

# A Voice Still Relevant for Today and Tomorrow: Sahir Ludhianvi

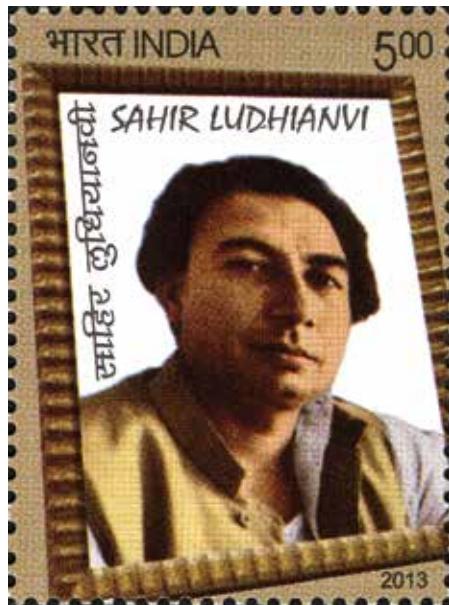
by ANUPAM SHARMA

Sahir Ludhianvi would be 100 years old this year and currently there are efforts underway all over the world to celebrate and reflect on his body of work. Canada is not an exception.

Dr. Prabhjot Parmar, associate professor of English at University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, B.C., led the effort to organize a two-day conference on "Sahir: A Commemoration of the Poet's Life and Work" on March 6 to 8. The conference attracted 55 presenters from eight countries and an audience of 300 people from 14 countries. For the Herculean effort, Professor Parmar and her team (and the university and the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute) must be commended!

What marked the conference was that among the seasoned, informed, and devoted presenters were also students at the University of the Fraser Valley. Therefore, it was both a reflection and an introduction of Sahir Ludhianvi as an important mirror to the colonial and post-colonial world in which a large swathe of humanity was surely ill-treated, exploited and thought to be less than civilized. One need not go far; the past in Canada provides us with ample examples.

Sahir Sahab, who lived from March 8, 1921, to October 25, 1980, is clearly an important figure. He is grounded in his reality and experiences, and his experiences are what inform everything that he has for us to consider. In addition to being a noted poet who was awarded a Padma Shri by the Government of India



India issued a stamp honouring the poet Sahir Ludhianvi in 2013.

in 1971, he is a colossal lyricist. According to biographer Akshay Manwani, he wrote approximately 729 songs, a large number that evolved from his poems.

"Sahir Ludhianvi: Reflections on the Society in India" was part of a panel on "Sahir: At Home and in the Diaspora," consisting of myself and three speakers from the UK and India. The gist of our conversation was that Sahir Sahab remains an important voice for us all – both in India and the Indian diaspora around the world. Underlying our presentations (and indeed the entire conference) was that for today it is perhaps the poverty of

the "word and thought" and "declining common-ground for conversation and exchange of ideas" that requires the resurrection of Sahir Ludhianvi.

My presentation is based on the observation that the film remains an important medium by which to convey both a message and outlook. In India, the song plays a role in this effort. As we scan the three decades after India's independence, we note a genre of "social film" that celebrates, informs, and critiques both the building of India's nation state and the resulting society. The film, being part of larger society, reflects, at least in some of this genre, the intellectual and constructive effort in this major endeavour. Here, Sahir Sahab is in good company—Guru Dutt, Baldev Raj Chopra, Yash Chopra and, from the political domain, Jawaharlal Nehru. This therefore is a committed and a progressive effort!

My effort engages songs from 14 films to reflect the workings in India, the building of its nation state and the larger society—in areas encompassing plight and status of women, advocacy for a society informed not by religious affiliations and rituals but instead based on a humanist outlook, and lastly the aspiration in the context of the modern economy that still places emphasis on dignity of labour.

However, for this article, I only focus on the section dealing with women to show Sahir Ludhianvi is committed and his word is based on all that he has experienced. Here, instructive is his relationship

and life-long dependence on his mother, Sardar Begum. This situation arises from the ill-treatment that his father, Chaudhri Fazl Mohammed, meted to his mother. He was a feudal landowner who had married for the 12th time. The endpoint for the mother and the son is an acrimonious divorce in 1934. Arising from the process of litigation, the son at 13 years of age is asked to choose between the mother and the father. He chooses the mother and so ensues the life-long intense bond and dependence on his mother. Equally intense and ferocious is the life-long disdain for the father. To follow was the life of fear and pecuniary concerns. So, given the choice to be a sole heir and affluent, the son chooses the mother and validates the primacy of human values. With this is laid the foundation to advocate and support the weak and dispossessed of the larger society—though finding expression and context in his location, the colonial and the post-colonial India.

Supportive of this assessment, my presentation here focuses and contextualizes the following four songs: "aurat nae janam diya mardon ko" (from the film Sadhana), "tu mere saath rahaegaa munnae" (from Trishul), "kuchch log mohabbat ko vyopaa samjh laetae hain" (from Dhanwan) and "log aurat ki faqt ko jism samjh lateen hain" (from Insaaf ka Tarazu). These songs speak to the lot that is of women. Sahir is very clear in his

>> continued PG.7

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# India Association of Manitoba Offers Free Online Session on Exploring Anger in Relationships

As part of its ongoing efforts to help the community cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, India Association of Manitoba (IAM) has been offering sessions on mental health. On April 1, the association will offer an online session called "Color me RED: Exploring the role of anger in our

relationships."

Therapist Kamal Bedi will speak at the free session, which runs from 7 to 8:15 p.m. The session is limited to the first 100 people who register.

Bedi earned her master's degree in marriage and family therapy in 2018

from the University of Winnipeg. Born and raised in Winnipeg, she studied philosophy as an undergraduate and lived in India for four years to learn more about her passion for Indian classical music, dance, and poetry. Bedi has always been fascinated by human interaction, mind-body-soul connection, and loves to ponder bigger questions about intangible aspects of human experience.



Kamal Bedi

>> SAHIR LUDHIANVI from PG.6

own disdain for those who perpetrate hurt and injustice on women. The songs listed are iconic, easily accessible, and the reader is already likely to be familiar with them.

More importantly, the movie Sadhana was produced in the 1950s at a time when the Indian parliament was deliberating upon the personal and civil laws for the country. Unable to provide for an overarching law for all citizens, the resulting law was limited to become the Hindu Civil Code. But it still served the objective of changing and bringing greater equality for women, which for long had been denied.

The song from Trishul is most biographical; it represents the indomitable spirit of a mother (his mother) not giving up and illustrating to her son that she brought him up (as described in the song) so that unlike her, he would be able to face the world on his terms. The song from Insaaf ka Taraazu for me represents acceptance from Sahir that much still needs to be done and that we cannot let down our efforts.

In the last song from the movie Dhanwaan, Sahir Sahab metaphorically brings in one place his mother and father. He then proceeds to give voice that his mother, given the chance, would certainly have employed to offer her controlled fury, scorn, and disdain for her husband and the society that gives rise to pitiful figures that degrade and ill-treat women. She says that for some, love is nothing more than a (business) transaction.

To conclude, Sahir Ludhianvi is a progressive personality who does not knowingly accept and/or tolerate the injustices meted to the weak and dispossessed of our society. Perhaps it is only fitting that Sahir Ludhianvi's birthday now falls on a day that has been designated as International Day for Women.

*Anupam Sharma is vice chair of India Centre for Academic, Business & Community Excellence. The centre, based at the University of Winnipeg, is an outcome of the partnership between the university and the India Association of Manitoba.*

## HOW TO REGISTER

To find the Zoom link to register for the free session, go to India Association's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/iaofmb](http://www.facebook.com/iaofmb)) and click on "events."



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