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## Yearnings of Unrequited Love: A Study of Habba Khatoon and Arnimal

Dr. Naadiya Yaqoob Mir

Postdoctoral Fellow

Indian Institute of Social Science Research (ICSSR)

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### ABSTRACT

Sufism is the name given to mysticism in Islam. The term is taken from the Arabic word 'suf' which means 'wool'. It basically denoted the ones who denounced the world, chose a mystic way of life and wore coarse woollen clothes. The explanation for this is also found in the oldest extant Arabic treatise on Sufism by Abu Nasr al-Saraj, who declared that "the woollen raiment is the habit of the prophets and the batch of the saints and elect". This act of devoting oneself to a mystic life is called 'sufism' in Islam. Sufis themselves prefer to say that their name is derived from 'safa' which meant 'purity'. The term Sufism embraces the philosophy and practices which aim at direct communion between God and man, and those who practice these are called Sufis. The Sufis attest to having the experience of seeing God, whom they call their Beloved One, face to face. There are instances of Sufis becoming unconscious when possessed by the ecstasy of extreme love. The Sufis say that the Prophet and some of his companions were totally absorbed in their prayers every time. The early Sufis were known for their asceticism. Poverty was their ideal. They thought that it was the world that distracted their attention from God. So, if they desisted from accumulating worldly things, they would be spared distraction, be able to achieve a high level of concentration and, as a result, their prayers would attain an exceptional quality. There is a blend of sufism and shaivism in most of the poets of Kashmir. The paper will examine one of the most recurrent themes of Sufi poetry i.e the pain, yearning and heart aches of unrequited love in the poems of the two women poets of Kashmir.

**Key words:** Sufism, Shaivism, communion, mysticism, ecstasy.

Love is one of the preferred themes of Sufi poets, both for its narrative potential and for its relevance as a spiritual driving force. The Sufi theoretician of mysticism Ruzbehan Baqli (d. 1210) says, became intoxicated with the Divine word and fell in love with God, the eternal beloved, through the contemplation of his beauty. This attractive power leads the Sufi to shed all traces of individuality and temporality, attaining the ultimate goal of annihilation and subsistence in God. Sufi poets have

described this union in countless ways, relying on their creative imagination and their visionary experiences, coupled with masterful poetical skills. Another important theme is the pain and suffering of unrequited love, longing and yearning for the beloved. Almost in all women mystics of Kashmir, the pain of unrequited love is manifested in so many ways. Their cries of union echo in almost all their poems.

Habba Khatoon born in 1554 in a small village called Chandhur in Pampore as a peasant, Habba Khatun or Khatoon was named as Zoon by her parents. As per oral tradition, she was called Zoon owing to her immense beauty. There is also a theory that suggests that she was once baptised by a Sufi mystic on a moonlight night who gave her the name Zoon. And it was under the guidance of her Sufi mentor that she began to compose lyrics and sing. She had a beautiful voice and a natural talent for composing poetry. Even though born in a peasant family, Zoon had learnt to read and write from the village moulvi. At a young age, Zoon's father married her off to a peasant boy. But her marriage was a disaster and she was soon divorced. It is believed that she was mistreated by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. It was after her divorce that she started writing and singing songs in Kashmiri.

Later, after she had been divorced, she met and fell in love with Yusuf Shah Chak. And it was after her marriage to him that she changed her name to 'Habba Khatoon'. Throughout history, there have been several women poets from different kinds of backgrounds and walks of life who did not just consider their voices worth hearing but also dared to stand out and be heard and Habba Khatun is one among them.

In a time when women's poetry mostly focussed on spirituality, Habba brought romantic lyrics to hers. While her verses are bold and mostly biographical, they also have a kind of universality to them. Her poetry was strikingly different as compared to the other poets of her time as it was candid and personal.

All of Habba Khatoon's poems were full of sorrow and longing in the memory of her husband. Her soul-stirring poetry is immensely popular in the valley even to this day and her verses on love and romance still captivate the Kashmiris. Habba articulated her lived reality in verse. It is the articulation of desire in words that were thus far limited to men that makes her poetry more captivating.

Lost in her world of dreams, Leila  
Lit her lamp in the dark!  
I am the moth and you my lamp!  
Enjoy my pomegranate blossoms

(Jha, Drabu, 2003)

Habba dared to name and beckon her lover, a significant role-reversal at a time when women were only the objects of desire.

The distant meadows are in bloom.  
Have you not heard my call?  
Flowers bloom on mountain lakes  
Come, let us ascend these meadows now  
The lilac blooms in distant woods  
Have you not heard my call?

(Jha, Drabu, 2003)

The relatability in her verse didn't stop at descriptions of conjugal love. Habba lent her voice to the banal chores of everyday life, singing as she went along. She wrote of miseries inflicted upon her by her in-laws and of the perils of physical labour. Her descriptors of sweat and toil are also beautifully poetic.

With sweat pearls dropping from my brow  
I'm a maiden gathering violets

(Jha, Drabu, 2003)

Much of her poetry is rooted in the flora of Kashmir: descriptors of hills and streams, flowers and fruits.

I'll seek you down the wandering brooks  
Praying we must meet again  
I'll look for you where the jasmines blow  
Don't tell me we shan't meet again

(Jha, Drabu, 2003)

While we cannot be certain that she was the only woman poet of her time, she was certainly the first to usher in a lyrical age of romantic poetry in the Kashmiri literature. Her successor in this genre would not show up until two centuries later in the form of poetess Arnimal.

Passed down orally in songs that have been sung by women across centuries, it is likely that Habba's words have been modified, reinterpreted and reimagined by many other unnamed voices. All these voices may have eventually contributed to the myth and legend of Habba Khatoon.

One of the most important and recurring theme of Habba Khatoon's poetry is the pain and anguish of unrequited love and longing for beloved as is manifested in the poem below:

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 colourful 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 colourful 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!

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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?  
(Mattoo 2019 110)

The poem expresses the anguish of unrequited love through a series of rhetorical questions. The speaker questions why her beloved has become angry and distant, lamenting his absence from her life.

Similar to her other works, Khatoon's use of repetition creates a sense of urgency and emotional depth. The constant refrain "Why are you cross with me?" conveys the speaker's despair and longing.

The poem reflects the social norms and expectations of love and relationships, particularly for women. The speaker's subservience and longing are indicative of the power dynamics often present in love during that era. Her poetry emerged during a period of significant cultural and political change in Kashmir. This era witnessed the influence of Persian literature and Sufism, which subtly permeated the literary landscape of Kashmiri literature.

Habba Khatoon's legacy is significant as she is considered one of the earliest known female poets from Kashmir whose work is still accessible. Her poetry continues to be widely read and sung in the region, serving as an important link. Habba Khatoon's story is a testament to the power of love and the resilience of the human spirit. Despite facing immense obstacles, the couple's love and devotion remained unwavering.

Habba Khatoon's life and poetry are a source of inspiration for people around the world. She was a woman who defied societal norms and pursued her passion for poetry, even in the face of adversity. Her love for Yusuf was pure and unbreakable, and her poems express the depth of her emotions and the intensity of her longing. In a world where people often feel disconnected and

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alienated, Habba Khatoon's story reminds us of the power of human connection and the strength of love. Her poetry touches our hearts and reminds us that even in the darkest of times, there is always hope.

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!

The poem depicts a woman's yearning for her absent lover, conveyed through the metaphor of "the golden wine cups of the night". The henna-dyed hands symbolize anticipation, while the night represents the beloved's absence. This poem differs from other works by delving into the depths of unrequited love, longing, contrasting with the themes of societal resistance. For its time, it offers a unique perspective on female desire.

The two main influences on her poetry have been the failure of her first marriage and her relationship with Yousuf Shah Chak, particularly the period when he was sent away in exile to Bihar. Her songs talk of earthly love and are more pragmatic in tone and less spiritual than 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,

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Yet though he burn my logs, behold I shine,  
My ashes wine!  
My Yusuf has been snatched away, my grief has reached the sky.  
A storm has taken over my house, leaving me in lurch.  
My eyes long for him, my tears flow incessantly.

(Cook 1958)

Despite the hardships she faced, Habba Khatoon never gave up hope and continued to write poems expressing her love for Yusuf. She became a symbol of resilience and courage for the people of Kashmir, who admired her for her strength and perseverance. Habba Khatoon's life and poetry are a source of inspiration for people around the world. She was a woman who defied societal norms and pursued her passion for poetry, even in the face of adversity. Her love for Yusuf was pure and unbreakable, and her poems express the depth of her emotions and the intensity of her longing. In a world where people often feel disconnected and alone, Habba Khatoon's story reminds us of the power of human connection and the strength of love. Her poetry touches our hearts and reminds us that even in the darkest of times, there is always hope.

This pain of your separation is what I must bear  
Why will you never come this way?  
Tell me, now what do I live for?  
Where did my love hide himself?

This fragile self has not long to live  
The guest I wait for is yet to come  
Soon I will have to leave this place  
Where did my love hide himself?

Whatever I gather is never enough  
Whatever I do they taunt me, she's mad  
Habba can only pray to her Lord  
Where did my love hide himself?

(Mattoo 2019)

I am resting in grave, counting breaths,  
searching and seeking you, every path closed,  
Like an unbaked clay, I melt with tears,  
Ablaze my nights with your shadows.  
Bid me bye before your forever,  
quench my heart, you satisfied never.

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Come, O companion, let's smell the dandelions,  
Let's write once again the messages of love.  
See, how restless I'm in the oppressed world,  
take me like you have touched a child.  
Because I'm no girl of the homes here,  
all I had was your heart to live"

(Shabir 2020)

Another poet whose poetry resonates the theme of unrequited love is Arnimal. Arnimal was born in the picturesque village of Palhalan, thirty kilometres away from Srinagar, on 1737, nearly two hundred years after Habba Khatoon. She was brought up in the charming surroundings of Chinars, tall, slender poplars, calm lakes and majestic mountains at her father's place. Daughter of a respectable family and wedded to a person of a great family, Arnimal was pretty, imaginative and accomplished, but all through her life she suffered the torments of separation. As a common practice in those days, Arnimal was married in her childhood Munshi Bhawani Das kachroo, but before attaining the bloom of her youth, she was deserted by her poet husband for some unknown reasons. The separation from her husband proved painful and tormenting for Arnimal and her emotions were terribly stirred. As a result of this sorrow and unhappiness was born the most melodious poetry full of pathos and grief. Burning in the agonising fires of separation, Arnimal in all disgust and melancholy returned to her parents' house at Palhalan, Baramulla. Her captivating songs ooze out varied shades of pain and agony. Separation from her spouse was a source of perpetual pain and agony. Rejected and unrequited love was what agonised her. Here is a lyric soaked in pain and agony-

Wreaths of flowers I wove for my husband

Would that he were to accept it

Cups of wine I filled for him

Would that he were to come

I yearn to clasp him in my arms.

Suffering from intolerable pangs of separation, she is deeply yearning for her husband who is miles away from her. In agony she addresses her friend

O friend, tell him about my agony

I know not what my fault is

Repaired he to my cruel co-wife

He is hers, since I learnt it

My whole being is set afire I lost my appetite

I am eagerly waiting for him

How I wish he were with me

(Bazaz, 2023)

Despaired and forsaken Arnimal expresses her pathos

Soaked in tears my hem is

awaiting you my days dragon

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Why this futile vanity  
 She again sings in melancholy  
 When will your soft feet touch our threshold.  
 I place them on my pate  
 In agony I came out searching for you  
 removing veils and barriers all  
 Pray come to me  
 The marital life of Arnimal Kachru was seething with pain and anguish.  
 O friend, why my husband separated from me  
 I bathed clean for him  
 All adornments went useless, he did not come,  
 O loveless, I can't bear with your separation any longer  
 Without you I shall fade away  
 Now no more can I wait even for a short while

(Bazaz 2023)

Arnimal has used ample of imagery from nature to ventilate her heart-ravaging pain and anguish. The creepers (hiya), yellow roses (arni-posh) and narcissuses (nargis) have oft found a mention in her lyrics. Awesome mountains and snow-capped peaks have been described in the context of her gloomy moods and pathos-laden feelings caused by separation from her husband.

For him have I filled brimful cups of wine  
 O friend, could you go to summon him  
 On way to meadow, back from peaks  
 O friend, take my blessings to him.  
 Rendering me hapless he frisked away like a deer  
 Call him, platefuls of sweets & candies are awaiting him  
 Tears are dribbling incessantly from my eyes  
 How to bear with pain and agony  
 Call him loud and clear

(Dhar 2006)

Again she says:  
 I am a youthful beauty, abandoned my abode for him  
 whole day passed awaiting him  
 His gnawing indifference has rendered me mad  
 I bear with taunts flung by one and all  
 Addressing her husband she in all despair busts out  
 O, my love,



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You were the friend of my youth  
Initially I knew not how to value it  
Wasted it away, Now I am pining and withering  
Show me your countenance, I am dying for a mere glimpse  
O, friend of my youth.

(Dhar 2006)

### Conclusion

There is an exemplary confluence of hope and despair in the love-laden lyrics of both Habba khatun and Arnimal. Helplessness, endless wait and incessant agony are the emotional states that resonate in their lyrical orchestrations. Their lyrics mirror the mind of a deserted woman who is in deep despair, lonely and yearning for their unrequited love. Stung by intolerable pangs of separation, they are deeply pining for their husbands. Besides fortitude and resignation, their poetry breathe a note of dissatisfaction and pain of unrequited love. Their lyrics gave voice to many voiceless Kashmiri women of their times. They acquired mastery over words and invented a unique style of expression. Some of their lyrics have become classics in Kashmiri language.

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