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## Ghazal Greatness

[Priya Das](#) • Published on [June 4, 2011](#)

*KAISE KEH DUUN/HOW SHALL I SAY (innova), www.amazon.com, available in mp3 downloads and CD, \$.99- \$13.54*

The review of the album, *Kaise keh duun/How shall I say*, by Pooja Goswami Pavan can start and end at one word—superlative. The lyrics, sound, music, tone, mood and, above all, her voice all elevate the experience of the ghazal to how it was meant to be—in a state of surrender. Pavan is generally hailed to be the successor of the legendary vocalist Begum Akhtar. A Minneapolis-based performer, composer, teacher, and scholar of Hindustani music, Pavan received a Ph.D. in Music from the University of Delhi in 2005 for her thesis on the life and music of Pandit Amarnath, who was one of the chief disciples of Ustad Amir Khan.



The choice of the popular and familiar Qamal Jalalabadi's "Kabhi kaha na kisii se" welcomes you at the very first note; Pavan's tonal quality draws you in. The song has been tuned slightly differently, but it does not detract from the beauty of the lyrics or the singing. Pavan's seemingly un-stylistic emphasis on certain words immediately harkens you back to an era of old-Urdu romance. The album showcases great poets spanning several centuries; in the second number, Pavan gets you to experience Bahadur Shah Zafar's freedom and anguish in "Sazaa ye khub mili." The tense love in his poem gives way to a silent one in the title track, Shakeel Badayuni's "Kaise keh duun," where Pavan and the poet lament that "We meet every day, but there's no conversation."

A great singer will choose great lyrics; not just to be challenged by them, but because nothing lesser will do. Very often, a good singer's having to referee warring music and lyrics disenchant

the listener, or great lyrics are lost at the chords of an un-inspiring singer. This album is a gem in the art of matching up calibers of musicians, singer, and poets—never mind that the last exist no longer; their poetry has its own life. Each of the verses in Pavan’s album is superlative in its own right, and each one urges you to believe that it cannot be bettered. In the hands of Murad Ali Khan the sarangi matches Pavan’s vocal excellence ; the sensitive and strong accompaniment on the tabla by Pandit Sudhir Pande cuts through the anguish-laden songs to, surprisingly, make them even more poignant, instead of breaking them up.

Vinay Mishra’s understated harmonium in Shamim Jaipuri’s “Kyon mujhe maut ke” heightens the underlying intoxication, “Hand us sorrow or wine, oh cup-bearer, as we drink sorrow, we drink wine.” So does Ustad Mahmod Dholpuri’s, in track six, “Ab to ghabraa ke.” The interplay between the lyrics and instruments is so beautiful that it feels as if each is vying to support the other.

Pavan’s guru and family, it appears, have provided the fulcrum to the CD—her semi-classical vocal teacher Vidushi Shanti Hiranand and father Pandit Surendra Goswami have composed several tracks. Pavan herself has composed three tracks, including Dagh’s “Sabaq aisaa parhaa diyaa.”

It must be Pavan’s training in both classical and semi-classical music that helps her shine as a ghazal singer—the former delivers tonally, the latter emotionally. Sometimes, light-music singers infuse un-fit sentimentality into ghazals. In Pavan’s Kaise keh duun, the CD booklet rightly proclaims that all components “contribute admirably in a harmonious confluence of sublime poetry and music.” Let’s add, “A must buy!”

*Priya Das is an avid follower of world music*

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