

Classic Poetry Series

Kaifi Azmi
- poems -

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Kaifi Azmi(19 January 1919 - 10 May 2002)

Kaifi Azmi (Hindi: काफ़ी अज़मी; Urdu: کیفی ازمی) was an Indian Urdu poet. He is considered to be one of the greatest Urdu poets of 20th century. Together with Pirzada Qasim, Jon Eliya and many others he participated in many memorable mushairas of 20th century.

 Early Life

Kaifi Azmi was born in a village Mizwaa(n) in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India.

 Family

Kaifi Azmi is married to Shaukhat Azmi. They have a daughter, Shabana Azmi (An Indian Actress of film, television and theatre) and Baba Azmi (Indian Cinematographer).

 Career

 Writings

At age eleven, Azmi wrote his first ghazal Itna To Zindagi Mein Kisi Ki Khalal Pade and somehow managed to get himself invited to a mushaira and over there, he recited a ghazal, rather a couplet of the ghazal which was very much appreciated by the president of the mushaira, Mani Jaisi, but most of the people, including his father, thought he recited his elder brother's ghazal. When his elder brother denied it, his father and his clerk decided to test his poetic talent. They gave him one of the lines of a couplet and asked him to write a ghazal in the same meter and rhyme. Azmi accepted the challenge and completed a ghazal. This particular ghazal was to become a rage in undivided India and it was immortalized as it was sung by legendary ghazal singer, Begum Akhtar.

Azmi abandoned his studies of Persian and Urdu during the Quit India agitations in 1942 and shortly thereafter became a full time Marxist when he accepted membership of the Communist Party of India in 1943.

During this period, the leading progressive writers of Lucknow noticed him. They were very impressed by his leadership qualities. They also saw in him a budding poet and extended all possible encouragement towards him. Consequently, Azmi started to win great acclaim as a poet and became a member of Progressive

Writers' Movement of India.

At the age of twenty-four, he started activities in the textile mill areas of Kanpur. As a full time worker, he left his life of comfort, though he was the son of a zamindar. He was asked to shift his base to Bombay, work amongst the workers and start party work with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm and at the same time would attend mushairas in different parts of India. In Bombay, he joined Ali Sardar Jafri in writing for the party's paper, Qaumi Jung.

In 1947, he visited Hyderabad to participate in a mushaira. There he met, fell in love with and married a woman named Shaukat Azmi. She later became a renowned actress in theatre and films. They had two children together, Shabana Azmi (b. 1950), a renowned actress of Indian cinema and Baba Azmi, a noted cameraman.

** Poetry **

Like most of the Urdu poets, Azmi began as a ghazal writer, cramming his poetry with the repeated themes of love and romance in a style that was replete with clichés and metaphors. However, his association with the Progressive Writers' Movement and Communist Party made him embark on the path of socially conscious poetry.

In his poetry, he highlights the exploitation of the subaltern masses and through them he conveys a message of the creation of a just social order by dismantling the existing one. Yet, his poetry cannot be called plain propaganda. It has its own merits; intensity of emotions, in particular, and the spirit of sympathy and compassion towards the disadvantaged section of society, are the hallmark of his poetry. His poems are also notable for their rich imagery and in this respect, his contribution to Urdu poetry can hardly be overstated.

Azmi's first collection of poems, Jhankar was published in 1943. His important works including anthologies of poetry, were Aakhir-e-Shab, Sarmaya, Awaara Sajde, Kaifiyaat, Nai Gulistan, an anthology of articles he wrote for Urdu Blitz, Meri Awaaz Suno, a selection of his film lyrics, and the script of Heer Ranjha in Devanagari.

His best known poems are Aurat, Makaan, Daaera, Saanp, and Bahuroopni.

"Kar chale hum fida jan-o-tan sathion
ab tumhare hawale watan sathio
zinda rahne ki mausam bahut hai magar

jan dene ki rut roz ati nahi
husn aur ishq dono ko ruswa kare
wo jawani jo khume nahati nahi
aaj dharti bani hai dulhan sathio
Kar Chale hum Fida Jano Tan Sathio"

 Films

Azmi's work in films includes working as a lyricist, writer and actor. Azmi wrote his first lyrics for the film Buzdil, directed by Shaheed Latif, in 1952. His early work as a writer was mainly for Nanubhai Vakil's films like Yahudi Ki Beti (1956), Parvin (1957), Miss Punjab Mail (1958) and Id Ka Chand (1958).

While directors like Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and Bimal Roy strove to create the "New Cinema", writers like Sahir Ludhianvi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Majrooh Sultanpuri, and Kaifi changed the tenor and vocabulary of the Hindi film song, creating a fresh new wave in Hindi film lyrics that lasted many years.

His greatest feat as a writer was Chetan Anand's Heer Raanjha (1970) wherein the entire dialogue of the film was in verse. It was a tremendous achievement and one of the greatest feats of Hindi film writing. Azmi also won great critical accolades for the script, dialogues and lyrics of M.S. Sathyu's Garam Hawa (1973), based on a story by Ismat Chughtai. Azmi also wrote the dialogues for Shyam Benegal's Manthan (1976) and Sathyu's Kanneshwara Rama (1977).

As a lyricist and songwriter, though he wrote for numerous films, he will always be remembered for Guru Dutt's Kaagaz Ke Phool (1959) and Chetan Anand's Haqeeqat (1964), India's greatest war film. Some notable films for which he wrote lyrics include Kohra (1964), Anupama (1966), Uski Kahani (1966), Saat Hindustani (1969), Shola Aur Shabnam, Parwana (1971), Bawarchi (1972), Pakeezah (1972), Hanste Zakhm (1973), Arth (1982) and Razia Sultan (1983). He also played a memorable role of Naseem's grandfather in Naseem (1995).

Azmi died on May 10, 2002 at around the age of eighty-three. He was survived by his wife, daughter and son.

His autobiography is included in a collection of his works, Aaj Ke Prashid Shayar: Kaifi Azmi.

 In Media

Azmi was the subject of a documentary film called Kaifi Azmi (1979), directed by

Raman Kumar. In 1997, he recited his own poems for Kaifiyaat, an audio book on his collected works.

Kaifi Aur Mein, a play based on his life, his works and the memoir of his wife, Shaukat Azmi - Yadon Ki Rahguzar (Down Memory Lane), was written and performed by Javed Akhtar and Shabana Azmi, and performed in India as well as abroad in 2006. Another play, directed by Rani Balbir, Waqt Ne Kiya Kya Hasin Sitam, based Kaifi Azmi's life and writings was staged in 2005, and received rave reviews.

 Awards

He was the recipient of Padma Shri one of the Indian Government's highest civilian awards. Besides he was awarded the Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy Award and the Sahitya Akademi Award for Urdu for his collection Awaara Sajde, Special Award of Maharashtra Urdu Academy, Soviet Land Nehru Award, Lotus Award from the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, and President's Award for national integration. In 1998, Government of Maharashtra conferred the Jyaneshwara Award on him. He was also honoured with the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Fellowship for lifetime achievement.

In 2000, he was conferred the first Millennium Award by the Government of Delhi and the Delhi Urdu Academy. He has also been honoured with a doctorate from Vishva Bharati University, Santiniketan.

 Sahitya Akademi Award

1975: Sahitya Akademi Award: Awara Sajde

2002: Sahitya Akademi Fellowship (Immortals of Literature)

 National Film Awards

1970: National Film Award for Best Lyrics: Saat Hindustani

 Filmfare Awards

1975:Filmfare Best Dialogue Award: Garam Hawa

1975:Filmfare Best Screenplay Award: Garam Hawa (with Shama Zaidi)

1975:Filmfare Best Story Award: Garam Hawa (with Ismat Chughtai)

 Famous Verses

Aaj ki raat bahut garam hawa chalti hai
Aaj ki raat na neend aayegi
Hum sub uthen, main bhi uthun, tum bhi utho
Koi khidki isi deewar mein khul jayegi
- Makaan

Tu jo bejaan khilonon se behel jaati hai
Tapti saanson ki haraarat se pighal jaati hai
Paaon jis raah mein rakhti hai fisal jaati hai
Banke seemaab har ik zarf mein dhal jaati hai
Zist ke aahni saanche main dhalna hai tujhe
uth meri jaan mere saath hi chalna hai tujhe...
- Aurat (Woman)

Waqt Ni Kiya Kya Haseen Sitam
Tum rahe na tum, Hum Rahe na Hum.

- Film Kaagaz Ke Phool 1959
Tum Itna Jo Muskura Rahe Ho
Kya gum hai jisko Chupa rahe Ho.
- Film Arth (1982)

zindagi bhar mujhe nafrat si rahi asko se
Meri khwabo ko tum asko me dubote keu ho?
Jo meri tarha jia karte hai kab marte hai
Thak gaya hu mujhe solene do rote keu ho?
Soke bhi jagte rahte hai janbaz suno.

keu sazai ho chandan ke chita mere liey
mai koi jism nahi jalao ge mujhe
rakh ke saath bikhar jaunga dunia me
thokar jahan khaogey waha paogey mujhe

Aavaaraa Sajde

Kaifi Azmi

Ab Tum Aagosh-E-Tasavvur Me.N Bhii Aayaa Na Karo

Kaifi Azmi

Andeshe

Kaifi Azmi

Azaa Me.N Bahate The Yahaa.N, Lahuu To Nahii.N

Kaifi Azmi

Bas Ik Jhijhak Hai Yahii Haal-E-Dil Sunaane Me.N

Kaifi Azmi

Daayaraa

Kaifi Azmi

Ek Duaa

Kaifi Azmi

Ibne-E-Mariyam

Kaifi Azmi

Itanaa To Zindagiii Me.N Kisii Kii Khalal

Kaifi Azmi

Jhukii Jhukii Sii Nazar Beqaraar Hai Ki Nahii.N

Kaifi Azmi

Koii Ye Kaise Bataa Ye Ke Vo Tanhaa Kyo.N Hai.N

Kaifi Azmi

Mai.N aa Hui.N Jise Vo Jahaa.N Nahii.N Milataa

Kaifi Azmi

Makaan

Kaifi Azmi

Mashvare

Kaifi Azmi

Mere Dil Me.N Tuu Hii Tuu Hai Dil Kii Davaa Kyaa Karuu.N

Kaifi Azmi

Nazaraanaa

Kaifi Azmi

Pahalaa Salaam

Kaifi Azmi

Patthar Ke Khudaa Vahaa.N Bhi Paaye

Kaifi Azmi

Sunaa Karo Merii Jaa.N In Se Un Se Afasaane

Kaifi Azmi

Tum Itanaa Jo Muskuraa Rahe Ho

Kaifi Azmi

Vatan Ke Liye

Kaifi Azmi