

Classic Poetry Series

Jan Nisar Akhtar
- poems -

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Jan Nisar Akhtar(14 February 1914 - 19 August 1976)

Jan Nisar Akhtar (Urdu: جن نثار اکhtar) was an important 20th century Indian poet of Urdu ghazals and nazms, and a part of the Progressive Writers' Movement, who was also a lyricist for Bollywood.

In his career spanning four decade during which he worked with distinguished music composers like C. Ramchandra, O.P. Nayyar, N Dutta and Khayyam writing about 151 songs, notable among them were songs from his breakthrough film AR Kardar's Yasmin (1955), Aankhon hi Aankhon Mein in Guru Dutt's C.I.D. (1956), Yeh dil aur unki nigahon ke saaye in Prem Parbat (1974) and Aaja re in Noorie (1979) and his last unforgettable song Ae Dil-e-naadaan in Kamal Amrohi's Razia Sultan (1983).

His notable poetry works include, Nazr-e-Butaan, Salaasil, Javidaan, Pichali Pehar, Ghar Angan and "Khaak-e-dil" (The Ashes of Heart"), a poetry collection for which he was awarded the 1976 Sahitya Akademi Award in Urdu by Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters.

 Early Life

He was born in 1914, in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, India, into a family of Sunni theologians, scholars and poets. His father Muztar Khairabadi was poet as was his father's elder brother, Bismil Khairabadi, while his great grandfather, Fazl-e-Haq Khairabadi, a scholar of Islamic studies and theology, notably edited the first diwan of Mirza Ghalib on his request, and later became an important figure during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 in his native Khairabad.

Jan Nisar passed his matriculation from Victoria Collegiate High School, Gwalior, and in 1930 joined Aligarh Muslim University, from where he did his B.A. Honours and M.A. degree, and started his doctoral work, but had to return to Gwalior due to family conditions.

 Career

On his return, he joined Victoria College, Gwalior as an Urdu Lecturer. Meanwhile in 1943, he married Safiya Siraj-ul Haq, also an alumnus of AMU, and the sister of poet Majaz Lucknawi, their two sons, Javed and Salman were born in 1945 and 1946 respectively. Post-independence riots in Gwalior forced him to shift base to Bhopal, where he joined the Hamidia College as Head of Department of Urdu and Persian, later Safiya also joined the college. Soon they became part of

the Progressive Writers' Movement and subsequently he was made its president.

In 1949, he resigned from his job, moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) to write lyrics for Urdu/Hindi movies besides ghazals and nazms for general publication. Once in Bombay, he came in touch with other progressive writers, like Mulk Raj Anand, Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Ismat Chughtai, who often met at Bombay's Silver Fish Restaurant, and subsequently came to be known as 'Bombay Group of Writers'. Success came his way quite late as a film lyricist, till then he was supported by his wife who had stayed back in Bhopal, though she died prematurely of cancer in 1953. Finally he had a career breakthrough, with Yasmeeen (1955), with music by C. Ramchandra. His association with Madan Mohan, the music director resulted in many memorable movie songs. Some of his notable lyrics were, Meri Neendon Mein Tum in Naya Andaz (1956) by Kishore Kumar, Shamshad Begum, Garib Jan Key Hamko Naa Tum Daga Dena sung by Mohd. Rafi in Chhoo Mantar, the hit Piya piya piya... in Baap Re Baap (1955) music by O.P. Nayyar, Aap Yun Faaslon Se by Lata Mangeshkar in Shankar Hussain (1977).

His poetry was secular and like many of progressive writers of his generation talked of freedom, dignity, economic exploitation and other issues gleaming of the leftist leanings. Even his romanticism which was amply displayed in his ghazals, was replete with references to household and family life. His notable books include Nazr-e-Butaan, Salaasil, Javidaan, Ghar Angan and Khaak-e-Dil (all Urdu titles). One of his many famous couplets is :

Ashaar mere yuu.N to zamaane ke liye hai.n,
kuchh sher faqat unako sunaane ke liye hai.n
Although my poems are meant for the whole world,
There are some couplets meant just for the beloved

He even wrote and produced a film Bahu Begum (1967) starring Pradeep Kumar and Meena Kumari. During the period of four year to his death he published three collections of his works most important of them being, Khak-e-Dil (The Ashes of Heart"), which has his representative poems from 1935 to 1970, and which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award (Urdu) in 1976. Jan Nisar was commissioned by the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru to collate the best Hindustani poetry of last 300 years, and later the first edition of the book titled Hindustan Hamara (Our Hindustan) in two volumes was released by Indira Gandhi. It contained Urdu verses on a topics, ranging from love and praise for India and its history, to festivals like Holi and Diwali, on Indian rivers like the Ganges, Yamuna and the Himalayas.

He died in Mumbai, India on 19 August 1976, while he was still working on Kamal Amrohi's film, Razia Sultan (1983).

He was nominated posthumously for 1980 Filmfare Best Lyricist Award for "Aaja Re Mere Dilbar" from the film, Noorie.

His anthology, Hindustan Hamara was re-released in Hindi in 2006.

 Family

He married Safia Akhtar, a teacher and writer in 1943, who in turn was the sister of Majaz, a romantic revolutionary poet. When Jan Nisar moved to Mumbai to try his luck as a film lyricist, she stayed back with their children. She died of protracted cancer in 17 January 1953. Thereafter Jan Nisar got married again on 17 September 1956, to Khadija Talat. "Tumhare Naam", a collection of letters from 1 October 1943 to 29 December 1953 penned by Safia Akhtar, were first published in 1955 in two volumes under the title, "Harf-e-Aashna" and "Zer-e-Lab", this Hindi translation, was by Professor Asghar Wajahat, former Head of the Hindi Department, Jamia Millia Islamia was released in 2004.

He was the father of lyricist and script-writer Javed Akhtar and psychiatrist and poet Salman Akhtar, Shahid Akhtar, writer and journalist Uneza Akhtar, Albina sharma, grandfather of Farhan Akhtar, Zoya Akhtar, Kabir Akhtar, Shoneize Akhtar, Aiman Akhtar, Ahmed Akhtar, Abir Sharma and Nishat Akhtar, father-in-law of Shabana Azmi, Lata Akhtar and Monisha Nayar and the ex-father-in-law of Honey Irani and Raj Verma, and connected with the rest of Akhtar-Azmi family.

Ashaar Mere Yuu.N To Zamaane Ke Liye Hai.N

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Bhuule Na Kisii Haal Men Aadaab-E-Nazar Ham

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Fursat-E-Kaar Faqat Chaar Hai Yaaro

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Ham Se Bhaagaa Na Karo Door Gazaalo.N Kii Tarah Ac

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Har Ek Raah Me.N Ek Gam Chhupaa Lage Hai Mujhe

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Jaaiye Baithiye Hukmraanon Ke Biich

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Jab Lage Zakhm To Qaatil Ko Duaa Dii Jaaye

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Kaun Kahataa Hai Tujhe Mai.N Ne Bhulaa Rakhaa Hai

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Lamhaa Lamhaa Terii Yaaden Jo Chamak Uthtii Hain

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Mauj-E-Gul, Mauj-E-Sabaa, Mauj-E-Sahar Lagatii Hai

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Puuchh Na Mujhase Dil Ke Fasaane

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Rahii Hai Daad Talab Unakii Shokhiyaa.N Hamase

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Sau Bhii To Kyaa Baat Banegii

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Sub_H Ke Dard Ko Raato.N Kii Jalan Ko Bhuule.N

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Subah Kii Aas Kisii Lamhe Jo Ghat Jaatii Hai

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Tamaan Umr Azaabo.N Kaa Silasilaa To Rahaa

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Tuu Is Qadar Mujhe Apne Qareeb Lagtaa Hai

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Ujrîi Ujrîi Huîi Har Aas Lage

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Zamaanaa Aaj Nahii.N Dagamagaa Ke Chalane Kaa

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Zaraa Sii Baat Pe Har Rasm To.D Aayaa Thaa

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Zindagii Tanhaa Safar Kii Raat Hai

Jan Nisar Akhtar

Zindagii Ye To Nahiin Tujhko Sanvaaraa Hii Na Ho

Jan Nisar Akhtar