

Mirza-Shafi Vazeh (1794-1852)

BIOGRAPHY

The "sage from Ganje", Vazeh was one of the best-known Azerbaijani poets, who worthily continued the classical traditions of the Azerbaijani poetry in XIX c. His verses have been translated into nearly all European languages yet at his life and played a great role in popularization of the Azerbaijani and Oriental literary thought in the West.

Vazeh was born in 1794 in Ganje. His grandfather Muhammed Shafi was one of the well-known noblemen of Ganje, and his father Kerbelayi Sadykh was a prominent architect in the palace of Javad-khan of Ganje. Young Shafi got his primary education at a madrasah, where he made a brilliant success of his studies of Arabic and Persian. Soon Vazeh had to interrupt his studies and leave the madrasah, because he was left all alone after the death of his parents and his brother and also because of his daring verses against the ignorance and fanaticism of the mullahs. He began to work first as a book copier, for which he had an excellent talent due to his beautiful handwriting skills, and then, he worked as a secretary and housekeeper in the estate of Pusta-khanum, the daughter of Javad-khan, the last ruler of Ganje. Simultaneously, Vazeh deeply enlarged his knowledge by self-education.

In 1840 Vazeh moved to Tiflis where, with help of his past student M.F. Akhundov, he secured the post of a teacher at a boy's school. In Tiflis Vazeh became engaged in literary activity more than before. In 1844 he established a literary society "Divani-Hikmet" which gathered many prominent Azeri, Russian and foreign intellectuals living in Tiflis.

Among the members of Vazeh-established "Divani-Hikmet" literary society was Friedrich Bodenstedt, a German poet and traveler, with whom Vazeh made friends and taught him the Azeri and Persian languages and literature. Vazeh rarely put his verses into written form and his friends wrote down most of his works during their gatherings. So did Bodenstedt too. Upon his return to Germany, Bodenstedt translated Vazeh's poetry into German and published it in 1851 under the name of "The songs of Mirza Shafi". The book created a stir: it was republished again and again, and translated into other European languages. However, after Vazeh's death in 1852 F. Bodenstedt denied Vazeh's authorship claiming that it was his own verses and he presented them as belonging to Vazeh in order to add some exotics to the book and thus facilitate its popularization.

Vazeh's verses, which were translated and published in all over Europe in XIX c., gained due attention in his motherland very late, only in the beginning of XX c. The Azerbaijani literary scientists S. Mumtaz and H. Hamidzade have played an important role in collecting and publishing Vazeh's original verses that have been preserved to date. In his poetry, Vazeh glorifies the joys of life, and the wisdom and goodness of Man.

