**A Spectacle beyond Words**

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Words cannot begin to describe the persona, aura, and charisma Zia Mohyeddin possessed and so easily disseminated whenever and wherever he went. People did not just listen to what he said, they felt it – and they lived it. As a master storyteller, Zia Mohyeddin became one with the words he spoke. His recitation of “Zindagi se darte ho,” “Mujh se pehli si mohabbat,” and “Pagalon ka doctor” among others were iconic moments indeed that still make an impact on the viewers. Zia Mohyeddin breathed his last in Karachi on February 13, 2023.

Whether it was speaking or writing, Zia Mohyeddin was a master in both. An example of Mr Zia Mohyeddin’s literary prowess can be gauged by reading a paragraph from the essay ‘Kasur’ from his collection of essays, A Carrot is a Carrot, in which he narrates the marketplace of Kasur, his native town: He writes, “There was an incredible commingling of smells in the bazaar. The acrid odour of tobacco and jaggery lying in open sacks, was soon overtaken by the aroma of freshly roasted grams. The cloth shops with their bolts of shiny silks and cottons gave off a whiff of vetiver; a few yards away was the soothing, breezy fragrance of sherbets which again dissolved into the tangy, spicy fumes of fried aubergines. The provision shops didn’t smell of turmeric and coriander, but fenugreek, which was a great Kasur specialty.” What you see in Mr Zia Mohyeddin’s writing is a keen sense of how he uses the concept of ‘show, don’t tell’ the most and adds value to the narrative. He received Hilal-i-Imtiaz Award in 2012 from the President of Pakistan while in 2003 he received the Sitara-i-Imtiaz Award from the Government of Pakistan. In November 2017, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the Pakistani community living in Dubai.

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Zia Mohyeddin was born on June 20, 1931, in Lyallpur, British India which is now known as Faisalabad. He was trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London from 1953 to 1956, he played key roles in stage plays including Long Day’s Journey into Night and Julius Caesar. He played a role in A Passage to India which was held at the iconic West End theatre in West End, London. Upon his return to Pakistan in the 1960s, he hosted The Zia Mohyeddin Show. He served as the Director of the PIA Arts Academy (1973-1977). In 2005, he was made President of the National Academy of Performing Arts in Karachi. In September 2021, he was honoured with the title of President Emeritus of NAPA. He appeared in several movies such as Lawrence of Arabia (As Tafas, 1962), Khartoum (As Zobeir Pasha, 1966), The Sailor from Gibraltar (As Noori, 1967), They Came from Beyond Space (As Farge, 1967), Immaculate Conception (As Shehzada, 1992). On television, he appeared in The Adventures of Sir Francis Drake (1962), Danger Man (1964-1966), The Avengers (1966), Hadleigh (1969), Gangsters (1978), The Jewel in the Crown (1984), among others.

During the 1970s he hosted The Zia Mohyeddin Show which became an instant hit primarily because of his he presented himself and conversed. He established himself as a master orator and paved way for others to follow suit. His passing away has closed the gates of an institution – the likes of which we may never experience.

*The writer is an independent researcher, author and columnist.*