

Entangled Poetics of Love: Ecological and Indic Epistememes in Irshad Kamil's Select Lyrics

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines select lyrics¹ of Irshad Kamil—Agar Tum Saath Ho, Nadaan Parindey, Aaj Din Chadheya, Jag Ghoomeya, and Tumse Hi—as cultural texts where the poetics of love unfolds through ecological, posthuman, and Indic² epistemic entanglements. Kamil's songs extend beyond anthropocentric intimacy, foregrounding the agency of skies, birds, rivers, colours, winds, and seasons as active participants in the drama of love. Read in the light of India's knowledge traditions, his metaphors echo shringāra rasa, Bhakti viraha, Sufi allegory, and Upanishadic visions of selfhood that refuse man's centrality. Silence in his lyrics recalls mauna, the yogic quietude that exceeds speech; birds in flight mirror the jīva wandering through cycles of return and release; longing that merges love with prayer dissolves the divide between ishq and ibādat. Such images embed desire within webs of dharmic order, ecological rhythms, and cosmic cycles. In this register, love becomes not sentimental possession but an ethic of attention, surrender, and repair—resisting neoliberal culture's³ acceleration and commodification. By privileging pause, endurance, and dwelling, Kamil's poetics destabilize consumerist scripts and reconfigure intimacy as ecological attachment where bodies, voices, and environments remain porous and co-composed. His lyrics reveal popular culture as a vessel for ancient epistememes, carrying forward a refusal of human-centered modernity. Love here is both fragile and resistant, civic and ecological—a cosmology of shared vulnerability that aligns Bollywood lyricism with India's cultural memory and planetary life-worlds, offering ways of dwelling humbly within more-than-human worlds.

Keywords: indic knowledge traditions, ecopoetics, posthuman entanglement, bollywood songs, cultural memory, poetics of love

"Poetry matters because it serves up the substance of our lives, and becomes more than a mere articulation of experience—although that articulation alone is part of its usefulness... Mainly, it

allows us to see ourselves freshly and keenly. It makes the invisible world visible. It transforms our politics by enhancing our ability to make comparisons and draw distinctions. It reanimates nature for us, connecting spirit and matter. It draws us more deeply into conversation with the traditions that we feed off, modify, and extend."(Parini, p. 181)

Dr. Irshad Kamil's lyrics show a vision of love that is deep and layered. They move beyond mere sentiment to capture intimacy in personal, spiritual, *ecological*, and existential ways. His notable film songs under consideration—*Agar Tum Saath Ho*, *Nadaan Parindey*, *Aaj Din Chadheya*, *Jag Ghoomeya*, and *Tumse Hi*—demonstrate how love is never fixed. It is a process shaped by pauses and gestures as much as by words. In *Agar Tum Saath Ho*, silence and pauses speak louder than dialogue, while in *Nadaan Parindey*, the wandering bird becomes a symbol of restless longing. His work echoes Hindustani lyricism, the longing (*viraha*) of Bhakti poetry, the devotional address of *Vaishnava padavali*⁴, and the tension of union and separation in the ghazal. Yet, they also speak to modern life, marked by speed and mistrust of clear feelings. In this way, Kamil resists the throwaway quality of neoliberal love narratives, restoring depth to intimacy while still touching ordinary listeners with warmth and simplicity.

Kamil's lyrics can also be seen as cultural texts that ensure tradition and continuity in Indian love-poetics. They draw from old idioms but reshape them in films to reflect today's emotions. Love here is more than a feeling—it is a way of knowing, resisting, and living in the world. For instance, in *Tumse Hi*, the thread of loyalty joins two lives across ordinary moments, while in *Aaj Din Chadheya*, the rising sun becomes a prayer for union. These songs recall *shringara rasa* from Sanskrit aesthetics, the mystical bird of Sufi poetry, and the sensuous images of Punjabi folk song. Images of rivers, rains, dawn calls, or threads of loyalty are not mere decoration. They carry meaning about love's permanence and change. Silence and pauses matter as much as words. They remind us that care, patience, and attention remain vital to love in an age that values speed and spectacle.

Another way to understand Kamil's songs is through *ecopoetics*⁵. His lyrics often highlight rivers, birds, skies, and colours as active partners in shaping love. In *Jag Ghoomeya*, the turning of the world itself mirrors the search for a beloved, while in *Nadaan Parindey*, the bird's flight becomes a lesson in human vulnerability. Here, love unfolds as *ecological dwelling*⁶. To love is to move with the seasons, to hear the rain, and to let the wind widen perception. Nature is not a backdrop but a living force that changes belief and slows life's pace. This points to *posthuman entanglements*⁷, where human feelings are shared with other beings and environments. Love is not just possession between two people. It is also participation with the world, shared vulnerability, and attention to cycles larger than the self. By weaving devotion with natural imagery, Kamil expands love beyond the human couple. His lyrics show Bollywood songs as cultural texts that honour both traditions and present-day ecological realities.

Kamil's lyrics also show how Indian knowledge traditions continue to live within popular culture today. His songs often echo the 'Upanishadic search for self'⁸ and truth. In *Nadaan Parindey*, the image of the wandering bird recalls the soul's restless journey toward its home, an idea close to the Upanishadic teaching that the self longs to merge with the cosmic. The *Bhakti* tradition appears strongly in songs like *Aaj Din Chadheya*, where devotion to the beloved mirrors the devotee's surrender to God. The language of prayer, longing, and surrender joins human love with divine love. Similarly, Sufi traditions of separation and union are visible in *Tumse Hi*, where every breath and every step become reminders of the beloved's presence. The Sufi idea that the path of love breaks the ego and leads to openness is woven into these lyrics with simplicity. Kamil also carries forward the aesthetic inheritance of *shringara rasa*, where love is seen as the highest mood of art, blending joy, pain, and beauty. By bringing these philosophical, poetic, and aesthetic strands into film music, his songs show that ancient traditions are not lost. Instead, they reappear in new forms, shaping how modern listeners understand intimacy, devotion, and the meaning of life.

Irshad Kamil: Towards the Poetics of Love

Born in Malerkotla, Punjab, Irshad Kamil combined rigorous academic training with creative innovation, completing a doctorate in Hindi literature at Panjab University with a focus on contemporary poetry. His early career in journalism with *The Tribune* and *The Indian Express* sharpened his expressive craft, but his move to Mumbai in 2001 proved transformative. Within a few years, he emerged as one of Bollywood's most acclaimed lyricists, celebrated for blending lyrical subtlety with popular appeal. Alongside two Filmfare Awards, he has received nearly every major industry honor, yet his achievement lies less in accolades than in how he redefined the cultural role of film lyrics, ensuring that poetry could endure even within the machinery of popular cinema. His literary commitments have continued alongside his film work: his poems and stories appear in journals, while his critical study *Samakaleen Kavita: Samay aur Samaj* situates contemporary poetry within broader social transformations.

His landmark play *Bolti Diwaaren* exemplifies his deeper philosophical concerns. Here he reflects on the place of love in human life, invoking classical and modern texts—"Kamayani, Kamasutra, Meghdoot, Manas, Gita, and Godaan" (p.14)—to show love's continuity across ages. Yet he cautions that in contemporary culture, love risks dilution under the weight of market values. As he observes in the play, "*hamara prem-bhaav ke prati drishtikon aayu ke saath badalta hai lekin parivartit paristhitiyon mein jo bhaav aparivartit rahta hai, wahi prem hai. (p. 14)*" For him, the permanence of love is itself an act of resistance against *bazaarvaad* (market culture). This understanding resonates with Francesca Orsini's observation that "Idioms of love have a very long history, and within every culture or cultural area there will always be more than one available at any given time—prescriptive, poetic, commonsensical, satirical, religious,

gender-specific, and so on. Francesca Orsini offers a particularly rich field for this kind of enquiry because several idioms—"of *sr̥ṅgāra*, *viraha*, *ishq*, *prem* and 'love'—have been active over a very long period of time.(p.1)" Kamil's oeuvre moves precisely within this layered terrain of idioms, drawing on tradition while interrogating its meaning in the present.

Situated within the lineage of lyricists like Sahir Ludhianvi, Gulzar, and Javed Akhtar, Kamil extends their tradition of uniting poetry with cinema while responding to shifting cultural realities. Like Sahir, he interrogates the commodification of emotions; like Gulzar, he fuses lyrical intimacy with philosophical subtlety; and like Javed Akhtar, he negotiates between popular idioms and deeper socio-political questions. Yet his voice remains distinct, marked by an acute awareness of how modernity reshapes love, language, and values. In this way, Kamil embodies the rare confluence of scholarship, literary imagination, and cinematic creativity, securing his place as both heir to a rich poetic lineage and an innovator defining the sensibility of a new generation.

This orientation toward love as both civic and ecological force shapes his best-known songs. In *Agar Tum Saath Ho* and *Jag Ghoomeya*, intimacy is a negotiation of fragility, endurance, and care, while *Nadaan Parindey* stages longing through the allegory⁹ of the bird, recalling Sufi motifs of the restless soul. In *Aaj Din Chadheya*, the natural world registers devotion through cycles of day and season, and in *Tumse Hi*, weather and time give rhythm to memory and desire. Across these works, *thaharav* (pause), *ishara* (gesture), and *viraha* (separation) become resources for resisting the speed and precariousness of contemporary relationships. Yet these motifs are never isolated from the more-than-human world. Rivers, rains, dawns, and skies act not simply as metaphors but as co-agents in the shaping of love, suggesting that intimacy is ecological and posthuman. In such a vision, the beloved is at once human, ecological, and existential compass, and the work of love involves not just holding on but dwelling with—accepting the rhythms, interruptions, and cycles that exceed human will.

Reading Lyrics as Cultural Texts: Decentering Anthropocentrism¹⁰

Reading Irshad Kamil's lyrics as Indian cultural texts, rooted in centuries of knowledge traditions, reveals how his poetics decenter anthropocentrism. His metaphors and symbols echo Bhakti, Sufi, and Upanishadic inheritances that refuse man's centrality. Instead, they situate the self within webs of nature, *dharmic order*, and cosmic rhythm. Silence in his songs recalls *mauna*—a yogic quietude that holds meaning beyond speech. The bird in flight mirrors the *jiva*¹¹ wandering through cycles of return and release. Love merging with prayer dissolves the divide between *ishq* and *ibadat*, reminding us that longing is both sacred and worldly. These images embed human desire within the pulse of the nonhuman and the eternal. Emotions are no longer private possessions but vibrations in a larger order. Kamil thus resists the neoliberal fantasy of

endless productivity, autonomy, and digital chatter. His lyrics whisper of surrender, interdependence, and ecological attunement. They teach that resoluteness and silence are acts of care, not absence. In this way, popular culture becomes a vessel for ancient epistemes, carrying forward a refusal of human-centered modernity. Kamil's poetics show that love is not merely an emotion—it is a cosmology, a way of dwelling humbly within the world.

(a) When Silence Speaks: The Emotional World of *Agar Tum Saath Ho*

In *Agar Tum Saath Ho* from the film *Tamasha*, Irshad Kamil unfolds a deeply intertextual cultural poetics of love, where intimacy is articulated not merely through romantic longing but within a larger Indian ethos of relational endurance. Lines such as “*Pal bhar thahar jao, dil ye sambhal jaaye*” (“Pause for a moment, so this heart can steady itself”) evoke the temporality of affect, where love becomes a stabilising force amidst emotional turbulence. This temporality is not static; it mirrors the rhythm of Hindustani lyrical traditions, where *thaharav* (pause) operates as a metaphorical site of both yearning and containment. The invocation of love as an embodied spatial practice—“*Meri taraf aata, har gham fisal jaaye*” (“Every sorrow approaching me slips away”)—inflects intimacy with the culturally specific belief in the transformative capacity of shared presence, resonating with devotional undertones in the subcontinental poetic heritage of Sufi and Bhakti sensibilities. The beloved's presence becomes both shield and sanctuary, inscribing a moral and emotional centrality into the structure of feeling.

The interplay of desire and dispossession emerges sharply in “*Teri nazron mein hai tere sapne, tere sapno mein hai narazi*” (“In your eyes are your dreams, in your dreams resides displeasure”), where the beloved's subjectivity is presented as a paradoxical field—dreams cohabiting with estrangement. Such antithesis recalls the ghazal's rhetorical structure, where *visaal* (union) and *hijr* (separation) coexist without resolution, and where the lover's interpretive labour is ceaseless. The admission “*Mujhe lagta hai ke baatein dil ki hoti lafzon ki dhokhebaazi*” (“I feel matters of the heart are deceived by words”) foregrounds a modern scepticism toward verbal declarations, destabilising the classical poetic faith in *shabd* (word) as a transparent medium of emotion. Here, the poetics of love shifts from articulation to presence, privileging the *bina bole baatein* (“conversations without words”) as a more authentic mode of relational exchange, aligning with South Asian aesthetics of *nazaakat* (subtle grace) and *ishara* (gesture). Love thus resides less in verbal assurance and more in the embodied negotiation of silence, glances, and pauses.

Within this cultural matrix, love is less a private sentiment than a mutual inhabitation of affective space. The recurring refrain “*Agar tum saath ho*” (“If you are with me”) functions as both conditional and incantatory, reframing existence itself—“*Bedard thi zindagi, bedard hai*” (“Life was merciless, life is merciless”). Companionship here does not erase the world's indifference; it

mediates its impact. The aquatic imagery— “*Behti rehti nadiya si*” (“Like ever-flowing rivers”)—recalls classical Indian metaphors where rivers signify both constancy and flux, binding the personal to the elemental. By suturing the quotidian with archetypal symbols, the song enacts a poetics where love is a lived negotiation between permanence and change, between the fragility of human attachment and the vast, unaltered currents of life. The beloved’s presence becomes a navigational principle in an otherwise indifferent cosmos, and this reorientation reflects a cultural inheritance where love is imagined as both anchor and current.

As an affective tool, Kamil’s lyric stages the negotiations of modern love within the cultural politics of intimacy in contemporary India. The repeated invocation of “*Agar tum saath ho*” performs a conditional relationality that tests the boundaries between companionship as emotional refuge and as existential necessity. By urging “*Pal bhar thahar jao*”, the song mobilises temporality as resistance to the disposability of relationships in a neoliberal urban world defined by acceleration and emotional precarity. The lyric’s oscillation between affirmation and alienation—its refusal to offer the beloved as wholly accessible or entirely lost—destabilises patriarchal romantic scripts that demand resolution. By declaring “*Baatein dil ki hoti lafzon ki dhokhebaazi*”, it critiques the communicative transparency ideal, privileging the ineffable over the spoken and embedding love within an aesthetic of subtlety, gesture, and implication.

Placed within the Indian literary-cultural tradition, *Agar Tum Saath Ho* bridges older lyric inheritances with contemporary sensibilities. Its emotional architecture resonates with the *shringara rasa* of Sanskrit poetics, encompassing both pleasure and pain, and draws upon Persian–Urdu *ghazal* conventions where union and separation interlock in unresolved tension. The paradox in “*Tere sapno mein hai narazi*” embodies this hallmark of Indian poetics, privileging complexity over closure. Culturally, the turn toward *bina bole baatein* echoes Sufi and Bhakti valuations of silence, *ishara*, and *dhvani* (suggestion) as truer than explicit articulation. In Bollywood’s contemporary landscape, the song resists the neat resolutions of earlier romantic sequences, instead presenting love as an ongoing negotiation—fragmented, reflexive, and resistant to idealisation. Through its fusion of devotional undertones, elemental imagery, and modern scepticism, *Agar Tum Saath Ho* inherits the subcontinent’s deep lyric traditions while innovating within them, marking itself as a cultural artefact where the politics of love is enacted in the tension between yearning for certainty and dwelling within its impossibility.

(b) Eyes That Wait: Allegories of Homecoming in *Nadaan Parindey*

Irshad Kamil’s *Nadaan Parindey* operates as an intricate allegory of love, loss, and existential return, folding the poetics of longing into the larger Indian tradition of homecoming as spiritual

destiny. The refrain “*O naadaan parindey ghar aaja*” (“O innocent bird, come home”) functions simultaneously as an address to a wayward lover, a seeker estranged from self, and a soul adrift in the cycles of worldly desire. In invoking the bird as a metaphor for the human spirit, the lyric inherits an enduring trope from Bhakti and Sufi poetics, where flight stands for restless wandering and the “home” signifies both the beloved’s embrace and divine union. The appeal to return is not sentimental closure but a call to relinquish exhaustion—“*kyun desh videsh phire mare, kyun haal bihaala thaka haara*” (“why roam lands far and wide, why be in this worn and tired state”)—positioning love as the act of anchoring a fractured self.

At its core, the song mobilises the cultural politics of love as retrieval and recognition. Here, love is not merely an interpersonal affect but a force of reorientation, reclaiming the self from dispersal. The lines “*kaate chahe jitna, paron se hawaon ko, khud se na bach paayega tu*” (“chop away all you will, you cannot shield your wings from the wind”) and “*toad aasmanon ko, phoonk de jahanon ko, khud ko chhupaa na paayega tu*” (“even if you break the skies or burn the worlds, you cannot hide yourself”) articulate a poetics of inevitability—love as the gravitational pull toward truth, selfhood, and belonging. In this register, Kamil’s lyric refuses the neoliberal fantasy of total self-invention; it insists on rootedness, on the impossibility of entirely severing one’s existential or emotional origins. This is not nostalgia but a counterpoint to the cultural script of mobility-as-freedom, recasting return as the deeper act of liberation.

The song’s most haunting turn emerges in the cawing invocation—“*kaaga re kaaga re mori itni arj tose, chun chun khaiyo maans*” (“O crow, O crow, I have only this request, pluck away my flesh”)—a direct borrowing from the Sant and Bhakti lyric archive, especially Kabir’s radical mortuary imagery. In this intertextual gesture, love is inseparable from mortality; the body is willingly offered to decay, yet the plea “*khaiyo na do naina more piya ke milan ki aas*” (“do not consume these two eyes, for they hold the hope of union with the beloved”) renders the eyes as sacred repositories of longing. The persistence of this hope, even in the face of bodily disintegration, situates love within an ethics of fidelity that transcends life’s material conditions. It is a lyrical enactment of *viraha*—the productive, even sanctifying, pain of separation—where absence intensifies, rather than diminishes, attachment.

Placing the song within the Indian literary-cultural tradition reveals its dialogic positioning across multiple inheritances. Its allegorical bird recalls ‘the *hans* (swan) of Advaita Vedanta’¹², the *parinda* of Urdu metaphysics, and the migratory soul-bird of Punjabi Sufi poetry. The structure of repeated imperatives—“*ghar aaja, ghar aaja*”—parallels folk refrains that sustain oral transmission, while the Bhakti-inflected imagery of offering one’s body to crows bridges popular music with devotional aesthetics. By retaining these older registers, Kamil reinserts into Bollywood’s contemporary love discourse a slower, cyclical temporality—one in which love is not about acquisition or climax, but about return, surrender, and the refusal to sever ties with

one's origin. This refusal functions as a quiet resistance to modern narratives that prize autonomy over relational embeddedness.

Functionally, *Nadaan Parindey* destabilises the boundaries between romantic love, spiritual longing, and existential philosophy. It stages love as a process of homecoming, not just toward the beloved but toward the self's unfragmented state, where desire, memory, and mortality coalesce. Through its metaphors, it affirms that love's ultimate act is not departure but return, not novelty but recognition. Kamil's lyric weaves the poetics of *shringara* (romantic love) and *bhakti* (devotional love) into the grain of cinematic music, keeping alive a lineage where the beloved's body, the home, and the divine are folded into a single symbolic terrain. In doing so, it claims space for a culturally resonant love-poetics that remains dialogically tethered to its roots even while speaking in the idioms of contemporary musical modernity

(c) Between Ishq and Ibadat: Interweaving Desire and Prayer in *Aaj Din Chadheya*

The song *Aaj Din Chadheya* by Irshad Kamil functions as a lyrical enactment of desire's devotional register within the interwoven fabric of Indian cultural poetics. Its refrain, "*Aaj din chadheya tere rang varga*" ("Today has risen like your colour"), establishes a 'synaesthetic metaphor'¹³ in which love's affective intensity suffuses the temporal moment, transforming an ordinary day into a sacredly imbued event. This is not merely romantic yearning—it is framed in the idiom of *ishq* that moves fluidly between the earthly beloved and the divine, echoing the *Sufi-Bhakti* tradition where longing becomes a mode of worship. The speaker petitions the divine, "*Rabba mere din ye na dhale*" ("O Lord, let my day not end"), performing a cultural gesture where personal desire is articulated as prayer, thus blurring the boundary between erotic and spiritual love.

Through its textual economy, the song mobilises culturally sedimented tropes of surrender and supplication, invoking the lover's position as both agent and supplicant. Lines such as "*Tenu dil da vaasta*" ("For the sake of my heart") enact a rhetorical bargaining, wherein love is not asserted but entreated, making the beloved's consent both the object and the measure of fulfilment. This invocation recalls the performative strategies of *ghazal* and *qawwali* traditions, where the speaker's humility becomes an aesthetic of moral strength. The lyric's repeated movement between complaint—"Kaisa khuda hai tu, bas naam ka hai tu" ("What kind of God are you, only God in name")—and praise—"Bakhsha gunahon ko, sun ke duawon ko" ("You forgave sins, you heard prayers")—suggests a dialogic intimacy with divinity that mirrors the quarrels and reconciliations of lovers, thus suturing religious devotion with human relational dynamics.

In its cinematic placement within *Love Aaj Kal*, the song operates as a narrative pivot where interior emotional states are exteriorised through musical performance, continuing a long-standing Indian filmic tradition in which song sequences are not ornamental but constitutive of the story's affective architecture. Kamil's poetics inhabit a recognisably North Indian sensibility shaped by Punjabi idiom and Sufi metaphor, where the beloved's image ("*Woh jo mujhe khwab mein mile, use tu laga de ab gale*" – "The one I meet in dreams, make them embrace me now") is mediated through dream-vision, a culturally resonant site where fate, divine will, and human longing intersect. The layering of everyday speech with sacred address exemplifies how Hindi-Urdu film songs negotiate accessibility and transcendence, allowing a mass audience to inhabit complex registers of feeling without the need for literary initiation.

Placed within the wider Indian literary-cultural tradition, *Aaj Din Chadheya* affirms love as a legitimate epistemology—a way of knowing the self, the beloved, and the divine. Its diction and imagery extend the continuum from the *padavali* of Vaishnava poets, through Sufi compositions, to modern Hindi-Urdu lyricism, retaining the central conceit that the beloved's presence can transform not only the lover's world but the world itself. The speaker's appeal, "*Chahiye jo mujhe, kar de tu mujhko ata*" ("Give me what I desire"), is not greed but an existential claim: to live fully is to have one's love realised. This cultural politics, embedded in its poetics, elevates romantic attachment into a form of spiritual entitlement, challenging ascetic denials of desire while inscribing love as an act of both personal and collective affirmation. In this sense, the song's work is not only to express longing but to reassert love's centrality in the moral and emotional economies of contemporary Indian life.

(d) The World Roamed, the One Found: Enduring Love in *Jag Ghoomeya*

In *Jag Ghoomeya*, Irshad Kamil crafts a poetics of love grounded in steadfast recognition rather than fleeting infatuation, situating the beloved as the singular axis around which the speaker's world revolves. The recurring assertion "*Jag ghoomeya thare jaisa na koi*" ("I have roamed the world, but none like you") functions as both hyperbolic declaration and cultural idiom, resonating with the long-standing Indian literary practice where the uniqueness of the beloved is framed as a cosmic truth. This is not the rhetoric of conquest but of discovery—an acknowledgment that the search across geographies and experiences culminates in the irreplaceable presence of one person. The absence enumerations— "*Na vo ankhiyan ruhani kahin, na vo chehra noorani kahin*" ("No such soulful eyes anywhere, no such luminous face anywhere")—evoke the Sufi-Bhakti tradition's *ananya-bhakti* (exclusive devotion), where the divine or the beloved becomes the sole referent of beauty and meaning.

The song's metaphorical register works by collapsing natural, seasonal, and spiritual imagery into a composite portrait of love. The beloved is "*barishon ke mosamon ki bheegi hariyali*" ("the

wet greenery of the rainy seasons”) and “*sardiyon mein galon pe jo aati hai vo laali*” (“the blush that comes on cheeks in winter”), producing a sensorial poetics that ties affection to the Indian subcontinent’s cyclical climates. In likening the beloved to “*raaton ka sukoon... subah ki azaan*” (“the peace of the nights... the morning call to prayer”), Kamil fuses domestic intimacy with sacred soundscapes, reactivating an Indo-Islamic lyric inheritance where divine rhythm and human rhythm are contiguous. Such associations subtly encode the cultural politics of inclusivity in love’s language, embedding the beloved in both everyday tenderness and the discernible register of faith.

By positioning the beloved as both *agni* (“fire”) and *barish ka paani* (“rainwater”), the lyric draws upon an archetypal Indian metaphors of opposites-in-union, a trope present from the *Ritu Samhara* of Kalidasa to modern ghazal composition. Here, the beloved is neither static nor idealised into a singular quality; she embodies contradictory forces—comfort and disturbance, constancy and unpredictability—thereby asserting that love’s truth lies in embracing complexity. The refrain “*Jaisi tu hai, waisi rehna*” (“Stay as you are”) resists the cultural pressures of transformation often implicit in romantic narratives, affirming an ethic of acceptance that carries subversive weight in a social landscape where love is frequently mediated by norms of change, conformity, and improvement.

Placed within the continuum of Indian literary-cultural tradition, *Jag Ghoomeya* enacts love as both personal truth and public testimony. The speaker insists on *sang rehna* (“staying together”) through “*apne naseebo mein ya hausle ki baaton mein*” (“in my fate or in the stories of courage”), linking intimate union with the larger temporal arc of life’s fortunes and trials. This interweaving of the private vow with the fate-bound register echoes the performative commitments of ‘Punjabi *bolian*’¹⁴ and ‘Sufi *qawwalis*’¹⁵, where love is sustained not only by passion but by endurance. The song, as deployed in the film *Sultan*, carries an additional cinematic function: it reframes masculinity not in terms of conquest but in relational loyalty, situating emotional constancy as a form of strength. In doing so, Kamil’s lyric bridges the rural earthiness of dialectal address with a pan-Indian emotional grammar, reaffirming love’s place as a site where personal desire, cultural memory, and ethical commitment converge.

(e) Nothing of Me Remains in Me: Fana and Wafa in *Tumse Hi*

In *Tumse Hi*, Irshad Kamil composes a poetics of love that dissolves the boundaries between existential being and relational presence. The opening paradox— “*Na hai ye paana, na khona hi hai*” (“It is neither gaining nor losing”)—places love outside the transactional logic of possession, instead articulating it as a state of inevitability: “*Tera na hona jaane kyun hona hi hai*” (“You’re not being there somehow has to be”). This expression of necessity reflects a culturally embedded idea in Indian lyric traditions, from *Bhakti* to modern Hindi-Urdu poetry,

where love is imagined as destined, inescapable, and constitutive of the self's reality. The refrain "*Tumse hi*" ("Because of you / From you") works as a refrain of origin and causality, underscoring that the rhythms of day and night, "*din hota hai, surmai shaam aati*" ("the day happens, the dusky evening arrives"), emerge only through the beloved's presence.

The song employs spatial and corporeal imagery to illustrate the total subsumption of identity into the beloved's essence. In "*Aankhon mein aankhein teri, baahon mein baahen teri*" ("Your eyes in mine, your arms in mine"), Kamil evokes an intimate merging where the self is no longer an autonomous entity— "*Mera na mujh mein kuch raha*" ("Nothing of me remains in me"). This motif of self-effacement recalls the Sufi principle of *fana*—the annihilation of the self in the beloved or the divine. Yet, in its cinematic context, the annihilation is romantic rather than mystical, re-situating an older poetic logic into a contemporary love narrative. The beloved becomes omnipresent: "*Main kahin bhi jaata hoon, tumse hi mil jaata hoon*" ("Wherever I go, I meet you"), enacting a form of love where the world itself is refracted through a singular relational lens.

Irshad Kamil further integrates the language of vows and binding into the lyric's affective structure. The lines "*Chhode na chhoote kabhi, tode na toote kabhi, jo dhaaga tumse jud gaya wafa ka*" ("The thread of loyalty tied to you neither slips nor breaks") employ textile imagery that is deeply resonant in Indian poetics, where cloth, thread, and weaving are long-standing metaphors for bonds of faith and intimacy. The thread here is unbreakable, a counterpoint to the fragility often associated with modern relationships, suggesting that love's endurance is both a personal ethic and a cultural ideal. This insistence on permanence situates the song within a tradition that values *nibhaana* (sustaining, fulfilling) as the moral horizon of love, resisting the disposability embedded in consumerist narratives.

Placed within the larger Indian literary-cultural framework, *Tumse Hi* functions as a re-articulation of the idea that love is the organizing principle of life's meaning. The speaker claims, "*Raste mil jaate hain, manzilein mil jaati hain, tumse hi*" ("Paths are found, destinations are reached, because of you"), tying romantic attachment to the completion of existential quests. This aligns with the *premakhyān* tradition in medieval Hindi literature, where the beloved is both the journey and the goal, and with Urdu's *ishq-e-haqiqi/ishq-e-majazi*¹⁶ interplay, where earthly love gestures towards a higher truth. In the cinematic narrative of *Jab We Met*, the song mediates between the internal awakening of the characters and the external unfolding of the plot, operating as a moment where personal transformation is lyrically staged. Through its fusion of devotional, folk, and romantic registers, Kamil's text affirms love not merely as emotion, but as a structuring force of perception, identity, and destiny in the contemporary Indian imagination.

Conclusion

Reading Irshad Kamil's lyrics as cultural texts reveals both their poetic force and their power to reshape contemporary imaginations of love. His songs extend the long continuum of Indian love-poetics, reanimating inherited motifs while negotiating modern uncertainties. *Agar Tum Saath Ho* privileges silence and pause as metaphors of endurance, unsettling neoliberal demands for constant exchange. *Nadaan Parindey* revives the allegory of the wandering bird to dramatize homecoming, mortality, and ethical return, drawing from Bhakti and Sufi idioms to counter fantasies of rootless freedom. *Aaj Din Chadheya* entwines desire with prayer, collapsing the binaries of *ishq* and *ibadat*. *Jag Ghoomeya* offers an ethic of fidelity, redefining masculinity through constancy and care. *Tumse Hi* enacts *fana* and *wafā*—self-annihilation and loyalty—translating mystical devotion into cinematic registers. Across these songs, Kamil resists the commodification of romance, privileging endurance, return, intimacy, and prayer over the market's "fast feelings." As Michael Hardt notes, love is a "biopolitical event, planned and realized in common" (p. 180); Kamil stages it as collective labor rather than mere sentiment.

Beyond interpersonal registers, Kamil's songs also unfold into an ecopoetic horizon that resonates with the Indian Knowledge Tradition (IKT) . Birds, rivers, rains, skies, and winds are not ornaments but co-agents, entangling human experience with elemental rhythms. Love becomes porous to weather and seasons, intimacy speaks in the grammar of dawn and return, and fidelity aligns with cycles of renewal. Such imagery echoes IKT, an assemblage of practices where *śāstra* and song, ritual and critique, craft and contemplation converge. In this frame, *rasa* is cognition, silence and gesture are modes of thought, and nature is co-actor rather than backdrop. Bhakti and Sufi idioms model intimacy as knowledge, *viraha* sharpens attention, and the *hans* embodies epistemology of discernment, sifting essence from excess. Knowing here means dwelling rather than extracting, with time understood as cyclical, seasonal, and ceremonial. Kamil's lyric poetics, in reactivating these sensibilities, bring ancient epistemologies into dialogue with modern anxieties.

Indian Knowledge Tradition also interrogates power, diagnosing how markets accelerate and thin out feeling, and its counterpoint lies in endurance, care, and the labour of keeping—values that Kamil foregrounds. His metaphors of threads, knots, and fidelity bind persons to promises and promises to place. Devotional address pairs humility with critique, while the ghazal's paradoxes teach readers to hold union and separation as tools of perception rather than problems. Poetry, in this sense, is archive and experiment, moving from temple to cinema without closing the circle, insisting on openness, repair, and shared attention. By extending this tradition, Kamil moves Bollywood lyricism beyond disposable romance into ethical and ecological practice, reclaiming songs as vessels of cultural memory and civic imagination. Love, in his work, is civic and ecological, personal and collective, a way of dwelling that resists haste and possession. It is not

only biopolitical but also more-than-human: a mode of being that exceeds the market and displaces human exceptionalism¹⁷.

Kamil thus stands in continuity with Sahir, Gulzar, and Javed Akhtar, yet his voice is marked by ecological and philosophical depth attuned to contemporary anxieties and by resonance with India's interwoven traditions of knowing. His poetics teach that love is not a consumable emotion but a practice of endurance, cooperation, and entanglement. It is cultural memory and ecological ethics, personal devotion and collective commitment. Through his work, love emerges as both 'epistemology and ontology'¹⁸: a fragile yet resistant force binding human and non-human worlds, sustaining cultural life, and continuing to animate India's poetic imagination in the twenty-first century.

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Short-Notes

1. According to Jonathan Culler, the lyric foregrounds language itself, performs speech acts, and creates structures of identification and displacement. It relies on memorable, repeatable expression, inviting readers into shared affective and cultural experiences beyond narrative representation.
2. Indic is a civilizational category, referring to cultural, linguistic, and philosophical traditions—Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh—that originated in the subcontinent and extended beyond it. India is geopolitical; Indic is cultural. India is the modern nation-state, defined by territorial boundaries, political institutions, and constitutional identity since 1947.
3. Neoliberal culture valorizes competition, consumerism, and individual success, reshaping art, education, and identity into market-driven enterprises. Its cultural significance lies in how it redefines freedom as economic choice, reducing collective imagination and intensifying inequality.

- 4.** The devotional address of Vaishnava padavali is a lyrical mode of worship in Bengal's bhakti tradition. Rooted in Radha–Krishna love mysticism, it blends poetry, music, and devotion. These verses, sung as prayers, create intimacy between devotee and divine, evoking surrender, longing, and ecstatic union through deeply emotional language.
- 5.** Ecopoetics, J. Bate observes, foregrounds the interrelation of language, culture, and environment, challenging anthropocentrism. It holds cultural significance by reimagining literature as ecological dwelling, fostering sustainability, indigenous wisdom, and collective responsibility through poetic forms that critique neoliberal consumerism and envision symbiotic human–nature futures.
- 6.** Ecological dwelling emphasizes living in harmony with ecosystems, recognizing human survival as interdependent with nonhuman life. It signifies a cultural shift from exploitative consumption toward sustainability, indigenous wisdom, and ethical belonging within Earth's fragile habitats.
- 7.** Posthuman entanglements, according to Karen Barad, signify interconnectedness beyond human-centered thinking, stressing relations among humans, nonhumans, technology, and environment. They challenge individual autonomy, suggesting culture itself emerges from webs of material, affective, and ecological interdependencies that blur subject–object boundaries.
- 8.** The Upanishadic search for self is an inward journey, exploring the Ātman as the ground of awareness. It emphasizes self-knowledge, detachment, and liberation, unveiling truth beyond ritual, time, and illusion.
- 9.** Allegory is a narrative mode where characters and events symbolize deeper moral, spiritual, or political meanings, weaving layered interpretations that transcend surface storytelling and reflect cultural, philosophical, or religious truths.
- 10.** Anthropocentric worldviews place humans at the center of existence, shaping culture through domination of nature. Culturally, it underpins industrial progress and human exceptionalism but is increasingly challenged by ecological crises and alternative cosmologies emphasizing balance and shared dwelling.
- 11.** In Jain philosophy, according to J. Soni, the jīva is the essence of life and the source of all action. It embodies three aspects—consciousness (caitanya), bliss (sukha), and virtue (vīrya)—without which a living being cannot exist or act meaningfully.

12. The *hans* (swan) symbolizes discernment (*viveka*), capable of separating milk from water, embodying Advaita's quest for ultimate truth. Culturally, it evokes spiritual freedom, purity, and transcendence, inspiring art, literature, and devotional imagery across Indian traditions.

13. A synaesthetic metaphor blends sensations from different senses, describing one through another—like “a loud color” or “the taste of sadness.” In poetry and song, it intensifies emotional effect by fusing vision, sound, touch, or taste, making experiences more vivid and interconnected, transcending ordinary perception to evoke layered meanings.

14. Punjabi *boliyan* are short, rhythmic couplets sung in folk traditions, especially during *giddha* and *bhangra*. They express emotions, humor, satire, and community spirit, creating lively cultural and social bonding.

15. Sufi *qawwalis* are devotional songs blending Persian, Arabic, and Indian traditions. Performed with harmonium, *tabla*, and claps, they invoke divine love, spiritual ecstasy, and communal unity in shrines and gatherings.

16. *Ishq-e-Majāzī* (worldly love) is attachment to human beauty and affection, serving as a mirror of desire. *Ishq-e-Haqqīqī* (divine love) transcends it, directing the soul toward God, where human longing becomes a path to spiritual realization and ultimate union.

17. Human exceptionalism asserts humanity's superiority over animals, machines, and ecosystems. It has historically legitimized mastery over nature and colonial expansion. In cultural critique, dismantling it opens space for egalitarian ecological ethics and posthuman solidarities.

18. Epistemology (ways of knowing) and ontology (nature of being) are culturally significant as they shape intellectual traditions, religious philosophies, and political ideologies. Their interplay determines how societies validate truth, organize identity, and interpret human–world relations.

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