and film history. She is also Trustee, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas Memorial Trust.

### Ravikant

Ravikant is a bilingual historian, writer, and translator. He read, researched, and taught modern Indian and world history in various colleges of Delhi University before joining the Centre's Sarai programme at its inception in 2000. He is the author of *Media ki Bhasha-leela*, New Delhi, Vani Prakashan, 2016. His collaboratively edited books include *Translating Partition: Stories, Essays, Criticism* with Tarun Saint (2001); *Deewan e Sarai 01: Media Vimarsh: Hindi Janpad* (2002), *Deewan e Sarai 02: Shaharnama with Sanjay Sharma* (2005). His collaborative filmography includes Andaz Production's *Kali Shalwar* (2001), an adaptation of Saadat Hasan Manto's eponymous story, and *Jo Dooba So Paar* (2011).



### Shafey Kidwai

Shafey Kidwai is a bilingual critic and communication expert who has been teaching communication studies for more than 30 years. He has written several books and translated many books from English into Urdu. His book *Khabar Nigari* (1988) is the first book on the art of reporting in Urdu. He has received the Sahitya Akademy Award for his Urdu book *Sawaneh-e Sir Syed-Ek Bazdeed* in 2019. His recent book titled, *Urdu Literature and Journalism: Critical Perspectives* published by the Cambridge University Press, has received widespread critical acclaim. His column on culture and literature *Going Native* appears in *Friday Review, The Hindu* fortnightly.



### Anil Mishra

Anil Mishra taught Political Science for 35 years and is presently the Hony. Director, Rajendra Prasad Academy, Rajendra Bhawan Trust. He was Member, India Working Committee, World Social Forum and India Social Forum held in Mumbai 2004 and in Delhi 2006. He served as Vice-Chairman, Maithili Bhojpuri Academy, Government of Delhi, 2008-2009 and as President, Pahal, an NGO working in the field of women empowerment and protection of child rights. He has published the book *Coalition Politics in India: Problems and Prospects* and edited *Rural Development in Bihar: Challenges and Prospects*.







### Robert Rahman Raman

Robert Rahman Raman is a Ph.D. candidate in Modern Indian History at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS), University of Goettingen under Professor Ravi Ahuja. His thesis title is "From Girangaon to 'Mini Pakistan': The Precarious Place of Working Muslims in Twentieth Century Bombay." His doctoral work is an enquiry of the long-term changes in the identification of Muslim-dominated neighbourhoods in Girangaon by the inhabitants as well as others and the impact of these precarious 'placings' on the social and political landscape of Bombay as a whole. He holds an MPhil (by research) and M.A in Modern India from the University of Delhi.



### Rene Singh

Singer, composer and activist, producer and lead singer of the musical and album 'Chaand taare muthion mein' based on the expressions of street children. Singh is a singer with a difference, who has always endeavoured to make socially relevant music. Following her passion in Indian semi-classical music, ghazals, thumri, sufi and spiritual music, she has trained from Gandharva Mahavidyalya and presented a huge canvas of world music in prestigious concerts, ranging from the hauntingly moving music of the great Sufi poets of the 15th/ 16th century, the compositions and ghazals of the great poets down the ages, to the lilting melodies of the gramophone era.



### Abdul Jamil Urfi

Abdul Jamil Urfi while a student at AMU during 1978-82, was campus correspondent for *Youth Times* and editor of *The Aligarh Magazine* (English). He is now working on penning down memoirs of his campus days, some extracts of which have already appeared in the public domain. In one of the extracts published online (*Kaarvan India*) he wrote about his brief association with K A Abbas in his attempt request the legendary writer and film maker to pen his Aligarh days memoirs for the Aligarh Magazine. Urfi works as a teacher at the University of Delhi.

### Acknowledgements

KAAMT would like to pay respects to Late Dr. DP Tripathi, Trustee, KAAMT, for his enthusiastic dedication to the legacy of KA Abbas. We miss his generosity of spirit and scholarship immensely.

Our heartfelt gratitude to the following for their continued support of our work.

Dr. Taqi Abedi  
Dr. S Farooq  
Dr. KL Mehra  
Dr. Aziz Qureshi

National Council for the Promotion of Urdu Language  
India International Centre

### **About the KA Abbas Memorial Trust (KAAMT)**

Khwaja Ahmed Abbas Memorial Trust (KAAMT) is a non-Profit Trust which works for the documentation, preservation and propagation of the legacy of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, who contributed immensely to the world of literature, journalism and cinema. The Trust is registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 in 2013.

Over the years, the Trust has been instrumental in creating spaces for various art and culture programs and publications, enabling research into the works of Abbas, and taking forth the legacy of Abbas to acquaint the new generation with his works, while reiterating its contemporary relevance. This is achieved by organising international seminars on themes that reflect his ideals; screening films produced, directed and scripted by him; curating exhibitions of his selected writings and film memorabilia, as well as adapting his works into theatrical plays and musicals. These events have been organised across India in cities such as Delhi, Aligarh, Panipat, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Dehradun.

The Trust has also taken up the task of putting together a complete list of Abbas's works and creating a space for the Abbas archive by reprinting some of his memorable books, conducting research on the writings and films of K. A. Abbas, hoping that the efforts at documentation will lead to the preservation and propagation of his legacy.



**Khwaja Ahmed Abbas Memorial Trust**