لا پھر اک بار وہی بادہ و جام اے ساقی ہاتھ آ جائے مجھے میرا مقام اے ساقی!

[redacted]

مری مینائے غزل میں تھی ذرا سی باقی شیخ کہتا ہے کہ ہے یہ بھی حرام اے ساقی

شیر مردوں سے ہوا بیشۂ تحقیق تہی رہ گئے صوفی و ملا کے غلام اے ساقی

عشق کی تیغ جگردار اڑا لی کس نے علم کے ہاتھ میں خالی ہے نیام اے ساقی

سینہ روشن ہو تو ہے سوزِ سخن عینِ حیات ہو نہ روشن، تو سخن مرگِ دوام اے ساقی

تو مری رات کو مہتاب سے محروم نہ رکھ ترے پیمانے میں ہے ماہِ تمام اے ساقی!

Ladies and Gentlemen, Assalam o alaikum.

On behalf of the Oxford University Pakistan Discussion Forum, I welcome you to the banks of the *Zinda Rud*.

Zinda Rud is the stream of life, tossing on its mystical waves the traveller who can brave its lyrical tumults. From Khusrau and Attar, to Rumi and Hafiz; from Ghalib and Mir, to Hali and Iqbal, this river has produced the finest examples of both poetry and philosophy, more often than not, conjoined into one pearl. The question is whether we can still harvest some of these jewels?

The poets we shall discuss today, created in Farsi, Urdu or Hindi, but their wisdom doesn't have a language. They are now hundreds of years and thousands of miles away from us, but their words transcend the bounds of time, the confines of distance. Today we shall make an attempt to decipher their metaphor, and bridge the chasms of space and time that separate them from us.

What relevance do these poets have in present times? Why do we, after all, gather here today? We cannot make general statements, but coming face to face with the stark physical and spiritual crises that engulf all of us, we can come to think that through their verse, we are in fact, gasping for some rays of hope.

We should remember that all major mystical, emotional and ecstatic poetry is the "feeling of desire" transforming into the "feeling of experience". It is this very *feeling of desire*, many would regard as simply the *desire for hope*, or more accurately, the *hope for desire*.

As the world is caught up in ignoble tension, can we participate in these poets' preaching of **an** honourable peace? As servility, intolerance and occupation reinhabit our world, can we learn from these poets' *desire* for freedom, wisdom and dignity? As divisiveness and sectarianism becomes rife, can these poets become, once again, a glimmering beacon of unity and integrity? In this chaotic age of the hollow, can we get a glimpse of the clarity these men experienced, taste the freedom they defined, and touch the passion they felt. Let's see if we can relive their message. Let's flow with the Zinda Rud.