

Gay & Lesbian

TimeOut
Delhi

The five-century secret

Jamali-Kamali explores the name that dare not speak its love, **Parvati Sharma** says.

The Archaeological Survey of India's guide to the capital, *Delhi and its Neighbourhoods*, informs the reader that "Since there are two graves in [Jamali-Kamali's] tomb, one believed to be that of Jamali and the other that of Kamali, an unknown person, the monuments go under a 'double-barrelled' name." The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage is more daring and more condescending in its extrapolations. *Delhi: The Built Heritage* surveys "two marble graves in the building, one of which is Jamali's, and the other said to be that of one Kamali, possibly Jamali's brother."

Karen Chase's *Jamali-Kamali: A Tale of Passion in Mughal India* offers, from its title onwards, a more erotic take on the matter. The new book-length poem takes off from an oral tradition that describes Kamali as Jamali's lover. Chase, an American poet, was on a Sanskriti writers' residency in 2004 when she visited the tomb and discovered its contrasting histories. Her reaction was a startled, "Huh?" What she calls "the disjuncture of that moment" sparked a period of fevered writing in which she assumed, for the most part, the voice of Sheikh Fazlul'lah, the sixteenth-century poet who wrote as "Jamali".

Chase admits that there is no way of really knowing who Kamali was, and what he meant to the poet who served many kings, from Sikandar Lodi to Humayun. "I would say I imagined their relationship entirely. What I researched was the details of their surroundings." So, for example, the poem's final part is written in Kamali's voice, as he mourns the historically accepted fact of Jamali's death while on a campaign with Humayun. She recalls panicking at some point about whether her protagonists' diet would allow their breath to be "apple-scented" (it would). From another passage,



Death will not part The pair of men's graves in the tomb in Mehrauli

we may derive both pleasure and the assurance that parrots and guavas were a part of the early Mughal landscape:

The grass green male parrot sports a dark pink collar.
I have ordered the stitchers to sew one for us, each.

At cow dust hour,
meet me in the orchard.
Like birds, we'll raid
the neighbour's guava trees.

The Jamali-Kamali mosque and tomb are found in a rather perfect romantic assignation. Mehrauli Archaeological Park, despite its title, is a lavish space of green just behind the Mehrauli phool mandi. You step from an auto into a spilling mass of flowers, and walk through an undulating park past medieval wells and domes. Following the signs, you reach a small unassuming mosque.

The tomb is next door, and will be happily unlocked by the caretaker, who came here as a child to study in the quiet of the the compound. Inside, there is barely enough space to circle the two graves of white marble. The tomb's ceiling is a splendid design of coloured tiles, it rivets the eye. Yet what you notice first is a rose in an unmarked bottle, set on a niche.

The caretaker, walking to work through the phool mandi, brings a flower every morning. He laughs in some embarrassment and mumbles his words, but I gather that he feels it's an appropriate thing to do.

Here, though, is the rub: the parrots, the apples, the roses – these are details, and details prevaricate. We are told, after all, that both God and the Devil may reside in them. Details don't invariably create context. So I was instinctively embarrassed to ask my guide about Kamali's identity, and he reciprocated with half-hearted assertions of his ignorance.

Chase's poetry tells us little about medieval Indian attitudes towards homosexuality. If these buildings are controversial today, they are so because the ASI is battling the Delhi Wakf Board over whether or not prayers may be held here. Kamali, unspoken, remains as ephemeral as the scent of that short-stemmed rose. If that sounds sentimental, I haven't finished yet. The pity isn't so much that we don't know who "one Kamali" was. The pity is that so many of us remain the best friend, the roommate, the dentist's appointment, the shifty half-smile – spoken of in hushed tones and always kind-of-teetering into the unknown – with rarely an equivocal footnote, even, for our pains. *Jamali-Kamali: A Tale of Passion in Mughal India*, Mapin, ₹450.

Listings

How to use this section

Admission to events is **FREE**, as are the resources, unless otherwise stated.
⊕ denotes the nearest Metro station, if applicable.

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail (*Time Out*, Plot No. 82 Okhla Industrial Estate Phase-III, New Delhi 110020), email (listings@timeoutdelhi.net) or fax (4656-5733) to Raghu Kamad. Include details of event, dates, times, address of venue, nearest Metro station if applicable, telephone number and any entry fee. *Time Out* is a fortnightly publication, appearing on the stands every other Thursday. **Deadline for information is a fortnight before date of publication.** Listings are free, but inclusion cannot be guaranteed due to limited space.

Events

Boyzone Saturday party

Sat Feb 5 & Feb 12

A weekend party hosted for the LGBT community. The party is held at various clubs in the city. To get on the guest list, call (92127-35569).

The Delhi FrontRunners & Walkers

Sun Feb 6 & Sun Feb 13

A weekly running/walking club for Delhi's LGBTI people. For more details, email frontdel@gmail.com.

Gay Delhi Sunday Socials

Sun Feb 6 & Sun Feb 13

A weekly social gathering for gay and bisexual men. For more information on venues and timing and to know about other gay events in Delhi, join the Gay Delhi email list by sending a blank email to gaydelhisubscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Resources

Naz Dost helpline for MSM and Gay Men

Mon-Sat 1-7pm

The Naz Foundation also hosts weekly meetings and support groups for men. Call (2981-2287).

Nigah

An autonomous collective that holds regular queer events and uses different media to talk about issues of gender and sexuality. Visit www.nigah.org.

The South and Southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality

Mon-Thu 1.30-5pm

Hosted by TARSHI, a free library of books, materials and documents on issues of sexuality. Call (2437-9070).

Gay Delhi

A yahoo group for gay and bisexual men in Delhi that hold regular meetings. Email gaydelhi-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.