



“REVOLUTION AND ROMANCE: A STUDY OF KAIKI AZMI AS POET AND LYRICIST”

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Abstract

This article investigates the life, poetic output and contributions to film lyrics of Kaifi Azmi, and considers how factors such as his progressive ideology, personal circumstances, and aesthetic disposition helped shape Azmi's dual position as a poet of Urdu literature and a lyricist in mainstream Hindi cinema. The article charts his early life, his entry into progressive writing movements, his major poetry collections, his foray into the cinema, the themes he took up (social justice, love, time), and his legacy. Drawing on biographical material, literary criticism and materials from film studies, the article argues that Azmi's position is of a unique kind of bridge between serious Urdu literary tradition and popular Hindi film culture, contributing to the modern Urdu nazm(poem) and the golden age of Hindi film songs alike. The article ends with reflections on his continued relevance to present-day conversations surrounding literature and film.

Index term- Kaifi Azmi, Poet, Lyricist, Songs

INTRODUCTION

Kaifi Azmi (originally Syed Athar Hussain Rizvi; 1919-2002) is regarded as one of the foremost Urdu poets of the twentieth century in India, while also being an important lyricist in Hindi movies. His poetry and songs range from romantic lyricism to engaged commentary on socio-political issues. This paper discusses the key threads of his poetic and lyric-writing career, situates him within the progressive writers' movement and film culture, and analyzes how his poetic sensibilities took shape as lyrics that retain literary integrity and popular appeal.

1. Background and Early Life

Kaifi Azmi was born on January 14, 1919, in Mijwan (Azamgarh district, Uttar Pradesh), to a landed family [4]. He wrote his first ghazal at the age of 11, which began: ““*Itna to zindagi mein kisiki khalal pade...*”[5]. He learned Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages and was encouraged by leading progressive writers. As an adolescent, he dropped out of traditional schooling and focused on progressive politics. When India was fighting for independence from British Rule, Kaifi Azmi abandoned his studies and totally involved in the freedom fighting. He joined the Communist Party of India and moved to Bombay (Mumbai) in 1943, where he worked for the party's Urdu journal “Qaumi Jang”[4]. His first collection of poetry “ Jhankar” was published in 1943 [1]. He had an upbringing at the junction of literature, politics and popular culture. He continued writing and his poetry had full of emotion and empathy towards the disadvantaged section of society, injustice and exploitation, writer and actor in films. He wrote numerous film songs, scripts and dialogues and his contribution to Indian films is unforgettable.

2. Poetry: Collections and Thematic Concerns

Azmi's major poetry collections include:

- *Jhankar* (1943)
- *Akhir-e-Shab* (1947)
- *Awara Sajde* (1973) — for which he received the Sahitya Akademi Award. Additional works such as *Sarmaya*, *Kaifiyaat* (complete works) and selected poems in translation appear in his biographies.

2.1 Social Justice and Progressive Ideals

Azmi's poetry, rooted in left-political inclinations, engages with oppression, dispossession, class and 'communalism'. For example in his poem "Kisan" he put the feelings of farmer in these words,

"chiir ke saal meñ do baar zamīñ kā siina
 dafn ho jaatā huuñ
 gudgudāte haiñ jo sūraj ke sunahre nākhun
 phir nikal aatā huuñ
 ab nikaltā huuñ to itnā ki baTore jo koī dāman meñ
 dāman phaT jaa.e
 ghar ke jis kone meñ le jā ke koī rakh de mujhe
 bhuuk vahāñ se haT jaa.e" (Poem-Kisan)

His participation with the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) and Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) signifies that poetry is a transformative form without compromising the social on their poetic.

2.2 Romantic, Existential and Time-Bound Motifs

In addition to the engaged poetry, he also held on to formal literary concerns: love, longing, time, memory. Jagannath Azad in his essay "Kaifi Azmi ki shayri par ek tayrana nazar" says that Kaifi's poetry is not bound to any one formula; its focus is on the past, the present and the future. The subject of his poetry includes the self sadness and grief of the period also. His poetry is full of possibilities of human progress [6]. Poet and well known lyriscist Jave Akhtar says,

"His poetry reflects his way of life. ... When he wrote about labourers, Kaifi Sa'ab worked among them to feel their hardship. ... Kaifi Sa'ab's poetry reflected his way of life." [5]

The beauty of Kaifi Azmi's poetry was that instead of building a wall around emotions and feelings, he used to connect them with the feelings of the people and the words that came out of his poetry would touch everyone's heart

For Example;

1. mile na phuul to kāñToñ se dostī kar lī
 isī tarah se basar ham ne zindagī kar lī
 ab aage jo bhī ho anjām dekhā jā.egā
 khudā talāsh liyā aur bandagī kar lī
2. patthar ke khudā vahāñ bhī paa.e
 ham chāñd se aaj lauT aa.e
 dīvāreñ to har taraf khaDī haiñ
 kyā ho ga.e mehrbān saa.e
 jañgal kī havā.eñ aa rahī haiñ
 kāghaz kā ye shahr uD na jaa.e
 lailā ne nayā janam liyā hai
 hai quis koī jo dil lagā.e

3. shor yūñhī na parindoñ ne machāyā hogā
 koī jañgal kī taraf shahr se aayā hogā
 peD ke kāTne vāloñ ko ye mālūm to thā
 jism jal jā.eñge jab sar pe na saaya hogā

2.3 Language and Form

Working mainly in Urdu with elements of Hindi-Urdu movie making, Azmi's language juxtaposes easy lyricism with literary heft. Critics have observed that he "injected the lyrics of the popular Hindi cinema... with the passionate linguistic energy of Urdu...all the while maintaining high literary standards" [1]. His ghazal is classically thought of as a romantic and metaphysical form, it became a medium of social and ethical thought. His nazm becomes his preferred form for expressing progressive themes—labor, gender, class, and nation. His poetry has a rhythmic flow and musicality—this is part of what made many of his poems instantly worthy of songs and films. Several of his nazms are either dramatic soliloquies or short stories (e.g. "Makaan" where the footpath-dwellers build palaces for others).

"āñdhiyāñ toD liyā kartī thiiñ sham.oñ kī laveñ
 jaD diye is liye bijlī ke sitāre ham ne
 ban gayā qasr to pahre pe koī baiTh gayā
 so rahe khaak pe ham shorish-e-tāmīr liye" (Poem-Makaan)

Kaifi reduced semantic density in Urdu to reach a wider audience, including working-class audiences. He avoided excessive Persianization and opted for a Hindustani idiom, a language blending Urdu and Hindi registers. His language has the rhythm of protest, compassion, and revolutionary zeal. Rather than a romantic lament, Kaifi's words frequently become demands for social justice and collective struggle. For example in "Aurat", he calls upon the woman to rise up and be more than in a passive state of suffering:

"uTh mirī jaan mire saath hī chalnā hai tujhe
 qalb-e-māhaul meñ larzāñ sharar-e-jañg haiñ aaj
 hausle vaqt ke aur ziist ke yak-rañg haiñ aaj
 ābgīnoñ meñ tapāñ valvala-e-sañg haiñ aaj
 husn aur ishq ham-āvāz o ham-āhañg haiñ aaj
 jis meñ jaltā huuñ usī aag meñ jalnā hai tujhe
 uTh mirī jaan mire saath hī chalnā hai tujhe" (Poem- Aurat)

3. Lyricist for Cinema

Azmi began writing Hindi-film lyrics in 1951 (or shortly thereafter) with the movie Buzdil (1951/52) [4]. Across the decades, he contributed to many notable and highly regarded Hindi films, including Kaagaz Ke Phool (1959), Haqeeqat (1964), Pakeezah (1971), and Arth (1982). He attracted the audience through his new way of writing film lyrics. He wrote the stories of films "Yahudi ki beti" (1956), "Parveen" (1957), "Miss Punjab Mail" (1958), and "Eid ka chand" (1958). He wrote numerous evergreen songs which are remembered for its beauty and emotions like "Waqt ne kiya kya haseen sitam" (kagaz ke phool, 1959). "Kar chale hum fida jaano tan sathiyo" a song of film Haqeeqat which makes every Indian cry. Many of his songs became immortal like, "Ye duniya ye mehfil mere kaam ki nahi" (HeerRanjha, 1970), "Jhuki jhuki si nazar"(Arth 1983), "Hoke majboor mujhe usne bulaya hoga"(Haqeeqat), "Tum jo mil gayeho"(Hanste zakhm), "Ye nayan dare dare"(Kohraa), "Simti si Sharmayi si"(Parwana), "Chalte chalt yuhi koi mil gaya tha" from film "Pakeezah" is also one of the most popular songs written by him. "Milo na tum to hum ghabbraye" was also very famous song of the time from the film "Heer Ranjha". Apart from all these popular songs he wrote lyrics of numerous hindi films like "Shola aur shabnam", "Nakli Nawab", "Live in Sydney", "Laalarookh", "Hum rahe na rahe", "Faisla", "Do boond pani", "Bhavna", "Akhri Mujra", "Sankalp", "Surag", "Ye nazdeekiyan", "Faraar", "Anokhi Raat", "Shart", "Ghar ka chirag", "Phir teri kahani yaad ayi", "Kahan tak aasma", "Surag" etc .Azmi is known to have helped broaden the vocabulary of film-song lyrics by infusing Urdu poetic sensibility. His patriotic song "Kar Chale Hum Fida" (from Haqeeqat) has moved beyond the realm of film to become a part of the culture. In what is known as a peculiar cinematic experiment in the film Heer Raanjha (1970), Azmi wrote the entire dialogue in verse. [3]

3.1 Interrelation of Poetry and Lyricism

Kaifi Azmi's cinematic and poetic work should be viewed together, not as separate compartments. His poetic motifs of time, memory, social justice and romance appear again in his film lyrics. When Azmi moved his Urdu poetic idiom into Hindi cinema, he brought to popular songs an extra level of depth that the film-song writing format typically lacks. Additionally, his involvement in the PWA and IPTA networks sustained a contemporary practice of socially-engaged art making which flowed into Azmi's film work. In short, Azmi represented an exceptional "poet-lyricist" who was able to maintain literary legitimacy while working in a mass-culture context.

Few Examples:

1. "Waqt Ne Kiya Kya Haseen Sitam" (*Kagaz ke Phool*, 1959)
2. "Kar chale hum fida" (*Haqeeqat*, 1964)
3. "Tum Jo Mil Gaye Ho" (*Hanste Zakhm*, 1973)
4. "Yeh Nayan Dare Dare" (*Kohra*, 1964)
5. "Chalte Chalte Yun Hi Koi" (*Pakeezah*, 1972)
6. "Tum Itna Jo Muskura Rahe Ho" (*Arth*, 1982)
7. "Milo Na Tum To Hum Ghabraye" (*Heer Ranjha*, 1970)
8. "Yeh Duniya Yeh Mehfil" (*Heera Raanjha*, 1970)
9. "Jhuki Jhuki Si Nazar" (*Arth*, 1982)
10. "Jhoom-jhoom dhalti raat" (*Kohra*, 1964)

Poet Ranjit Hoskote says, "Kaifi Azmi, along with Sahir Ludhianvi, Ali Sardar Jafri and Majrooh Sultanpuri, infused the lyrics of the popular Hindi cinema of the 1950s and 1960s with the passionate linguistic energy of Urdu, rich in emotional nuance and compelling imagery. ... His great achievement was that he never gave way to populism ... While his lyrics always retained a high literary standard.

4. Legacy and Contemporary Relevance

Azmi gained various honours: the Padma Shri (1974), the Sahitya Akademi Award (1975) [4], and shortly before his death, he received the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship. He passed away on 10 May 2002 in Mumbai [5]. For scholars in Urdu literature, film studies and popular culture, Azmi represents a significant case of how high literary tradition and commercial mass culture can co-exist. The example prompts critical inquiry into topics such as: What role does poetic play in commercial cinema? Can socially engaged art exist in popular formats? How do regional linguistic traditions (Urdu nazm) engage with pan-Indian and global mediums?

Conclusion

Kaifi Azmi's dual identity as both a poet and a lyricist remains important for several reasons. His roots in progressive Urdu poetry secured stable foundations for his work as part of a tradition of social justice; however, it would be a mistake to situate him exclusively within the ranks of literary intellectuals, because he also successfully ventured beyond these spaces into the realms of popular cinema and mass culture. The result is that Azmi's work is both serious and enjoyable thus lying at the intersection of engagement and timelessness. Moreover, in bridging Urdu poetic tradition and popular Hindi film song culture, he puts forward a case for the poet-intellectual being engaged in the public sphere that does not have to sacrifice their literary integrity. In terms of future research, we could certainly conduct studies comparing Azmi's lyrics and those of contemporaries (e.g., Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri), and we can also work to document archival studies of unpublished nazms and works him and his contributions to numbing film script writing.

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