Does language affect the expression and understanding of ethical perspectives and values of an individual? To explore the answers to this question, CBEC organized an “Urdu Baithak” (Urdu Forum) on August 26, 2017. The event was significant because unlike other events organized by the Centre in recent years, all speakers were from within Pakistan and the language of the event was Urdu, the national language of the country.

Sessions in the Urdu Baithak were open to the public and drew a full house throughout the day. This reflected the irresistible pull of Urdu for participants from different backgrounds and geographical locations around the city.

The event began with a brief introduction to the Center by Dr. Farhat Moazam. Following this, CBEC associate faculty, Dr. Nida Wahid Bashir, invited Mr. Harris Khalique, a prominent sociopolitical writer, literary critic and poet to moderate the event.

Speakers included Dr. Nomanul Haq, a renowned scholar and writer, who discussed the evolution of human values and explored the role of language in the development of moral sensibilities. Dr. Nomanul Haq put forward the opinion that our use of language reflects our inner moral state, and using corrupted words and slang testifies to intellectual laziness and moral apathy.

His premise was challenged by the next speaker, Dr. Arfa Sayeda Zehra, a well-known scholar with a scintillating style of oratory. In her discussion on the role of literature in the development of moral behavior, Dr. Arfa countered Dr. Nomanul Haq’s position, drawing examples to illustrate her viewpoint that languages evolve and this does not necessarily imply moral degeneration. The two speakers’ perspectives were followed with great interest by a large audience, evidenced by the animated question and answer session following each talk.

The event’s last session was a recital of poetry by celebrated poets Mr. Naseer Turabi and Ms. Zehra Nigah who enlivened the scholarly discussion on moral values and language with beautiful poetic expression. Mr. Turabi recited a number of his well-known poems including “Woh Hamsafar Tha,” (“My Companion”) to great acclaim. Ms. Nigah, who was presiding over the session, delighted the audience with her melodious recitation of the great Pakistani poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s poem “Meray dil meray musafir” (My heart, my traveler).

The event ended with the audience in the auditorium, and those watching online on Facebook, expressing their desire for CBEC to organize more events like the Urdu Baithak.