

Poetry Series

Habba Khatoon

- poems -

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Habba Khatoon(1554 - 1609)

Habba Khatun was a 16th century Muslim poet from the village of Chandrahar of Kashmir. She was born in the small village Chandrahar, and was known under the name Zoon (the Moon) because of her immense beauty until her marriage with Yusuf Shah Chak, who later became ruler of Kashmir, after which she was called Habba Khatun.

Her songs are popular in Kashmir and she is almost a legendary figure in Kashmiri literary history. Perhaps the influence she has exerted over the popular imagination had much to do with the difficult life she had as a peasant girl who had received some basic education. Habba Khatoon was a peasant girl who, after a difficult first marriage which ended in divorce, married Kashmir's last independent King, Yousuf Shah Chak. When the Mughal King Akbar conquered Kashmir and exiled Yousuf Shah Chak, Habba Khatoon spent the rest of her life wandering across the Valley singing her songs. Even though there is some dispute about biography, the texts associated with her name are widely popular across Kashmir.

She grew up in the midst of the saffron fields and in the shade of the chinar trees. She was not raised as a typical peasant girl. She had learnt how to read and write from the village moulvi. At an early age her father married her to a peasant boy. But this illiterate peasant boy could not keep Zoon happy. He could not understand the longings of her heart. Just like Lal Ded, Zoon also was sad. Lalla became desperate and left her home. Zoon divorced her husband and started singing songs in Kashmiri.

Zoon used to sing in the shade of a chinar tree. One day Yusuph Shah Chak was out hunting that way on horseback. He happened to pass the place where Zoon was singing under the chinar tree. He heard her melancholic melodies, and went to look at her. He was stunned by her beauty. As soon as their eyes met, they fell in love. Later, Zoon and Yusuph Shah were married. She changed her name and became Habba Khatun.

Habba Khatun introduced lol to Kashmiri poetry, lol is more or less equivalent to the English 'lyric'. It conveys one brief thought. It is full of melody and love.

Habba Khatun kept Yusuph Shah under her control. The couple was very contented, and Yusuph Shah became the ruler of Kashmir.

Their happiness did not last long. Akbar came into prominence in Delhi, and he

called Yusuph Shah there. In 1579, Yusuph Shah was compelled to go to Delhi. In Delhi, Akbar arrested him. He was kept in prison in Bihar. Poor Habba Khatun was separated from Yusuph Shah. The songs of Habba Khatun are full of the sorrow of separation. It is claimed that Habba Khatun introduced the 101 into the Kashmiri (language) After her came Arnimal who also sang mournful lyrics.

Habba Khatun spent her last days singing her songs in the Valley, songs which are popular to this day. Even now you can see young Kashmiri singers turn to such popular lyrics as Mye ha kaer chey kit and Che Kamiu Sonei Myani.

?my Friend?,? This Youth Is Loss

?My friend?,? this youth is loss
?I lost all day on the way

?Why were we born??
?Why did we not die??
?Why such beautiful name?s?
?We must wait for the Judgment Day
?And I lost all day on the way

?The way of the world is a meaningless storm
?I invited a difficult fate
?And I lost all day on the way

?Many nightingales entered the garden
?And they had their play
?The flowers left the garden
?To make way for the nightingales
?And I lost all day on the way

?Please protect me on the Day
?Where there will be fire of Hell
?Habba Khatoon will give you a call
?And I lost all day on the way

Habba Khatoon

Gather Violets O Narcissus

Rain has come, and fields and fruit trees sing,
Spring has come, and Love, the Lord of Spring,
Dandelions have lifted up their faces,
Cold has gone and every wintry thing!
Forget-me-not the forest graces,
Iris and the lily spring will bring.
Gather violets, O Narcissus,
Winter's ashes from our door I fling!
The water bird the lake embraces,
How can frost upon your petals cling?

[Translated by Nilla Cram Cook]

Habba Khatoon

Habba Khatoon

I left my home for play
Nor yet again
Returned, although the day
Sank in the West.
The name I made is hailed
On lips of men,
Habba Khatun! though veiled,
I found no rest.
Through crowds I found my way,
From forests, then,
The sages came, when day
Sank in the West.

[Translated by Nilla Cram Cook]

Habba Khatoon

Lol Of The Lonely Pine

The one who dazzles - have you seen that one?
Upon him look!
A sleepless stream in search of him I run,
A restless brook.
In far off woods, a lonely pine I stood
Till he appeared,
My woodcutter, and came to cut the wood.
His fire I feared,
Yet though he burn my logs, behold I shine,
My ashes wine!

[Lol is a style introduced by Habba Khatoon to Kashmiri Poetry. It expresses one brief thought.

Translation by Nilla Cram Cook]

Habba Khatoon

Lol Of The Wild Yellow Rose

Wild, the vagrant yellow rose
Again has bloomed,
Beauty has in all that grows
Rare forms assumed!
Where, O love, your hiding place?
I wander far,
Seeking you among the streams
The dew-drops pour.
Jasmine in the forest gleams,
But where your face?
Violets bloom for me to trace
To where you are.

[Translated by Nilla Cram Cook]

Habba Khatoon

Never Return These Hours

Meadows I cover with flowers for you,
Come, my lover of flowers!
Come, let me gather fresh jasmine for you,
Never return these hours!
Lilacs have bloomed by the river for you,
Deeply the world is asleep,
Still, though, no answer has reached me from you,
Garlands of green I keep.
What if they speak only evil of me?
Who has been able to change destiny?
Come, my lover of flowers!

[Translated by Nilla Cram Cook]

Habba Khatoon

Song Of The Restless Stream

The world its Ramadan will end,
The lover's Id,
The feast of love, O call him, friend!
For love is Id.

But love has melted me like snow,
A waterfall,
As restless as the summer streams
I sleepless go!

O, call him gently, friend, O call!
With wreaths and dreams
I carry wine to Dara's peaks'
The world below.

And yet he roams in distant vales,
New wine he seeks!
If he comes not, the jasmine pales,
And I, and all!

[Translated by Nilla Cram Cook]

Habba Khatoon

The Golden Wine Cups Of The Night

In henna I have dyed my hands,
When will he come?
I die, while he roams distant lands,
My heart is numb!

O, where is now the day's delight?
I've waited long.
The golden wine cups of the night
To him belong!

The ritual of love is sweet,
Could I adorn
My love with jewels, perfume his feet,
Be no more torn,

Anoint him with my fragrant kiss,
Love, for your sake,
The lotus of my heart in bliss
Would block the lake!

[Translated by Nilla Cram Cook]

Habba Khatoon

Which Rival Of Mine Has Lured You Away From Me?

Which rival of mine has lured you away from me?
Why are you cross with me?
Forget the anger and the sulkiness,
You are my only love,
Why are you cross with me?
My garden has blossomed into colorful flowers,
Why are you away from me?
My love, my only love, I think only of you,
Why are you cross with me?
I kept my doors open half the night,
Come and enter my door, my jewel,
Why have you forsaken the path to my house?
Why are you cross with me?
I swear, my love, I am waiting for you,
dressed in colorful robes,
My youth is in full bloom now,
Why are you cross with me?
Oh, marksman, my bosom is open
To the darts you throw at me.
These darts are piercing me,
Why are you cross with me?
I have been wasting away like snow in summer heat.
my youth is in its bloom.
This is your garden, come and enjoy it.
Why are you cross with me?
I have sought you over hills and dales,
I have sought you from dawn till dusk,
I have cooked dainty dishes for you.
I do all this in vain!
Why are you cross with me?
I shed incessant tears for you,
I am pining for you,
What is my fault, O, my love?
Why don't you seek me out?
Why are you cross with me?
The shock of your desertion has come as a blow to me,
O cruel one, I continue to nurse the pain.
Why are you cross with me?
I have not complained even to the spring breeze

That is my agony.
Why have you forgotten me?
Who will take care of me?
Why are you cross with me?
I swear by you
I do not go out at all,
I don't even show up at the spring.
My body is burning,
Why don't you soothe it?
Why are you cross with me?
My hurt is marrow deep; I did not complain.
I just wasted away for you.
I have suppressed endless longing,
Why are you cross with me?
I, Habba Khatun, am grieving now.
Why didn't I ever greet you, my love?
The day is fading and I keep recalling,
Why are you cross with me?

Habba Khatun

Why Are You Cross With Me

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Habba Khatun