

Classic Poetry Series

Shah Hussain
- poems -

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Shah Hussain(1538–1599)

Shah Hussain was a Punjabi Sufi poet who is regarded as a Sufi saint. He was the son of Sheikh Usman, a weaver, and belonged to the Dhudha clan of Rajputs. He was born in Lahore (present-day Pakistan). He is considered a pioneer of the Kafi form of Punjabi poetry.

Shah Hussain's love for a Brahmin boy called "Madho" or "Madho Lal" is famous, and they are often referred to as a single person with the composite name of "Madho Lal Hussain". Madho's tomb lies next to Hussain's in the shrine.

His tomb and shrine lies in Baghbanpura, adjacent to the Shalimar Gardens. His Urs (annual death anniversary) is celebrated at his shrine every year during the "Mela Chiraghan" ("Festival of Lights").

Kafis of Shah Hussain

Hussain's poetry consists entirely of short poems known as Kafis. A typical Hussain Kafi contains a refrain and some rhymed lines. The number of rhymed lines is usually between four and ten. Only occasionally is a longer form adopted. Hussain's Kafis are also composed for, and have been set to, music deriving from Punjabi folk music. Many of his Kafis are part of the traditional Qawwali repertoire. His poems have been performed as songs by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Abida Parveen and Noor Jehan, among others.

Here are three examples, which draw on the love story of Heer Ranjha:

"Ni Mai menoon Khedeyan di gal naa aakh
Ranjhan mera, main Ranjhan di,
Khedeyan noon koodi jhak
Lok janey Heer kamli hoi,
Heeray da var chak"

"Do not talk of the Khedas to me, mother.
I belong to Ranjha and he belongs to me.
And the Khedas dream idle dreams.
Let the people say, Heer is crazy;
she has given herself to a cowherd."

Another Kafi:

"Sajjan bin raatan hoiyan whadiyaan
Ranjha jogi, main jogiani, kamli kar kar sadiyaan
Maas jhurey jhur pinjer hoye, kadken lagiyaan haddiyaan
Main ayani niyoonh ki janan, birhon tannawan gadiyaan
Kahe Husain faqeer sain da, larr tere main lagiyaan"

The nights are long without my beloved.
Since Ranjha became a jogi, I have scarcely been my old self;
people everywhere call me crazy.
My young flesh is all wrinkled, my bones are a creaking skeleton.
I was too young to understand love;
and now as the nights swell and merge into each other,
I play host to that unkind guest - separation.

Main vi jaanaan jhok Ranjhan di, naal mere koi challey
Pairan paindi, mintaan kardi, jaanaan tan peya ukkaley
Neen vi dhoonghi, tilla purana, sheehan ney pattan malley
Ranjhan yaar tabeeb sadhendha, main tan dard awalley
Kahe Hussain faqeer namana, sain sunedha ghalley

I have to go to Ranjha's hut, will someone go with me?
I have begged many to accompany me, but I had to set out alone.
The river is deep, and the shaky bridge creaks.
I am tortured by my wounds, but Ranjha my beloved is the doctor who can cure
them.
Only my beloved can bring me comfort.

Mai Ne Main Kinon Aakhaan

Shah Hussain

O' Mother To Whom Shall I Tell The Story

'O' Mother to whom shall I tell the story of my separation's grief.
The fire lit inside me by the teacher smolders and smokes
As I stir the ambers, I see the red Jewel
The pain of separation has driven me mad
Suffering is the bread I eat
Pain is my curry dip, sighs of grief my cooking fire
I roam the jungles and deserts in vain
Says Hussain, the God's fakir:
How happy I will be to find my prince!

Shah Hussain

Paakh Jinha Diyan Nigahma Hoiya

Shah Hussain