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Artistes, scholars, citizens discuss issues of urban poor during lockdown

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Highlighting issues of the urban poor during the lockdown period, several artistes across genres and people from Mumbai came together in the virtual world to participate in 'Apna Adda' today. 'Apna Adda', an initiative by Apanalaya, is an attempt to foster dialogue on various aspects of urban life through artistic expressions.

The event focused on migrant workers, daily wagers, hawkers, domestic helpers and drivers, among others who faced the onset of the Covid-19 induced lockdown. This volume was called "Hum Kahan The" and is one of the many addas that will come together in the near future. The artistes included the renowned Qissago Danish Husain -- an actor, storyteller, poet and theatre director -- and Hussain Haidry -- a spoken word poet, writer and lyricist.

Husain narrated an interesting story written by Vijay Dan Detha which speaks about real knowledge and common sense, while Haidry recited three different poems which spoke about different experiences of people of different classes in the city, the perception of rain and fire and the lockdown.

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The event also featured Faizan Khan, better known as Faiz BBX who is a beatboxer and student of The Dharavi Dream Project, Asia's largest after school of hip-hop. Fourteen-year-old Ayush, also a student of the school, performed a rap and raised important questions on social issues.

Apna Adda also saw a performance by Hubnath Pandey, a poet and Hindi professor at Mumbai University, who narrated a poem about the workers who were killed on train tracks while going back home. Nagma Mulla, President and COO of EdelGive Foundation, narrated a story on how the lockdown impacted individuals differently and how oblivious one can be to another person's struggle.

The others included Smita Vyas, co-founder and CEO of MyTree. Aarushi Majumder, a student at Stanford University; Manprit Singh, and members of Goonj ek Awaaz, a cultural collective that uses songs and poems to resist injustice and inequality. Professor Himanshu Burte, an architect and urbanist, said, "Apna Adda is one space where people from different backgrounds come together and have conversations which include politics, development and personal reflection. We need spaces where we can speak about all this." Arun Kumar, CEO of Apanalaya, ended the event with a promise to organise more Addas to continue this effort at building an inclusive city.

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