

Art
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A maestro long forgotten

By Nadeem Saeed

MULTAN, Aug 28: In a small rundown house in Multan's Justice Hameed Colony, a frail-bodied ageing man often remains busy in preparing exquisite small decoration pieces and toys in plaster of Paris, and coating them with oil-based colours through spray gun.

Zawar Husain, as he is known, he is the master of many a trade — painting, sculpture, poetry, criticism and philosophy. Some of his masterpiece painting products are displayed at the famous Lahore Museum along with the work of renowned artists of the country.

Zawar has to work several hours a day in his small workshop to earn bread. Continuous inhalation of oil fumes and blowing particles of the plaster of Paris have cast a bad effect on his already not-so-good health. Sometimes, he has to remain confined to his bed in the face of deteriorating health. But then he has to pluck up his courage to start labouring for life.

From the history we glean young Zawar got admission to the textile designing department of the then Mayo School of Art (now National College of Arts) in Lahore in early 1950s. Going down the memory lane, Zawar Husain recalls that Ahmad Sheikh was the principal of the Mayo School at that time, and his wife Anna Molka Ahmad was the head of the Punjab University's

fine arts department.

"Although I was studying textile designing, my (innate) passion for calligraphy and paintings remained unswerving. Ustad Allah Bakhsh and Abdur Rahman Chughtai were the frequent visitors to the school," he said. He also recalled chats and discussions with the masters in their respective genre of fine art, which he believed imprinted long-lasting impact on his mind and work. He claimed to learn a lot from them. "Under their influence, I started doing more and more drawings."

"After persistent toil, I was lucky to gather a great deal of my work that inspired my principal Ahmad Sheikh. His wife Anna Molka was organizing an exhibition of the work of young artists at the Punjab University, and he encouraged me to take part in it. When I approached Anna Molka, the brochure for the show had been sent to the printer. But, when I showed her my work she cancelled the earlier brochure and designed a new one having my name in the list of the main participants. She gave me a separate corner in the show to display my work, 14 illustrations of Iqbal's poetry.

"My work was well-received and appreciated by the critics," he said, and claimed "I think Chughtai (Abdur Rehman) started doing illustrations on Iqbal's poetry after seeing my work."

Zawar, however, gave up lending illustrations to what he said poetry of others, and opted to illustrate his own poetry.

He has given two books on his illustrated poetry, *Akeeli Hava* and *Shakh-i-Viranah-i-Dil*, while collection of some of his works in prose has also been published in the form of a book titled *Tehzeeb*.

A lover of poet, Zawar feels that free verse is more expressive than the structured ghazal genre of Urdu poetry. That is why he adores N M Rashid as a creative poet in the contemporary Urdu poetry. A ghazal poet, according to Zawar, can give hardly three or four masterpieces in his or her literary life. His critical essays on art and literature are often published in the literary periodicals such as *Mah-i-Nau* and *Adbiat*.

Owing to unavoidable circumstances, he said, he could not continue his studies at the Mayo School and had to settle in Multan along with his family. However, his lust for knowledge kept him in the company of books even though he was doing odd jobs to make both ends meet. "My quest to find philosophical explanations of the "man and nature" in the universe had ever inflamed with more and more reading," he explained his passion for books and reading.

In early 1960s, he set up an Academy of Arts in Multan where the interns were trained



ZAWAR Husain — a man of

both in visual and performing arts. But, the academy could not work beyond a couple of years due to financial crunch. Later, Zawar started conducting art classes at the Multan Ladies Club and remained engaged with the venture for several years.

Living in a city which had more or less dull landscape for the promotion of fine arts, Zawar never missed an opportunity to take part in the art competitions organized in the cultural city of Lahore. Recollecting one of such competitions, he said, he had put on display one of his landscape paintings depicting rural life in the outskirts of Multan. The painting won laurels by Ustad Allah Bakhsh, "who put his hand in his pocket and gave me Rs200, the only thing he could find, as a reward."

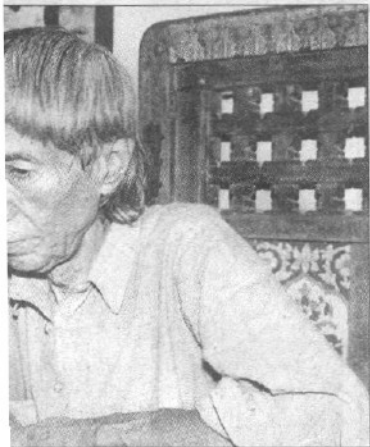
In 1982, the Punjab Arts Council organized a competition in which nearly 300 painters displayed their products. Among the judges was famous poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Zawar's semi-abstract painting in geometrical forms won the prize. The painting was purchased by the Lahore Museum.

Zawar could not leave Multan and, thus, slipped into anonymity in the world of art despite the fact that his seclusion brought maturity of contents both in his paintings and writings. He expressed the bitterness of being anonymous by contradicting the notion about Multan that it is the city of saints. He said: "Multan is the city of feudal lords, and not of saints and spiritualism." His isolation from the mainstream art activity in the country took him closer to the study of nature. Tree became an eloquent metaphor both in his paintings and poetry.

Nowadays, he mostly paints human figures in various forms of tree. Late Prof Jillani Kamran



PAINTINGS that show a commingling of man and nature. — Dawn



an of many a trade. — Dawn

g once described the art of Zavar
ot Husain as "union of man and
rs tree." He said, "Zavar has con-
er, joined nature's tree and the man
rt in a new body, which sometimes
es gives impression that the afflict-
th ed man has changed the form of
re tree and sometimes it appears
o- that the tree has discovered the
er eternal existence of man and has
rt dispersed his load of sorrows into
d its branches."

e Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi once
i- wrote "we had painters who were
s- also writers and writers who
t- were also painters, but their
t- exalted virtue had given minor
n status to their other quality.
1, However, in Zavar Husain, both
et these qualities can be found.
g Zavar has founded an illustrated
s mysticism by conjoining meta-
n physics and physics in his paint-
s ings and poetry."

n Zavar terms painting as the
s- highest quality blessed upon
e mankind because "man imprint-
z ed drawings in his caves well
i- before the creation of language
d and advent of civilization." For
g him "consciousness of one's exist-
e- ence is a must, and its negation
n amounts to death."

y And perhaps his awareness
e about his unfathomed, yet unrec-
t- ognized work has engrafted an
s underlying plaint at an advance
e age against official apathy in his
g otherwise undaunted soul of a
e *dervish*. In one of his poems he
e says:

*Shafaq ka rang jahan
Khak pe bikharta hai
Wo aik morr per
Sukhey huvey drakht se pehley
Tera khayal
Merey rastey mai parra hai*

(Where the hue of evening twi-
t light
s Suffuses on the dust
s At that turn
s Before a dried up tree
s Your thought
t Comes in my way).