

Classic Poetry Series

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq
- poems -

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Muhammad Izhar ul Haq(14 February 1948)

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq, (Urdu: ????? ?????) is a columnist and a renowned poet of Urdu language, in Pakistan. He has received international recognition for his contribution to Urdu literature, and has been awarded Pakistan's highest civil award Pride of performance in 2008. He has published four books of Urdu poetry and writes weekly column in daily Nawa-i-Waqt.

 Personal Life

Born on 14 February 1948 in the village Jhendial, in the district of Attock in Punjab, Muhammad Izhar ul Haq got his early education from his grandfather and father. His grandfather, Ghulam Muhammad, was a famous scholar and jurist of his time and was known to teach Persian literature and language. Muhammad Izhar ul Haq's father, Hafiz Muhammad Zahoor ul Haq Zahoor, also a scholar of high repute, was author of a number of books in Persian and Urdu in poetry as well as prose. Muhammad Izhar ul Haq topped in Government College Rawalpindi in graduation examination and was awarded Federal Government Inter-wing fellowship under which he did his MA Economics from Dhaka University. Later, he did MA in Arabic from Punjab University as external candidate and also learnt Uzbek language in Islamabad. In 1972, he joined the Civil Service of Pakistan after qualifying the Central Superior Services competitive examination. He ascended to the highest echelon of bureaucracy in the federal government, before retiring in 2008.

Widely travelled, he has explored Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Uzbekistan, China, Australia, India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Somalia, Morocco, Italy, Spain, Britain, Belgium, Holland, Canada, USA and Mexico.

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq has three sons and two daughters, and lives with Zahida Shaheen, his wife, in Islamabad and Melbourne.

 Poetry

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq has four books of poetry to his credit:

1. Diwaar-e-aab (winner of Adamjee Award for Literature 1982)
2. Ghadr (1986)
3. Paree-zaad (1995)
4. Paani peh Bichha Takht (winner of Allama Iqbal Award 2003)

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq is considered a trend-setter in modern Urdu Ghazal. His first book, *Diwaar-e-aab* (1982) won Adam Jee award, the highest literary distinction at that time in the country. His two subsequent books in Urdu poetry, *Ghadr* and *Paree-zaad* hit the stalls in 1986 and 1995 respectively. His fourth book, *Paani peh Bichha Takht*, was conferred yet another honor, Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal award, in 2003. Izhar is best known in the genre of Ghazal, although his mastery in free-verse and prose-poem has also been established among the literary circles of South Asia.

Sample English translation of Izhar ul Haq's poetry can be read in the anthology "*Pakistani Urdu Verse*, Oxford University Press 2010", translated and edited by Yasmeen Hameed.

 Columns and Other Literary Works

Izhar ul Haq writes columns in the leading Urdu newspapers of Pakistan and abroad. He has been a regular columnist in *Jang*, *Daily Jinnah* and presently in *Nawaiwaqt*. Themes of his columns usually relate to politics and society, reform and development, religion, and ethics etc. Izhar ul Haq is noted for his unique style of literary prose and especially his command over classical Urdu and Persian literature. The title of his Urdu column is "Talkh Nawai", which translates to "bitter discourse". Izhar ul Haq is also an occasional contributor in *The News* (Jang group), *The Bangladesh Today*, *The Age* (Australia), and various other national and international newspapers.

Izhar ul Haq has also contributed in the research for implementation of Urdu in Pakistan, with the National Language Authority. In addition, he has also contributed with the National Language Authority as one of the compilers of the *Qaumi English-Urdu Dictionary*.

For his services to Urdu literature, Muhammad Izhar ul Haq was awarded *Pride of Performance* by the government of Pakistan in 2008.

A Poem

There is a strange bitter taste in my mouth
The crystal water as it strikes
the rocky slabs
tears me also into shreds
Perhaps at a little distance from here
It is snowing in the mountains.
Everything is cold. I hold nothing against anyone.
Why does the moon peer from a cloud?
Why hold up someone who is intent on leaving?

[Translated by Muhammad Salim-ur-rahman]

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq

A Poem For Marziyya

Our flower-like children
When sleeping early morning
It looks as if fairies descending from clouds
Are resting on silken bed-sheets
Bright and flowery, adorned by Turkmen
Like angels have come down from heavens
In proper order
Rolling rosaries in their strong hands
Praising the Lords
And sitting in bedroom windows
Guard them

Our flower-like children
When sleeping early morning
It looks as if subservient time
Head lowered, hands clasped, dawdling
Waiting by the bedside for them to wake up
So that colours splash, morning light shows up
Flowers spread perfume
Birds sing

Our flower-like children
When sleeping early morning
High above the shining stars
Lower than the heavens
Where fortune is distributed
Almighty packs piety, truthfulness and success
And on the wings of archangels, sends carved chests
Towards their bedrooms
Our flower-like children

[Translated from Urdu by Masror Hausen]

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq

Authorization

The points is not
whether your hair is wet or dry,
whether it is still long or has been cropped,
whether your cheeks are glowing or not;
the points is
whether the writing can be seen or not.

Remove the piece of paper tied to its leg
before you allow the homing pigeon to fly away.
The winter is over
and the supply of dried meat has been laid in.
Before you hole up in the cellar
look out for me a last time;
and if my horse returns without me
take off from in the saddle and the saddle-bag.
And should a traveler, covered with snow,
call for help in the deserted settlement
give him shelter in the cellar.
After all, you are not an angel.
woman.

[Translated by Muhammad Salim-ur-rahman]

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq

Cordova

I wear no amour, I carry no sword,
as I make my way down Andalusia
through centuries of tears.

Nowhere to camp beneath the sky.
The magic and mystery of a journey
lasting eight hundred years.

I may, who knows, flower some day
at daybreak. Now I trek through a dark
where thorns and weeds prevail.

[Translated by Muhammad Salim-ur-rahman]

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq

I Was Not Good For Time

I was not good for Time.
Time therefore stood against me.

An old man and an old woman loved me
but time stroked them into an everlasting sleep
and I kept sitting by them.
Then a woman and a man kept me close to their hearts
but time aged them.
and their hearts thinned and weakened.

I fell in love with a young woman
but when beauty bloomed to its full
and its tresses touched the heart.
time dragged us towards dusk.
so much so that brambles choked the green bowers.

I adored and loved little children
but when they grew up,
time lured them to diverse vocations
and they wrapped me up in a sheet of decay.

That small, crude hill
was not made of emerald and blue stones.
It was plain earth and rock
which held in its lap
an evergreen mulberry tree
and in the gorge close to it
was a pond.
and across was the high ground
where we played till the sun went down;
where fear crept into the nights.

All this remains where it was
but time has placed in the farthest dimension
and I cannot see it anymore.
In a reed-basket.
the child who was being carried,

inside his eyelids, were blisters

which were pierced by a fresh, rough cloth
and the eyes had bled.
People had mourned at the loss of his sight.
Fate had mourned on its endurance.
Who was he..?
And the woman who carried that basket:
where were her roots
and in whose image was she reflected...?

I was not good for Time,
That is why it stood against me.

Where I was to be the witness,
Time erased me
and where I was not to be,
Time placed me there.

When plague struck
and terrified people
went to live in huts far a way from their homes,
I was not there.

When two people were being clamped to the press and tortured.
and in the hall of royal audience
they openly demanded their release.
I was not there.

When fighting erupted between two tribes
near a deep chasm in the mountain
and a man had his head severed
the second time over,
I was not there.

When at midnight
he went down into the ravine in the valley,
where genii. cast out like children
with exposed tummies and bare buttocks
sat in a circle
with a lantern lit in the middle.
I was not there.

But when for the last time,
with a coloured cloth tied around his waist.
wearing a pointed gold-embroidered shoe,
mounted on a black horse.
a slave with sceptre by his side.
he started off for the west.
then turned north.
and in the cemetery
where coloured rags clung to prickly trees.
quietly,
he went to sleep in a grave.

I was there

[Translated by Muhammad Salim-ur-rahman]

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq

Senility

I am a park
Come, sit here and laugh
Bask in the sun
and while your day away
among my velvet green fields
the silver trees,
the plentiful flowerbeds
and bracing arbours.
And when the icy
evening lowers,
go home, selfish
citizens, go home.
I will cope all night,
all by myself,
with the falling snow.

[Translated by Muhammad Salim-ur-rahman]

Muhammad Izhar ul Haq