Classic Poetry Series

Zinda Kaul

- 4 poems -

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Zinda Kaul (1884 – 1965)

Pandit 'Zinda Kaul is a well-known Indian poet, writer & teacher. He composed in Persian, Hindi, Urdu & Kashmiri.

Personal Life

Zinda Kaul was also known as MasterJi by his students and friends. He came to be called 'Masterji' because he used to teach many Kashmiris, both in school as well as at his home. Zinda was born into a Kashmiri Pandit family, & his father Pandit Lakshman Pandit was indifferent to his formal education. Masterji had to face many difficulties in his life. He was a school teacher for a long time. After that, he worked as an ordinary clerk. In 1939, Kaul retired from the Publicity office of Kashmir as a translator. He died in Jammu in the winter of 1965.

Literary Work

Zinda Kaul was the first Kashmiri poet to win the Sahitya Academy award in 1956, for his book of poetry compilations Sumran. It was first published in Devanagari, and later the government had it printed in the Persio-Arabic script. The Sahitya Academy of India gave Pandit Zinda Koul an award of five thousand rupees for this book.

In the beginning 'Masterji' wrote in Persian, Hindi, and Urdu. Masterji started writing in Kashmiri in 1942. In his Kashmiri poetry, he has written primarily on devotion, philosophy & peace. Masterji's poetry has been published in all these four languages. However, he made his name by writing in Kashmiri.

His poetry was greatly influenced by Lal Ded and Parmanand. His writing style is mystical & is influenced by bhakta tradition.

Masterji composed poetry only for (his own) pleasure. Those who know say that Masterji's poems in Kashmiri were better than those in Hindi and Urdu. Masterji translated the poems of the famous Kashmiri poet Parmanand into English. These poems have been published in three volumes. Kashmiri poetry suffered a great loss upon Masterji's death.

Compulsion

One would cry and not restrain the tears,
But crying is of no avail,
Shedding incessant tears is of no avail,
And knocking one's head against
boulders is of no avail.
And knowing that there is none to heed,
Why this urge to plead!
Why dash darts into the void!
Mere compulsion! Mere helplessness!
The body is consumed minute by minute,
suppressed by hunger and thirst and cold,
chained by ailments and kith and kin
depressed by constant worries and woes.
And once these worries cease to exist,
the body is tempted and lured
by numberless temptations.
The restless mind is without any peace
for something has obsessed it.
Without the encounter with the Good,
Without the realization of the Good,
The mind is searching for something lost
like a person drunk in sleep.
More affliction of desire and body!
Our ears have heard,
Our hearts have believed,
that sometime, somewhere, someone
caught a distant glimpse of Him.
We pine for Him; we long for Him,
For we think he is sulking from us
hiding under the bushes.
Indeed, love is a painful obsession!
I ask
The one who is hidden far and away,
The one who gives us a deaf ear,
Does he ever enquire how we are?
Does he ever recall where we are?
Does he ever ask himself,
'I wonder what is the lot of those
Whom I put in the dismal dark,
Whom I let loose
Over the hills, over the streams, over the woods?'
Indeed, beauty has no compassion!
We could argue,
'Why expect love from the loveless?
Why expect fruit from a willow?
If you do not know his whereabouts,
How can you plan his search?'
But heart will not retract the steps
For how can one chain the air!
For how can one blame the heart!
Love is not a child's play!
It is the sound from within;

It is like the fragrance of the musk.
The musk deer hunts over hills and dales
looking for something that is within him.
The heart is like the musk deer, searching
without that which is within.
The fragrance of the dear one pulls him out
with eyes shut and hands down.
He is playing the game of hide and seek,
appearing here and appearing there.
Once the moth has seen the lamp afar,
how can it stand still?
It must chase the light with frenzy
(Even though the light is not seen).
It must tear through the seven robes of wisdom.
Beauty is not mere enchantment!
Mere compulsion! Mere helplessness!
Mere affliction of desire and body!
Indeed love is a painful obsession!
Indeed beauty has no compassion!
Love is not a child's play!
Beauty is not mere enchantment!

[Translated from original poem Majburi]

Zinda Kaul

Not Prepared

The one who loves me more than I
My hope, my light, my tears and my Master
The one who searches for me
The one who waits for me, my eternal lover

He says, in this country, for some time
You must wait for me and let
The flowers of love and separation grow
You must gift the flowers to your neighbors and now

Your crossing, your salvation: that is my work, leave it to me
He says, the one who waits for me
If you water any plant, you water this Earth
If you love anyone, you love Him
Love leaves Him only to return to Him
This is what the wise and the seers say and
This is the secret of love, and this my prayer
He says, the one who waits for me, my eternal lover

You send me letters everyday
Everyday in a paper of a different colour
Everyday I get your messages
A flower grassland, a wide lake, a starry sky
And a river: the waterfall at Aharbal
Oriole, moth, narcissus
Young fawns, a lover, a beauty and
A wise man
A true ascetic of the Not-Self
The one who has Nothing
And calls everything his own
Everyday I get messages from you
The one who waits for me, my eternal lover

The fading moonlight in the last hours of the night
The sweet fragrance of flowers everywhere
The music of the heavens and the earth is one
The soft breeze of heavens and a magic in the air
Perhaps he is just about to arrive, perhaps he has come
The one who waits for me, my eternal lover

I am enveloped in this shame
Can I hide or atleast die?
He might turn away from me if I am in this state
I am unclean: inside and outside
But perhaps I have a few flowers for prayer
The flowers I never offered to my neighbors
I will string them into a garland but these have wilted

Can I find a clean place to invite him in?
But the things of the house have left no space for you
The door to the temple is a kitchen. And I wait
The one who waits for me, my eternal lover.

I do not feel that his love for me has changed but
This state I am in is a message from him
He would not come if I am not prepared

He saved me from this test, saved me from disgrace
The one who waits for me, my eternal lover

Zinda Kaul

Reply

Dear friend, pray do not lose hope and faith;
no wonder if someone comes to you with another love token.
He has no dearth of tokens; His treasures are full.
His tokens are lying ungathered in hills and woods,
or brightly blooming in flowerbeds, or scintillating among the stars.

You say:"How can we face him after all our slips and falls? "
Such lame excuses to turn back from devotion will not do.
For supposing we withdraw, can His love let us go?
The eternal bond (between the human soul and God) is not fragile and flimsy like a child's friendship.

He loves the humble repentant; though He pretends to be angry with those who are sophisticated.
If you do not believe me, go and ask aside His popular devotees like Sudama who had won His love.
He, the all-knowing innocent child, is never far from saints like Surdas and listens quietly to their devotional songs.

Zinda Kaul

Sumran

Listen, my friend! He gave me His rosary as a token of His love, but alas!
I failed to take care of it and lost it! I was unworthy.
I have no hope to recover those precious beads by groping in my blindness.
To be so lucky one must have donated valuable gifts to the poor in one's past lives, which I have not.

I ought to have treasured it in my heart but I held it in my hand to make a show of it.
So no one else is to blame; I myself am responsible for such grievous loss.
To show one's treasure is to lose it; impatience leads to imperfection;
people keep lids on their kettles so that the rice may be cooked perfectly.

Since I have lost this token, I go, like one out of wits, from shop to shop without meaning to buy or beg anything.
(Those who go from faith to faith grasp none.) How can I explain my lapses, slips and falls?
How can I face Him during the day?
And I cannot go to Him alone also in the dark, dangerous night.

Zinda Kaul