

JAMILUDDIN AALI

## Some Couplets

*Note:*

IN 1995 Jamiluddin Aali showed me the typescript of a selection and translation by Baidar Bakht and Marie-Anne Erki of verses from his *dōhas* and ghazals. I felt that I too would like to try my hand at translating some of them, and these are the result. Those who have seen Baidar Bakht and Marie-Anne Erki's translations will see how much I owe to them, and I gladly acknowledge my debt to them. Some of my translations are little more than rearrangements of their words to fit the metrical pattern I have chosen to give them.

—RALPH RUSSELL

What sort of God are you?—that all my life  
I hope for nothing from you—and do not despair

In autumn I regretted that I had not gathered flowers  
Now spring has come, and now the fabric of desire is  
torn

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Jamiluddin Aali is a man of many accomplishments. As a poet he has written ghazals, *naẓm*, patriotic songs, and above all *dohās*, a form which before his time was associated with classical Hindi poets like Kabīr, and which he has now established as a recognized Urdu form. His *tarannum* makes him a popular figure at *mushā'iras*. In addition he has been in the forefront of educational developments in the Urdu medium, was long the secretary of the Pakistan Writers Guild, and has now for many years been Honorary Secretary of the Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdū (Pakistan). He is also a columnist for the Urdu daily *Jang*. —R.R.

It is not charm but life itself shines in her eyes  
So beautiful, so restless, and so deeply sad

Her eyes are wine, and all can recognize it  
No one can understand the secret of my thirst

Aali, your eyes have shed a thousand tears  
But still the morning star is shining bright

These lips that strive to utter now just one brief sigh  
Were once alive, ready for telling endless tales

How good the balance I have now achieved!  
I neither wish to live, nor yet to shun life

Today all that I asked would have been granted  
My happy heart felt fear for the result

Why have you now adopted such restrained and  
courteous speech?  
What happened to the boundless force of your sincerity?

What can I do? My heart would never go along with  
others  
At every step I met a caravan I could have joined

I had long looked towards a far horizon  
But on my way to it I found your door

I loved you, and I have lost nothing by it  
Except the courage that one needs for love

How can you fix your destination in this world?  
You reach it, and another looms ahead of you

I speak your name and what else can I do?  
I know no other way to tell my story

My body and my soul are melting in the flame  
She lit the candle of my love, and then forgot it

I, I alone can feel the candle's flame  
All others are enchanted by its light

The love that fills your heart concerns you only  
What of it if she does not value you?

My sweetheart came to see me, but, alas, came like a  
cloud  
That passes over my parched field and does not rain on  
it

No one can run away from it; no one can capture it  
Time of itself inflicts its wounds; they of themselves are  
healed

I have a friend named Aali, and this is his task in life:  
To live a blameless life and suffer life-long blame for it

We kiss, and so we cannot speak; we speak, and cannot  
kiss  
Alas, my love, why did not God give you a thousand  
lips?

King Akbar heard the *dīpak rāg*.<sup>1</sup> I saw a *dīpak* woman  
A woman, who with just one glance can set your heart  
ablaze

If you are all authentic saints, then I too am a saint  
Poor lonely sinner though I am, why should I feel  
ashamed?

Don't be deceived by my complaints, for I am that same  
man  
Who swore an oath time and again that he would give  
up love

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<sup>1</sup> *Dīpak rāg*—a legendary *rāg* composed in the reign of Akbar (1556–1605). It is said that the playing of this *rāg* would light the lamps.

I lived out in the wilderness, but when I called your  
name  
I heard the sound of countless rosebuds bursting into  
bloom

I like to stir up turmoil, yes; but do not blame me for it  
Perhaps this too may prove a way to cure my loneliness

All that he touches turns to gold, yet *he* stays empty-  
handed  
His name is Aali, and they now call him King Midas  
Aali

Out of the sea of life arose islands of memories  
Some islands full of stones, and some of pearls and  
diamonds

I sit here in the *pīpal*'s shade, the shadows lengthening  
And one sits by my side, and one lives in my memories

Why speak of Aali? No. A poet is a man who goes  
To level mountains with his fingernails, and does it too!

Aali, keep quiet or sing your ghazals. Either way  
No harm will come of it, and no good either

What is it seekers find inside the Ka'ba of the heart?  
One finds an idol, one a man, and one a deity

A husband, or a father, or a brother, or a son  
One woman—and she lives in bondage to each one of  
them

Great is the power of love; its strength can take on all  
the world  
And silently the worms of time eat even it away

Aali himself kicks up the dust, and then himself  
complains  
“Look! Tell me what there is to see. I can't see  
anything!”

Come, let me tell you something. You will surely see the  
point  
I dived beneath the whirlpool and there found the water  
calm

If we are to go ahead we need to change our horses  
We need to change the standard of the standards we  
observe

Aali, it is the same for you as for the rest of us  
Before the play is done the curtain suddenly descends

—*Translated by Ralph Russell*