











gets his words out any way he can, working as a scriptwriter, producer, director, storyteller, actor and editor. In the cluttered world of multimedia, he knows that poets must diversify their performance space, beyond mushairas and books, if they want to be heard. Atif was the third poet to recite at the Aalami Mushaira, when the crowd was still streaming in and before it had settled down to really listen.

From Atif's Web site, fans can download his recitations, join a live chat room and participate in a poetry-lover's forum—all very 21st-century. "Couplets are heartbeats," he says. "Some poems can be written in a moment, because love needs only a moment." Somehow, digital audio seems entirely appropriate for his of-the-moment modernity. "Media should uplift people, not keep them down. We have so much we must think about in our times—climate change, terror, racism. A poet is fortunate if people can understand what he wants to say."

The sky is still dark when the first call to the dawn prayer sounds from neighboring minarets. It is time to conclude, although the maizban has done an admirable job in keeping on schedule. No poet's feelings have been hurt, and several have been singled out for the praise of "Vah, vah!" that follows the calls "Mukarrar, mukarrar!" Only one poet is still to recite, and he has ample time to finish before the final prayer call in another 15 minutes.

At the final couplet, the maizban hurries words of thanks to the poets, their listeners and the organizing committee. The task of knitting together this polyglot city of more than 12 million residents—with more than 1500 migrants arriving every day from all parts of the country—has not been easy. The Aalami Mushaira, this celebration of Urdu poetry at its best, is one of the few glues that hold. As the Karachi poet Tariq Sabzwari recited earlier in the night, Whatever be my city's air, I'll love it still Whether in the sun or shade This land of mine, this land of ours.

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