

Jinnah Award: For Ardesir Cowasjee, recognition of a lifetime of wit, fight and philanthropy

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The columnist and philanthropist, Ardesir Cowasjee, was presented the 11th Jinnah Award at the head office of the Oxford University Press on Tuesday. He is seen here going through a memento presented to him, a leather-bound compilation of his work published in Dawn over the last ten years. PHOTO: NEFER SEHGAL/EXPRESS

KARACHI: This year the Jinnah Society has presented its 11th Jinnah Award to columnist and philanthropist Ardesir Cowasjee in recognition of his outstanding and dedicated services to the country.

The ceremony was held at the head office of Oxford University Press on Tuesday with former ambassador Jamshed Marker as the chief guest.

A dapper Mr Cowasjee arrived in a dazzling cream suit set off with a screaming silk turquoise tie. The look was completed with an elegant gold-tipped walking stick and a pink flower at the lapel. His wit was as sharp as his threads:

“Asalam-o-Alaikum,” he started off with a twinkle in his eye. “I am overwhelmed and thank all of you who are here to waste a great deal of your valuable time.”

And then, it was his turn to be surprised as he was presented a leather-bound edition of his articles and columns published during the last ten years. He has written a total of 960 articles in 22 years, all of which have been published in the daily *Dawn* newspaper.

And while Mr Cowasjee is perhaps best known for his byline, theatre and television artist Khalid Ahmed read out a citation to highlight his philanthropic work. Through the Cowasjee Foundation, he has funded the education of countless Pakistani students.

The foundation has sponsored one of The Citizens Foundation's schools, the Cowasjee Campus in Lyari, the construction of the Cowasjee School of Midwifery at the Lady Dufferin Hospital and it is helping build a school at NED University campus as well.

The foundation has also worked with institutions such as the SIUT where a dialysis ward and lithotripsy centre have been set up. Its funding has been channeled to Jinnah hospital where the accident and emergency operation theatre unit was constructed.

Mr Cowasjee has dedicated time and effort to focus on making people aware of the misdeeds of Pakistan's rulers and the different ways in which the people have been exploited by their compatriots. He has mostly done this through his fearless weekly columns that have made him a household name.

Indeed, Liaquat Merchant, the founder of the Jinnah Foundation, highlighted how Mr Cowasjee drew heavily on Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, to make his arguments. "I think there is no one in the country who has cited Jinnah more than Ardeshir Cowasjee," he said.

Mr Cowasjee is an ardent supporter of Jinnah's speech of August 11, 1947 about secular Pakistan, pointed out PR company owner Babar Ayaz while talking to *The Express Tribune*. "To acknowledge Ardeshir Cowasjee's contributions is to acknowledge the fact that Jinnah had envisioned Pakistan as a secular country and not an Islamic republic," he remarked.

These words were not lost on Dinaz Divecha, a visiting lecturer at the NED University of Engineering and Technology, who was in the audience. "I'm feeling very proud as a Parsi today," she said. "[Mr] Cowasjee is admired not only in Pakistan but all over the world for his outspoken stance on sensitive issues while deterring the threats to his life. In fact, it is an honour for Parsis living all over the world."

Mr Cowasjee joins the list of recipients which include personalities such as Abdul Sattar Edhi, Hakim Mohammad Said, Dr Adib Rizvi, Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan, Dr Ishrat Husain.

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