

Two UT Austin Students Receive Prestigious Majaz Literary Award



Above: Max Bruce and Syed Akbar Khan accept the award.

AUSTIN, TX – Two students from The University of Texas at Austin have been selected to receive the *Asrar-al-Haque Majaz Literary Award* for their sensitive and original study of Urdu poetry.

Two students of Urdu from the University of Texas at Austin have been honored with the Asrar-al-Haque Majaz Literary Award at a mushaira held in Houston on 6th September 2009. The awards were given by one of Urdu's finest living poets, Professor Waseem Barelwi. This prestigious award was

created by the Alumni Association of Aligarh Muslim University to recognize excellence in the scholarly appreciation of Urdu poetry; graduate student Max Bruce and undergraduate Shan Khan have been chosen by the Association for this notable honor. The Award celebrates the memory of renowned Urdu poet Majaz Lakhnawi (1909-1955), best known for the revolutionary *nazms* and *ghazals* that he composed as a prominent member of the Indian Progressive Writers Association.

Max Bruce is pursuing an MA in the field of Urdu poetry and Hindi literature in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas; he holds a degree in Philosophy from the University of California-Santa Cruz. Before joining UT, Max was an Urdu Language Fellow of the American Institute of Indian Studies in Lucknow, India. In 2008 he served as a faculty assistant for the South Asian Summer Language Institute at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; he is currently a Teaching Assistant for UT's elite Hindi Urdu Flagship, a unique, federally-funded program dedicated to the promotion and advanced teaching of the two languages.

Though Max's focus is on Urdu poetry (he is an Urdu poet in the making, as well as being an accomplished tabla player), he has also begun groundbreaking research in Persian poetry. The works of Mirza Ghalib are a special focus. In the words of Max's advisor Dr. Syed Akbar Hyder, "Max is about to bring a revolution in the field of Urdu aesthetics. His original approaches to Perso-Urdu intertextuality will become models for comparative literary studies. He has also proven himself as an innovative teacher, and will redefine Urdu-Hindi pedagogy in the decades to come." During the mushaira in Houston, Max was able to demonstrate his budding Urdu poetry skills. He recited his own ghazal, which won the applause of more than 500 people in attendance.

Shan Khan is studying in the Hindi Urdu Flagship and will be the program's first



Above: Max Bruce reciting a self-composed ghazal.



Above: HUF Associate Director Dr. Sarah Green receiving an acknowledgment for HUF's contribution to the enhancement of Urdu studies.

the discipline of Comparative Literature, Shan shows us how to conduct interdisciplinary studies in the most sensitive manner. He can appreciate and interpret songs of Townes van Zandt as brilliantly as he can read the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal and Jigar Muradabadi.”

Shan plays an active part in the Urdu scholarly community and has been a loyal lieutenant to Dr Hyder in organizing the Hindi Urdu Flagship's “distinguished speaker series” and the 2009 Conference on *Beauty in the Worlds of Islam*. He has also organized large-scale events such as a concert of Islamic spiritual music featuring Pakistan's celebrated rock musician and filmmaker Salman Ahmad. Shan is currently studying in Lucknow, within the Hindi Urdu Flagship's Overseas program.

The spirit behind Aligarh Muslim University is one of inquiry and creativity; both Shan Khan and Max Bruce capture this spirit in the context of American higher education. The Asrar-al-Haque Majaz Literary Award, which brings both of them a plaque and a scholarship, honors their outstanding achievement.

graduate in the summer of 2009, with a double major in English and in Asian Cultures and Languages. A profound interest in the devotional music tradition of *qawwali* led him to the study of Urdu, and in due course to a sophisticated appreciation of its poetry. Dr. Hyder points out that Shan's passion for Urdu poetry and aesthetics is rare among undergraduates and marks him out as an exceptional student; his essays on literary aesthetics are outstandingly creative and original. As Dr Hyder says, “By approaching Urdu poetry through



Above: Shan Khan, award recipient and HUF student currently studying Urdu in Lucknow, India.