

# IFTI NASIM

b. September 1946

d. July 22, 2011

## POET & ACTIVIST

*“I don’t practice [Islam].  
But I compensate by helping other  
people, by doing my activism ...”*

**He was a trailblazing  
Pakistani-American  
poet and LGBT activist.**

Ifti Nasim was a gay Pakistani-American poet whose unique LGBT-themed collections, written in Urdu, were published internationally. He helped establish Sangat Chicago, an organization supporting South-Asian LGBT youth.

Nasim was born in Faisalabad, Pakistan. He was the middle child in a large, traditional Islamic family. Throughout his teens, Nasim experienced bullying, ostracization and loneliness as a gay youth. A passionate poet and an activist who opposed Pakistan's martial law, Nassim was once shot in the leg during a protest.

Inspired by a Life magazine article touting America's acceptance of gays, Nassim emigrated to the United States at the age of 21. He enrolled at Wayne State University

in Detroit, Michigan, where he continued his poetry. He spent most of his life in Chicago, Illinois, and became a naturalized U.S. citizen. Some of his siblings joined him in America.

In 1986, at the age of 40, Nasim helped found Sangat Chicago, an advocacy organization and support group for young people of South Asian origin. Sangat's participants found solace connecting with one another and sharing experiences, particularly of being LGBT Muslims. Nasim also regularly hosted a weekly radio show and contributed to an American Pakistani newspaper.

Nasim wrote poems in English as well as in Urdu and Punjabi, two of the languages spoken in Pakistan. He published three books of poems in Urdu, which conveyed novel themes of the plight of LGBT people in Muslim and third-world countries. His most popular collection, “Narman” (1994), which translates to “hermaphrodite,” became the first published articulation of gay themes in Urdu and sparked a movement of “honest” poetry.

“Narman” was distributed in the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden and Germany, and underground in India and Pakistan. His other two books of poetry, “Myrmecophile” (2000) and “Abdoz” (2005), explored gay love, longing and the pressures of heteronormativity.

In 1993 Nasim became the first poet from a developing nation to read his work at Chicago's Harold Washington Library Center. The following year, Chicago's South Asian Family Services awarded him the Rabindranath Tagore Award for his poetry. In 1996 he was inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame.

Nasim died in Chicago of a sudden heart attack at the age of 64. The Chicago Tribune published his obituary.



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