

Classic Poetry Series

Amin Kamil
- poems -

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Amin Kamil(1924 -)

Amin Kamil is a major voice in Kashmiri poetry and one of the chief exponents of modern ghazal in the language. His influence is widely accepted by his contemporaries and later generations. Kamil, besides being a poet, has also written short stories and a novel and works of literary criticism. He has also written a number of plays and musicals for the radio. His critically edited collection of Sufi poetry (Sufi Shair, 3 vols., 1964-6.5) remains a definitive text which has been widely acclaimed. He has also edited the collected verse of Nund Reshi, and that of Habba Khatun. Kamil is also known as a scholar of high calibre.

Kamil has also given us some memorable poems in the Nazm form. He edited the independent journal Neab for some time. As a critic he has acquired wide recognition. He also helped create the modified alphabet presently used for Kashmiri language. Kamil has also contributed to the field of translation. His translation of Tagore's Dak Ghar, as also the poetry of the Urdu poet Iqbal have been significant additions to the corpus of translated literature available in Kashmiri.

Kamil was born at Kaprin, a village in South Kashmir. He graduated in Arts from the Punjab University and took his degree in Law from the Aligarh Muslim University. He joined the Bar in 1947 and continued to practice Law till 1949, when he was appointed a Lecturer in Sri Pratap College, Srinagar. He was closely associated with the writers' movement of that time and under its influence switched over from Urdu to Kashmiri as his medium of expression. He joined the State Cultural Academy when it was set up in 1958 and was appointed the Convener for Kashmiri language. He later became Editor for Kashmiri and edited the two journals of the Cultural Academy – Sheeraza and Son Adab with distinction for many years. He retired from the service of the Cultural Academy in 1979.

Fiction

Kamil's contribution in the field of fiction adds to his stature. In 1958, Gati Manz Gaash (Light amidst darkness) was published, a novel inspired by the well-known observation of Mahatma Gandhi in the context of the aftermath of the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947, that in the midst of darkness prevailing everywhere he had found a ray of light in Kashmir alone.

Kamil has attempted to provide this concept with blood and bone which, of

course, is a highly exacting task. The heroine Fatima, an educated young Muslim maiden of a distant village, working as a school teacher in Baramulla, the scene of carnage committed by the tribal invaders, prefers to be known as the widow of Ramkrishan, an ugly and illiterate Hindu, who had given his life to protect her honor. It is the only Kashmiri novel that is based on historical events.

Kamil's collection of short stories, "Kathi Manz Kath" (Story within Story) published in mid-60s includes his masterpiece, "Kokar Jang" (The Cockfight). The Cockfight is considered as the most popular story in the Kashmiri literature. It has been translated into many Indian languages and has appeared in English translation in anthologies such as Indian Short Stories 1900-2000 edited by I. Vi. Ramakrishan; Contemporary Kashmiri Short Stories edited by Hriday Kaul Bharati, Neerja Mattoo; Contemporary Indian Short Stories Vol 3 all published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. The Cockfight is prescribed in the school and university curriculum in Jammu and Kashmir. It has also appeared in Best Loved Indian Stories of the Century published by Penguin India in 1999. Prof. J L Koul writes about this story that "...perhaps, the comic muse at its subtlest best (though not unmixed with irony) in Kashmiri short story is to be seen in Amin Kamil's Hini Rahman and Kokar Jang, particularly in the latter, in which the foibles and eccentricities of character of the two women neighbors, Jaana Bits and Shah Maal, are expressed through their respective cocks." Kamil has a special talent for blending humor, irony and politics/social comment in his stories as well as poems. As an example of this, in his poems, is "Taay Nama" published in mid-80s. Kamil's poems as well as stories frequently comment on the socio-political situation of Kashmir. In this connection, his story "Sawal Chu Kaluk" Enigma has received much acclaim.

Poetry

Kamil is a master of the Kashmiri Ghazal and has been instrumental in fashioning it into an entity distinct from its Urdu and Persian counterparts. His poetry is marked by freshness of sensibility, maturity of expression and striking technical innovation which together give him a diction uniquely his own.

Kamil employs subtle humor with devastating effect in his poetry. Through it he mirrors contemporary life and makes a social comment on his milieu. It, however, is satire or humor that does not bruise, but heals. Kamil is metaphysical and introspective as well and in some ways represents the continuity of the quintessence of his own literary tradition minus its ponderousness. He has the quality of being simple as well as profound at the same time. This he does in purely Kashmiri tenor. In spite of his erudition he has never fallen prey to the transplantation of an alien metaphor, borrowing of a

foreign concept or trend in literature.

Amin Kamil has influenced a whole generation of Kashmiri poets, in particular the Ghazal writing poets. Many have tried to approximate his diction, but he stands alone. This is in part due to his poetic concerns that are deeply humanistic, his rich word-hoard which is informed by his upbringing as well as a deep study of tradition, and his literary rectitude. His mastery over prosody and nuanced understanding of his chosen language has also contributed towards this preeminence. Writing in the Encyclopedia of Indian Literature, Ghulam Nabi Gauhar sums up Kamil thus: "He is a master of Kashmiri Ghazal and has to his credit poems of eternal value."

Awards and Honours

Amin Kamil won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967 for his book of poems, *Laveh Te Praveh*. "What distinguishes this book from the poetry of the sixties is the conversational tone producing intimacy, blending of Persian and Kashmiri words and expressions, aphoristic comments on life, intermingling of satire and pathos, use of musically potent meters, masterly use of simile and image, oblique but esoteric expression, and finally the use of Persian and Indian mythological allusions", to quote Shafi Shauq. The style established in this anthology gets further refinement in Kamil's later collections of poetry, namely, *Beyi Suy Paan* (*Again the Same Self*, 1967), *Padis Pod Tshay* (*One Foot Shadowing the Other*, 1972) and *Yim Myan Sokhan* (*These, My Words*, 2007).

Kamil has won many awards for his books and achievement including awards from the Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy, the State Government of Jammu & Kashmir, Robes of Honor from many prestigious organizations, International Irfan Foundation Award, Kashmir University's Lifetime Achievement award, and Padma Shri from the Indian government. Recently, a two-day national seminar on Amin Kamil was held in Aligarh Muslim University in which Kamil was recognized as a writer of national importance, transcending the boundaries of the vernacular literature of Kashmiri. Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages published a special issue of its literary magazine *Sheeraza* on Amin Kamil's life and works which was released in Srinagar in a function in Summer 2011.

Bare Thoughts

A DESERT my love can offer the shade of your hair
The memory of you insists, knocking at the door
(If the heart is a door). It is hard to want more
Of time; to wish to be alone
We were none of us given to be

What more can a heart do (if the heart lives right
Next-door a too inquisitive mind) but doubt
And fasten close the pain? The softened, open mouth
Hate can never know—
In tears is a consecration of love.

These cups are too shallow for thought—
Do you think they'll find
For us forms more truly shaped, less hallowed
Before I sell and no longer sound
Love's wants, myself grow to shadow
Some other?
These must be wraiths
These where Man, you say,
We've yet to raise.
The wreath of words is not your own.
Bare thought is given to grey
Unto decrease.

The dog is collared in gold—
O how your bark quickens my heart.
In the ruined city
A trembling heart is treasure.

Amin Kamil

Cities On Fire

What fire is this, O Lord? City after city is burning.
The reason turned into pitch-smoke, ifs and buts are burning.

The roof's aflame, the walls come down, the rooms ablaze
Houses light up houses, person after person is burning.

Like a scorching desert it sucks the moisture from the eyes.
Even the sighs can't have an effect, effects are burning.

Every thoughtful mind's tranquil is smoldering within.
Faces have turned black as coal and the hearts are burning.

The split seconds are catching the sparks- a lot to brave!
The moment's like an ember-burnt hole and the time's burning.

The mountains crack and rocks melt just like the wax.
The brooks bubble along the course with waters burning.

(draft translation; under revision)

[Translated from the Kashmiri by Muneebur Rahman]

Amin Kamil

Despite Insight

An unknown doubt came in sight, despite all insight:
And we fell for the darkness in a morning clearly bright.

Under the dense shade of trees, look, shadows dissolve
It's like the mid-day scorching sun, in a late afternoon breeze.

A dusty storm at his back and a thick fog in the front
Makes Adam as uncertain as he is brilliant.

I also have studied the lessons of morals and ethics.
I also have erred with all that knowledge of its topics.

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[Translated from the Kashmiri by Muneebur Rahman]

Amin Kamil

In Water

You're fraught with words, better go sit in water;
For they swell with meaning and glow more in water.

Look for the heart in the chest and roast it on embers
Look for the blood in the liver and drink it in water.

Tomorrow Kashmir will stretch in the sun like a desert,
The day after Ladakh and Leh will float in water.

Under the hollow banks frightened waves take refuge;
Lord Jaldev is born with fire in water.

At mid day, even the sun gets soaked in sweat;
At the end, even the moon catches fire in water.

Even in excitement, sometimes, people set towns on fire;
Even for fun, sometimes, people pour poison in water.

The lost cow is looking for the elevensome, would someone tell her?
Five drowned in dry land, six are aflame in water.

The peddler of ghazals, this Kamil, makes fiery calls
But the fatefrost people are coldly sleeping in water.

[Translated from the Kashmiri by Muneebur Rahman]

Amin Kamil

Naked Thoughts

My love provides this desert with
Your lovely hair's luxuriant shade.
Time and gain your memory
Knocks wildly at the door of my heart.
Who would for ages live alone? -
It's not with that wish we were born.

When the wind had idle sport with the lamp,
Trembling seized the lights of heaven.
Being helpless, for the mind lives close,
The heart put a lid on its agony.
Hate never will know softened lips;
Love is blest with streams of tears.

Old goblets are too small for thought -
I wish some better form were found,
Else I might sell, not sing love's yearnings,
And follow only in others' wake.
Who says man can't be found here now?
Then what are these? Only ghosts?
The brocade of words is not to be had,
And naked thoughts just waste away.

The dog wears a collar of gold -
O how your barking thrills my heart!

In this city of sad decay
Even a fluttering heart is a treasure.

[Translated from the Kashmiri by Trilokinath Raina]

Amin Kamil

The Dew

Into the garden quietly came the dew
last night. It had sad news to tell.
Throughout the night it said
what every priest in mosque and temple says,
into the flower's ear whispering as it wept:
"Mortal is the world,
evanescent its laughter and its joys.
With a cry we come, with a wail we go."

The morning sun came up,
mind's mistiness cleared and eyes did see around.
The dew—it shrank with fear,
the dark night's messenger had fled.
The flowers laughed, the buds—
they clapped for joy and burst into bloom.

[Translated from the Kashmiri by J. L. Koul]

Amin Kamil