

AHMAD ZIA RAFAT was born in 1966 in Herat. He was reading classical literature and writing poetry at the age of 15 and soon gained recognition in Afghan literary circles as a powerful committed poet and writer. Rafat opposed the presence of the Red Army in Afghanistan and went into exile in Iran for two years (1986-1987); coming to believe that he could be more effective at home than abroad, however, he returned to Afghanistan and began producing poetry opposing the government. Three years later his first collection of poetry, *Faryad-e-Nashanida*, published by the Association of Writers of Afghanistan, won a literary award.

While in exile, Rafat, along with other cultural activists, founded the Association of Afghan Cultural Activists, which he chaired, and in that capacity organised various cultural activities.

Late in 1987, he was one of the founders of Shora-e-Motahed Meli. This foundation was established by independent thinkers, of whom Rafat was one, and encompassed 50 political parties and civil society organisations. Rafat was elected chairman for two successive periods. In the opinion of political opinion-makers Rafat put the foundation on the map in Afghanistan. Although he has since retired from the foundation, he is still active as a political commentator and cultural activist.

In 1991 he became a student in the Faculty of Literature at Kabul University where he earned his Master's degree. He represented a new literary generation and, first as the deputy and later as the president of the Herat Literary Society, could gather together the poets and writers of Herat. The situation then and during the Taliban regime was very bad and with the help of other scholars he created a developmental environment for young writers.

With the advent of a new millennium and a new Afghan government in 2001, Rafat returned to the university, this time as a lecturer, in the Faculty of Literature. He also headed the publications department in the Ministry of Higher Education and ensured this department's exemplary performance.

Although Rafat supported the government at first, and was a member of the Constitutional Loya Jirga of 2003-2004, he became disillusioned and when in 2005 he resigned his position in the Ministry of Higher Education and began criticising the government, he became known as a critical commentator in the media. Popular as he had been among cultural activists, his media exposure and criticism of the government only increased his popularity. Rafat is one of those rare persons who earn respect across a wide spectrum of political groupings, from his opponents as well as his supporters.

Right now, Ahmad Zia Rafat is a lecturer in the Journalism Faculty at Kabul University. Dozens of articles on political and literary topics have flowed from his pen and also several books: *Haman Yousof Haman Bazar*, *Kenare Khiaban*, *Sher-e-Kochak*, *Darde Bozorg* and *Bon Bast*. Three further books, *Nazaria Hai Honari*, *Barrasi Sher Hai Dari Ameer Ali Shir Nawaee* and *Naqd-e-Adabi*, are in the process of production.