

Classic Poetry Series

Mohammad Ibrahim Zauq

- poems -

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Mohammad Ibrahim Zauq(1789 - 1854)

Sheikh Muhammad Ibrahim Zauq was a noted Urdu poet . He wrote poetry under nom de plume "Zauq", and was appointed poet laureate of the Mughal Court in Delhi.

He was a poor youth, with only ordinary education, who went on to acquire quite some learning in history, tradition and astrology in his later years. Zauq was a prominent contemporary of Ghalib and in the history of Urdu poetry the rivalry of the two poets is quite well known. During his lifetime Zauq was more popular than Ghalib for the critical values in those days were mainly confined to judging a piece of poetry on the basis of usage of words, phrases and idioms. Content and style were barely taken into account while appreciating poetry

Early Life

When he was born at Delhi, his father, Shaikh Mohammed Ramzan was a lowly placed soldier in the Mughal army. It was no less than a miracle that Zauq, without having the proper treatment on account of the penury of his family, survived the attacks of a dreaded malady like small pox nine times during his childhood.

His father had no means to equip his son with the best available education of the time. He was sent to a maktab (elementary religious school) that was run by Hafiz Ghulam Rasool. Hafiz himself was a poet and used Shauq as his nom de plume. Under his influence the young Mohammed Ibrahim also got attracted towards poetry. Hafiz provided the required encouragement, took him as his pupil in poetry too and suggested Zauq as his nom de plume.

Though Zauq could not complete the course of the maktab, he got hooked to poetry. In those days Shah Naseer was the most famous master poet of Delhi. Zauq began showing his ghazals to Shah Naseer for improvement. Naseer recognized the natural talent and made him his pupil. Gradually, Zauq began participating in the mushairas. His natural bent of mind towards poetry coupled with his singular obsession to excel in the pursuit brought him fame and fortune. He would be better appreciated in the mushairas than his mentor. Shah Naseer got very annoyed with the growing popularity of Zauq. He threw him out of the group of his pupils. Zauq, thereafter, relied only on his talent and continued writing poetry with a vengeance.

Another poet, Meer Kazim Husain Beqarar, a friend of Zauq's was appointed the

mentor of the Crown Prince Zafar, who later ascended the throne. Through him Zauq could get the chance to enter the royal court. He also started participating in the royal mushairas. When Begarar took up the job of Meer Munshi (Head Clerk) in the Office of John Elphinstone, Crown Prince Zafar appointed Zauq as his mentor with a monthly salary of Rs. 4- that was ultimately raised to Rs. 100- when Bahadur Shah Zafar ascended the throne. He remained the poet laureate of the Mughal Court till his death in 1854.

Career

Zauq's reputation in Urdu poetry is because of his eulogies that reflect his command over the language and his expertise in composing poetry in extremely difficult meters. Since he got associated with the royal court right from his teens and remained there till his death, he had to write mostly eulogies to seek the patronage and rewards from the princes and the King. His mentor, Shah Naseer, would also pay attention only to the linguistic eloquence and mastery over prosody. Zauq also emulated the example of his mentor. Such style of poetry suits eulogy writing. Many critics regard him a great eulogy writer next only to Sauda.

His ghazals also have some literary values. Since Bahadur Shah Zafar was fond of using simple and colloquial diction, Zauq too composed his ghazals using simple words, phrases of everyday use and similes rooted in the common culture. His ghazals are also notable for their spontaneity. Zauq was a deeply religious man. In his ghazals too he would deal with religious and ethical themes. Therefore, his ghazals lack lyricism and appear to be the verses of a preacher.

Legacy

Major portion of Zauq's poetical output got lost because of the mutiny of 1857. Maulana Mohammed Husain Azad compiled a slim volume of his poetry with the help of his pupils like Hafiz, Veeran, Anwar and Zaheer that contains twelve hundred couplets of Ghazals and fifteen Eulogies. Even though much of his work was lost, he left behind a legacy of ghazal, qasida, and mukhammas.

Genre

The qasida was his special forte. Zauq's idioms were homely, but no one has a greater number of signal phrases memorable for thought or music. His language was polished and his diction elegant. He used several styles successfully and, though not as great a thinker as Mirza Ghalib, had a more melodious flow of language.

Death

Zauq died in 1854, and today his grave lies in a bylanes of Paharganj, Delhi. His grave was restored after the Supreme Court orders in early 2000s, but his home in nearby Nabi Karim area, was never identified.

Life Brought Me So I Came

The life brought me so I came; the death takes me away so I go
Neither I came on my own nor I go with my will

There may be a few gamblers as bad as I am
Whatever move I made it proved to be very bad

It's better that one should not get hooked to the charms of the world
However, what one can do when nothing can be accomplished without getting involved

Who's come to the rescue of someone who's about to leave this world!
You too keep moving till you can move on

O Zauq! I'm leaving this garden with a pinning for fresh air
Why should I care now whether zephyr blows or not!

Mohammad Ibrahim Zauq