

# Makers of Indian Literature

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# Haba Khatoon

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Haba Khatoon (mid-sixteenth century) was the consort of a king but attained immortality as the queen of song. The name of her husband, Yusuf Shah Chak, has been saved from oblivion in the light reflected from that of Haba Khatoon, the peasant woman he adorned his palace with. A blend of country lass and queen, musician and poet, her personality has merged with the Kashmiri poetry and culture, through her passionate lyrics, *vacans*.

Legends have grown around her, and it is not easy to establish beyond doubt the authenticity of all the songs attributed to her. Based on the scant surviving material, Sri S.L. Sadhu builds up an account of her life and evaluates her contribution to the Kashmiri literature.

Sri Sadhu's works in Kashmiri have received awards from the Government of India. His *Wuchha Prang* has won a Unesco award. Author of two books in English, Sri Sadhu presents this monograph mainly to the non-Kashmiri readers.

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A sketch of a Kashmiri damsel, by Pramod Ganpatye, based on a miniature painting of the Kashmiri School, third quarter of the 17th century A.D. Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.

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S. L. Sadhu

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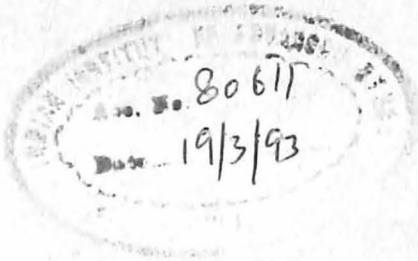
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To Professor J.L. Kaul

## Contents

1. The Age of Haba Khatoon	7
2. From Farm to Palace	13
3. Haba Khatoon's Poetry	38
4. Haba Khatoon's Influence	53
Bibliography	56

## CHAPTER 1

### The Age of Haba Khatoon

MANY kings and queens have immortalised their names by their valour, statesmanship and wisdom. A few sovereigns attained celebrity through patronage of learning, poetry and art. Haba Khatoon was the consort of a king but attained immortality as the queen of song. The name of her husband Yusuf Shah Chak has been saved from oblivion in the light reflected from that of Haba Khatoon, the peasant woman he adorned his palace with. Truly has Kalhana paid a tribute to the poet in the *Rajatarangini* in the words:

Worthy of homage is the indescribable insight of a poet which excels the stream of ambrosia since through it is achieved a permanent embodiment of glory by the poet and others as well.

Haba Khatoon was born in an age when Kashmir suffered much political, social and economic distress. The dynasty of the Sultans distinguished by rulers like the mighty Shahab-ud-Din and the illustrious Zain-ul-Abdin had grown feeble and power passed into the hands of feudal barons who keenly competed with one another in the bid to exercise power in the name of a puppet here or a pretender there. Adventurists and mercenaries from outside were freely enlisted to secure such selfish ends. While internecine feuds between rival leaders and the clang of swords continued unabated, mansions, localities and bridges were burnt and hunger and famine stalked the valley. Habib Shah, the last of the Sultans, was so weak and naive that in 1554 A.D. he was deprived of his crown while in full court and

nobody raised even a little finger in his support. The throne was next occupied by Ali Khan, a member of the powerful Chak clan. Though energetic, he was intrepid and was occupied all the time in meeting revolts and confrontations. Neither he nor his successors could devote sufficient attention to the arts of peace which could have given people the relief they needed most. Further, several complicating factors gained prominence during the Chak rule to the detriment of the common people. The Chaks were Shias and the brunt of their proselytising zeal fell on both the Hindus and the Sunni-Muslims. What was worse, the Sunni-Shia rivalry took an ugly turn and distressing form, leading to an extensive cleavage between the two sections of the population, and sympathies of the masses were alienated. A more serious development was the allurements felt by the hawk-eyed Mughal, Akbar, for the beautiful valley of Kashmir. Because of their mutual bickerings and quarrels, disgruntled Kashmiri leaders often sought assistance from the emperor, or his satraps, who encouraged defections and destabilisation.

The foregoing events brought untold misery to the people. The Kashgari invasion of 1534 A.D. had led to a severe famine the following year as the peasants left their home and farm to seek safety of life and limb in forests and mountain-glens. For almost fifty years they were constantly oppressed and harassed by the war-lords whom they had to maintain along with their mercenary rabble. Practically no ruler planned extension of irrigation, flood protection, encouragement to shawl weaving or development of other handicrafts. There was consequently large scale unemployment among such sections of people as peasants, shawl-weavers and craftsmen. In the midst of this man-made misery a premature and unseasonal snowfall descended upon the valley in 1576 A.D. Its devastating impact lasted three years but it left the economy crippled for a decade. When Akbar finally annexed Kashmir he immediately embarked upon the construction of the Naagar Nagar (or Shuka's *Nag Nagri*) rampart at a cost of 11 million rupees to offset unemployment and dire indigence. (Portions of the wall can be seen even now round the Hariparbat area in Srinagar). It is, therefore, no surprise that the people's cup of misery was full to the brim during the life-time of Haba Khatoon.

Scholars look upon Kashmiri as a language of long standing and claim kinship for it with the media in which *Brihat Katha* of Gunadhya and *Milind Panho* were composed. Since the originals of these two works have not been traced, a definitive conclusion cannot be arrived at. The earliest specimen of Kashmiri writing is found in the three-word expression in the *Rajatarangini* (V-398) embodying an order of King Chakravarman (A.D. 935-37): *rangassu helu dinna* (village Helu is granted to Ranga) which clearly indicates that the language had moved close to its present form. The next available specimen of Kashmiri writing is the 13th century composition *Mahanaya Prakash* (Illumination of the Highest Attainment) of Shiti Kantha. Its 94 stanzas are as different from the present day Kashmiri as old English is from modern English. Old Kashmiri was of a phonetic character but extensive vowel changes over a period of time made it almost a different language in its modern form. Dr. Grierson cites it as an illustration of an analytical language in the process of changing into a synthetic one.

Two events of great importance for Kashmiri language and literature occurred in the thirties of the fourteenth century. One was the birth of Lal Ded (c. 1335-1385 A.D.) and the other the assumption of power in 1339 A.D. by Shahmir, founder of the dynasty of Sultans who ruled Kashmir for over two hundred years. Lal Ded's language is far in advance of Shiti Kanth's medium in its proximity to the present form and is close to the speech of the masses. She chose the *vaakh* quatrain to convey her feelings and mystic experiences that impressed the people as never before. She tried to tear away the veils of sham and falsehood which had deluded the populace. Her younger contemporary Sheikh Noor-ud-Din (1377-1440 A.D.), locally known as Sheikh-ul-Alam out of reverence, also blazed a trail in poetry. His sayings in the verse form *shrukhs* have an import not different from those of Lal Ded, and both are held in high esteem as saint-poets who aimed at guiding people towards simplicity, purity, sincerity and truth.

Haba Khatoon was born about two hundred years after Lal Ded. The language she used had already adopted almost all those characteristics which it embodies today. If Lal Ded's language was

ahead of Shiti Kanth's in its march towards the present form, Haba Khatoon's medium represents a bigger advance beyond that stage. A factor of great importance in this behalf was the impact of Persian on Kashmiri owing to the silent revolution of 1339 A.D. referred to above. While many Muslim Sultans continued their patronage of the Pandits and Sanskrit, they extended it to Persian also. Hundreds of Syeds from Western and Central Asia sought refuge in Kashmir and among them were scholars, poets, mystics and theologians. Before long Persian became the court language. Being cultivated by various sections of the people it exerted considerable influence on Kashmiri language, lending to it greater flexibility and grace. Kashmiri also absorbed many words from Persian and Arabic, or the existing words were enriched with nuances of meaning. It could not escape modifications in art forms under the influence of Persian, nor close itself completely to new literary traits. Kashmiri works reported to have been composed during the reign of Zain-ul-Abdin (1420-70) clearly support this assumption. That several of the Sultans right down to Yusuf Shah composed verses in Sanskrit, Persian and Kashmiri, or used all the three languages, could not but stimulate a similar exercise among the talented subjects whose sensibility was being moulded on a new pattern. A sort of a composite culture began to emerge.

Music, acting and dancing have always been popular in Kashmir. Zain-ul-Abdin revived patronage of music and the arts, which example was followed by other Sultans till the valley was annexed by the Mughals. The court also patronised actresses and dancers. These traditions continued during the Chak regime—1554-86. Austerity and profundity of the age of Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din appear to have suffered erosion and the people once again awoke to the fascination of music, poetry and minstrelsy. Persian influences, including those of the *ghazal* and *sufi* poetry, were already permeating the fabric of thought and culture and the Kashmiri song embodying poetry and music took its birth in this environment.

There has never been any dearth of saints, mystics and spiritually-minded people among the learned and the common-folk in Kashmir. Apart from saints of local origin people enjoyed close communion with Muslim divines and mystics from Central Asia and further west. Echoes of the teachings, enshrined in

poetry, of Kabir, the Sikh Gurus, Tulsidas, Surdas, Mirabai, etc., also travelled to Kashmir, especially through pilgrims, and some people turned to the *vacan*, or song-lyric, to enshrine a deep personal attachment to a spiritual ideal. A fervent longing for God, the eternal Beloved, is projected in a few of these song-lyrics. It is, however, human love that infused life and vitality in *vacan*-songs.

These songs, sweet and penetrating, have come to us across five centuries by word of mouth or through the vocal chords of music-lovers, both sophisticated professionals and amateurs. Though it is not possible to identify them distinctly, the songsters appear to have been quite a few in number. It was as though the people discovered a new source of energy to nourish their many-sided personality and comfort them after a period of toil, arduous discipline and rigid self-restraint. This period of Kashmiri poetry has been called *vacan-kaal* or the era of songs.

The sixteenth century *vacan* or song-lyric is a short poetic composition set to music. There are few written records of the poetic composition as such but specimens have been found strewn in the books of *soofiana kalaam*, or classical music, with *raag*, *taal*, *sva*r and time indicated in each case. Some of these *vacan* songs have come down to us through *rohiv*, a popular folk-dance accompanied with song while others have been perpetuated because of their use by artistes and amateurs in chorus on weddings and other gala functions. The melodiousness of songs is enhanced by medial rhymes and end-rhymes, alliteration and assonance, especially because the Kashmiri language has a large number of vowel and semi-vowel sounds. The three-lined or four-lined unit or stanza is concluded with a refrain. The song is flexible in rhythm. Replacement of Sanskrit-based meters with those of Persian had already started by the time the song emerged but it does not quite fall within the quantitative measure of the latter.

Though the song-lyric in Kashmiri came under the influence of Persian in respect of vocabulary, diction and prosody, it continued to voice the feelings of the female lover addressed to the male beloved, which is at variance with the established convention in Persian. In such songs there is not much scope for the portraiture of feminine beauty as the love-smitten female lover will not extol her own form while she is waiting for a gesture from her unresponsive male beloved.



The song is generally not intellectual in concept or content. It has no theme to project, no message to convey. It is an utterance, simple and direct, of a woman affected by the sting of love waiting for her lover in a world vibrating with love's message in the form of flowers, the turtle-dove and the bumble-bee. Her *lol*, unrequited love and longing, is bound in his absence to dissolve into a wistful and plaintive utterance. It appears as though she finds a relief in unburdening her melancholy heart in song. These song-cycles embody love in many moods, ranging from simple harmless longing, through doubting and questioning, to a conviction of the lover's infidelity and the much dreaded but inevitable separation. Each song, however, projects a single mood which becomes the focus of the entire attention of the reader or the listener. It thus contrasts sharply with the *ghazal* which displays a variety of moods ranging from sensuous love to mysticism, to which only the highest masters can provide a disciplined harmony.

The Kashmiri song of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries rarely displays a note of gaiety or passion. There is only plaintiveness and longing, melancholy and frustration. The harsh cruelty of love appears to be wrapped in the garb of female bashfulness and restraint and presented in all tenderness. The *vacan* is characterised by the simplicity and candour of the folk-song and the sincerity of the lyric. It is also highly musical. Most of the songs embody secular love, unsophisticated and simple, natural and human. Their appeal to the heart is direct and deep for those brought up in the lap of nature as for those overlaid with culture. There is nothing mystical, moral or homilic about the *vacan*.

The songs of this period are, by and large, of unknown authorship. Some of those poets who lived during the period and nourished the song-lyric include Habibullah Nowshehri and Nund Akmal. But the crowning glory of the age is Haba Khatoon. If the earlier period is dominated by Lala Yogeshwari who merged herself in the Universal Self, the sixteenth century Kashmiri poetry offers its highest pedestal to Haba Khatoon. Her personality which is a composite of her roles as woman and queen, musician and poet, got merged with Kashmiri poetry and culture and has been bubbling forth from time to time through songsters who fall under her spell consciously or otherwise.

## CHAPTER 2

### From Farm to Palace

THE heaths and braes of Pampore and its surrounding villages immediately to the south of Srinagar have for thousands of years been known for the high quality of saffron produced from its rich soil. The cluster of villages has, however, dowered upon the language, literature and culture of the valley its most glorious and ever fragrant flowers in the form of two of its greatest poets, and both of them women. Lalleshwari, popularly known as Lal Ded, born at Sempore near Pampore, in the reign of Udyandev, the last Hindu king, is the first known major poet in Kashmiri language who has continued to dominate the poetry and culture of the Kashmiri speaking people. In the same area was born Haba Khatoon in the mid-sixteenth century. The village which claims the credit as the birth place of Haba Khatoon is known as Chandahar. Some unseen spirit seems to have taken a hand in the application of these names: for Haba Khatoon was christened Zoon, the Kashmiri word for the moon derived from the Sanskrit  *jyotsna*  through the Prakrit  *jonha* , and Chandahar derived from Chandreshvara (as suggested by Stein) stands for the lord of the moon. Her father was Abdi Rathar, a well-to-do farmer.

Some circles who have disputed this fact associate her birth with the small glen of Gurais to the north of the valley of the Jhelum. Tradition links a spot near Tsoorawan in Gurais with the poetess and it is known even now as the 'hillock of Haba Khatoon'. They take their stand on a legend that Haba Khatoon was born to a petty chieftain in Gurais who passed her on to a Kashmiri trader Hayaband in lieu of the liquidation of his debts. Hayaband married her to his son Habalala, hence the name

Haba Khatoon. But since the marriage could not be sustained, Haba Khatoon became miserable and poured out her grief in her songs. Yusuf Shah Chak, who was himself of the Dard stock inhabiting Gurais and Dardistan, was attracted by her songs and married her. When he lost the throne and was living in exile, she left the palace and took refuge in the house of one Abdi Rathar.

Various names and events have been adjusted in this account dextrously to give it a semblance of verity. However, the other tradition holds firmer ground. While there are no references in Haba Khatoon's verses to Gurais, her chieftain father Hayaband, or Habalala, she clearly mentions her ancestral village Chandahar. "My parental home is in upper Chandahar." She also corroborates in another couplet that her name was Zoon and that of her husband Aziz: "O Aziz! don't sulk away from Zoon", and in yet another verse pertaining to her days of misfortune she states: "They (her parents) sobbed and cried that Zoon (the moon) was overtaken by an eclipse."

It is held that the 'hillock' of Haba Khatoon came to be associated with her because of her later contacts when she visited Gurais as the consort of Yusuf Shah Chak.

Abdi Rathar of Chandahar, her father, was a well-to-do farmer. She confirms it in one of her verses: "My parents were people of standing, that is why I came to be known as Haba Khatoon".

Haba Khatoon did not leave an authentic record of her poetical composition. The lyrics that are being attributed to her have come down to us either through records of *mausiqi* (musical compositions) in which they are interspersed, or through the oral tradition. A collection of her lyrics was published sometime back by the J & K Academy of Languages, Art and Culture. But there are scholars who doubt the authenticity of all that is passed on under the stamp of her name. Such critically disposed people therefore accept with reservations the account of her life to which reference is made in some of her verses, including the four mentioned here. However, most scholars believe that she was christened Zoon on her birth in the house of Abdi Rathar in Chandahar village and that the name of her first husband was Aziz.

In a society where the percentage of literacy is around thirty

today, it was unthinkable 400 years back for an average village girl to be taught reading and writing. But she appears to have been an intelligent child and Abdi Rathar was obviously a man gifted with unusual courage and foresight. Notwithstanding the expected back-talk and open criticism, he made arrangements for the education of his daughter at the hands of a village *maulvi*. This is a clear indication that Abdi Rathar's talented daughter Zoon was eager to learn. Till recently the teachers of the orthodox type had generally gained notoriety for imposing discipline through corporal punishment on pupils who had the misfortune of learning at their feet, and unable to stand the callous discipline numerous pupils sought to end their educational career. Referring to it Haba Khatoon has said:

My parents sent me to a distant place for receiving instruction and the teacher belaboured my physical frame with switches.

That Haba Khatoon and her parents persisted in going against the usual current is a testimony to her forbearance and their determination to do their best for her proper upbringing. Haba Khatoon received instruction in the study of the holy Quran and, of course, the Persian classics which, owing to the patronage at the court had become the rage of the times. No further details of this period of her life are available. Perhaps she read *Gulistan* and *Bostan* which was the usual fare of pupils in Persian in Kashmir till recently. However, her name spread well beyond the village boundaries and Abdi Rathar's Zoon was referred to as an extraordinary child in hamlets other than Chandahar.

Zoon was, however, no book-worm and her upbringing included work on the family farm along with her father and other village folk, tending of cattle and other household chores. She shared the company of other village girls in such pastimes as searching for herbs like rumex, dandelion, cress and rheum, wild fruit like raspberry and water chestnut, and mushrooms and morel. She would also fetch water for the household from the spring or the stream and perhaps compete with her companions in the delicate game of balancing a number of water-pots on the head. Her mother would not let her be without putting her to the practice of the spinning-wheel. These activities and

pastimes gave her a lasting knowledge of nature and her lyrics are, so to speak, bestrewn with fragrant herbs and lovely wild flowers.

In course of time her parents thought of marrying Zoon. Few girls could be better endowed for a happy married life. She came from a well-to-do family and was educated and accomplished. She was highly beautiful and could sing in a sweet, enchanting voice. She could work at home and on the farm to bring prosperity to her family. Her parents selected a peasant-boy Aziz Lone as her husband. Probably the boy belonged to a respectable house, otherwise he does not appear to have had any other claim to such a prize as Zoon. There is no evidence to suggest that he was even literate, let alone educated. His tastes and interests had nothing in common with Zoon's and there is hardly any doubt that he was a dull-witted, matter-of-fact and boorish young peasant. Destiny seems to have created him with the purpose of inflicting a deep smart in the heart of Haba Khatoon and she sought relief in song. With a happy family life her music and minstrelsy might have been absorbed in conjugal bliss and she might have been entombed like so many other embodiments of beauty and sweetness, unknown, unwept and unsung. Nature tricked her into song and glory through Aziz Lone who was stolid to her charm and apathetic to her love. Despite this Haba Khatoon was fondly devoted to him in love and fidelity and left no stone unturned in trying to evoke a suitable response from her husband.

The Indian mother has distinguished herself among woman-kind as an embodiment of love, tenderness and self-sacrifice. Unfortunately, her role as a mother-in-law to her son's wife has in the popular imagination been of a flint-hearted termagant capable of enlisting the whole household of aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters against the new-bride. Whether it is because of excessive fondness for her son, a dormant urge for seeking compensation for her own bridal sufferings, or owing to some deep Freudian complex, the Indian mother-in-law has acquired a notoriety for her machinations against the bride she herself chooses for her son. The women poets of Kashmir have been especially unfortunate in this behalf: they were married into households dominated by women narrow-minded and unsympathetic, selfish and inimical. Such was the mother-in-law of

Lal Ded, the first major Kashmiri poetess, who kept a stone with a scanty covering of rice in her bowl to convey the impression that she, her daughter-in-law Lal Ded, consumed a lot of food. Such were the in-laws of Rupa Bhawani, a poetess of the 17th century revered as a mystic saint, and their harsh treatment drove her from home to practise penance in woods and wildernesses. Arnimal, the nightingale of the eighteenth century, found her husband's clan equally arraigned against her and she warbled her pathetic songs at her parental home. True to type, such indeed was the experience of Zoon, Abdi Rathar's daughter, who found her mother-in-law, Aziz Lone's mother, harsh, hostile and cruel.

With all her beauty of form and mellifluous voice she worked like a slave at her husband's home and their lands. She would go to the stream to fetch water for the household, go to the uplands in search of firewood and wild edible roots, ply the spinning-wheel and do other chores in the tradition of the old times. But there was no appreciation for all this. Instead, her mother-in-law and perhaps her husband too were always on the look out for a slip on her part—of course, innocent and unwitting—to give them a handle to taunt her, abuse her and perhaps belabour her. If she broke an earthenware water-pot by accident she was asked to replace it or pay for a new one. If while spinning yarn far in the night sleep overpowered her, her mother-in-law would give her a jerk by catching hold of her hair. She embodies these experiences in one of her famous lyrics, *Chaarā' Kar Myon, Maalinyo* in which, revealing her forlornness, she unloads her grief-stricken soul.

The tenderness and love of her husband would be compensation adequate enough to her against all the apathy and harshness of his mother. But that was not to be. Probably he was one of those persons who spy upon their wives on behalf of the jealous mother. There were probably other young men who would have made any sacrifice to win an innocent smile or a soft word from Zoon and she could not be unaware of the value of her treasures even in the remote world of the sixteenth century peasant society in Kashmir. But he does not appear to have made any concession to her physical charm. She tried to educate his tastes and accomplishments which would make of him a tolerable husband. Her effort in this direction is recorded in *Chhaav*

*M'ya'ni' Daa'n Posh* (Enjoy My Pomegranate Blossoms).

Bracelets of flowers<sup>1</sup> I made for you, darling!  
Come, enjoy my blossoming!<sup>2</sup>

To me, the earth, you are the blue welkin,  
The protector who lends me dignity and respect;  
I am the embodiment of delicacies,  
                    and thou the beloved guest,  
Come, enjoy my blossoming!

Laila lit a candle on a dark night,  
The poor darling became insensible,  
I am the moth to you the candle,  
Come, enjoy my blossoming!

The summer of my life is slipping away,  
And the roses are likely to wither;  
O nightingale, wish you were here for a while!  
Come, enjoy my blossoming!

I pour out my sorrow through the whole gamut,  
But you never heeded my plaint;  
Do you find anything wanting in my wares?  
Come, enjoy my blossoming!

The potter shaped his pots in different forms  
And painted them in varying style,  
Some emerged uncouth while others, darling, are lovely,  
Come, enjoy my blossoming!

I have for you garments of the choicest<sup>3</sup> make,  
Beloved Aziz, don't be annoyed with Zoon,  
Haba Khatoon's dreams have remained unfulfilled,  
Come, enjoy my blossoming!

But neither the display of emotion in abandon nor admoni-

1. In another version 'bracelets of basil'.

2. Literally 'pomegranate blossoms'.

3. Literally fine *pashmina* garment stuffed with down.

tion brought any relief to Zoon in her predicament and Aziz continued to be indifferent to her. In such circumstances women approach saintly people credited with mystic powers for help. Zoon also must have sought the help of such men, among them one Khwaja Masud. He is said to have given her consolation and predicted a better future for her. He, it is said, also coined for her the name Haba Khatoon which Zoon adopted.

But nothing brought even a streak of conjugal delight in the life of Haba Khatoon and she continued to address her laments to her husband. Here is one entitled: *Ladhya Daa'n Posh ta' He* (May I send you pomegranate flowers and basil):

“How can I, darling, pass my days without you?  
I shall make for you bouquets of pomegranate  
and basil flowers.”

I have been combing hills and woods for him,  
Pray tell him “Who are the other women you are enticed by?  
Come, hapless and lovelorn I am,  
I shall make for you bouquets. . .”

On what pretext did he carve my heart  
with a scythe?  
Pray tell him when I am dead,  
He would lose the anchor of his life,  
I shall make. . .

Engrossed in self-indulgence he has forgotten me;  
Pray tell him he has proved untrue to his troth,  
Haba Khatoon's tears know no cessation.  
I shall make for you bouquets. . .

The situation was pretty bad for her and she realized that life in such an atmosphere was worse than death. She could not make out how her death would profit him. Another song *Ce Keho Vaaty Myaani Marnai* (What do you stand to gain by my death?) contemplates such an act but concludes on a note of self-introspection:

Forgive all my faults, Protector of the Universe!  
What do you stand to gain, Love, if I die?



Having got badly entangled I find it difficult to pass the day,  
 Me, a pretty basil, has acquired the hue of mentha,  
 Because of the scorching fire my heart has to carry;  
 What do you stand. . .

You have loaded yourself with desirable wares,  
 Empty-handed will your body be laid to rest in the grave!  
 My ambitious youth, why don't you then sober down to  
     this reality?  
 What do you stand. . .

Reading through the thirty chapters at a stretch,  
 I suffered not the slightest variation,  
 But no one could grasp the epistle of love in a single reading,  
 What do you stand. . .

Does she contemplate a 'second reading' of the 'epistle of love'? She could not be blamed if she did. She does not appear to have lost hope entirely. Though her moods grow darker and sullen she clings to the dream of wedded life with its joy, warmth and affection. A person of her sensibility and natural gifts could not but pour out her frustration, but her gathering despair still leaves room in her heart for a glimmering hope. One of her most famous songs *Wolo Myaani Poshay Madano* (Come, my flowery Cupid) graphically representing the state of her mind at the time is surcharged with melancholy, bitterness against the wild talk of the people and vexation at the indifference of her husband. Her complaint is:

*Wolo Myaani Poshey Madano*

*Dil nith colham roshey,  
 Wolo myaani poshey maduno!*

*Wolai ve'si' gachavai hiyey,  
 Yus gav su katee yiyey,  
 Praaraan chhas chaani ziyey,  
 Wolo myaani poshey madano!*

*Wolai ve'si' gachhavai handey,  
 Laanyun nyai kati andey,*

*Loo'ka' ma'ti ka'dnas randey,  
Wo lo myaani. . . .*

*Wolai ve'si' gachhvai babrey,  
Chhokh me' loinam tabrey,  
Zanh ti aam nai khabrey,  
Wo lo. . . .*

*Wolai ve'si' gachhvai krechhey,  
Khalqav tuj has rechhey,  
Timan tay myon hyu gachhey,  
Wo lo. . .*

*Wolai ve'si' khasavai vantai,  
Khalqav b'ari' has kan tai,  
Tee booz ta'mi' saadan tai,  
Wo'lo myaani poshey madano!*

*Wolai ve'si' gachhvai aabas,  
Dunya chhu nendri ta khaabas,  
Praaran chhas bo' jawaabas,  
Wo' lo. . .*

“Having snatched my heart you have gone far off,  
Come, my Love, my flowery Cupid!”

Let us go, my friend, to gather jasmine,  
Once dead, none can enjoy life;  
I hanker for your prosperity, Love,  
Come, O Come, my flowery Cupid.

Let us go, friend, to gather dandelion,  
The tangled strands of destiny cannot be freed,  
The populace relishes my humiliation,  
Come, O come, my flowery Cupid.

Let us go, friend, to gather basil,  
Wounding my heart with the axe,  
Disdains he even to inquire of me,  
Come, O Come, my flowery Cupid.

Let us go friend to gather herbs,  
Heartless people make fun of me,

Would that they were in a similar plight!  
Come, O Come, my flowery Cupid.

Let us go, friend, to the woods:  
People poison his ears against me,  
Naively he gives credence to these tales!  
Come, O Come, my flowery Cupid.

Let us go, friend, to fetch water:  
The world is fast aslumber, Love,  
I yearn for a response from you,  
Come, O Come, my flowery Cupid.

“Come, give up this loathing of me, I have been longing for none but you; this life is all too short; Come, O Come, my flowery Cupid.” Thus ends Haba’s plea to her beloved.

This lyric ranks among the best in Kashmiri and is among the finest expressions of human emotions for its sincerity, depth of feeling, melancholy, freshness of thought, universality of approach, simplicity of idiom and sweetness of diction. The subtle link between wild natural plants and human beings enlarges the scope of emotional harmony to encompass all life in its sweep.

Notwithstanding her genuine grief she renewed her offer of making greater sacrifices for him and even to surrender her precious golden ornaments to him. “While the world is aslumber,” she said “sleeplessness is gnawing my heart. I, therefore, fetch water and hope to receive your assent.” But response there was none. The appeal was lost in the void. It is probable that her husband and his mother harassed her all the more and she could only find relief in song and music. She seems to have realised that there was little possibility of kindling love in her husband or sympathy in her mother-in-law. In such a situation a young woman, her heart filled with disgust, confusion and vexation, turns to her parents for help and succour. Haba Khatoon’s bewilderment and lament are summed up in her lyric *Chaarā’ Kar Myon Maalinyo* (Do something for me, my father’s clan).

All is not well with me at my husband’s place,  
Rid me of my troubles, my father’s clan!

I left home to fetch water from the stream,  
My tender parents, the water-pot broke,  
Either replace the broken pot, or  
Pay for it, I beseech you.

All is not well with me at my husband's place,  
Rid me of my troubles, my father's clan!

My youthful frame is wasting,  
Mounting the uplands has become back-breaking,  
My feet are blistered gathering herbs,  
Salt is spreading over my wounds,  
All is not well. . .

Falling exhausted on the spinning wheel  
I broke the shaft,  
My mother-in-law seized me by the hair;  
Worse than death was it to me!  
All is not well. . .

I am uneasy with the smart of the loved one,  
My sorrow overflows the brim,  
Haba Khatoon has passed on the hint,  
Be alerted, father's clan all-watchful,  
All is not well. . .

Who cares at her home for a woman thus slighted by her husband? She has to slave without hoping for her wages. With her sorrow and misery Haba Khatoon continued to earn her bread and shelter at her husband's home by hard physical labour, working on the family farm growing cotton. Wordsworth heard the sweet but melancholy strains of the 'solitary reaper' and came to the conclusion that she was singing of some 'natural sorrow, loss or pain'. Here stood this sad-hearted Zoon sick for love with tears in her heart amidst the 'alien' farm digging and harrowing or singing and reaping by herself, her song an invitation to the wayfarer to stop here or gently pass. On one occasion the extensive valley was overflowing with the plaintive numbers of her poignant lyric *Chaara' Kar Myon* (All is not well with me at my husband's place. . .), acquainting with her sad

plight the sun and the sky, the breeze and the cloud, the hills and plains, birds and flowers, when a young man with a distinctive habiliment riding a well-caparisoned and spirited horse happened to catch its strains wafted over the breeze. Overcome by its lilting cadence and dulcet music he was irresistably led to its source as if in a dream. The nearer he approached her the more distinctly his ear caught her words and the melancholy plaint embodied therein. On he went and drew up the horse in the presence of Haba Khatoon whose beauty bewitched his eyes as her music had enthralled his ears a few moments earlier. In front of the young lady was none other than Prince Yusuf Shah Chak, heir-apparent to the throne. Well might he have exclaimed, "Harrowing clods and tending cattle go ill with such beauty of form, such heavenly complexion and this voice gifted by the celestials!" This unexpected confrontation obviously overwhelmed both. She downcast her eyes and the waves of reverberating music came to a standstill. Thus did the Cinderella of the village of Chandahar meet the Prince Charming of the kingdom of Kashmir. He fell for her and sued her hand to adorn his palace.

Here was the young peasant woman slaving for her loaf, neglected and loathed by her husband, abhorred by his mother and a victim of people's gossip, being entreated by the heir-apparent to take her exalted place in his palace. She had sought love from Aziz Lone which he denied her; she was in need of affection from his mother which she did not give; she expected normal regard and courtesy from society which treated her with disdain. And now she was being offered all this and more. Needless to say that she accepted the offer and entered the palace in 1570 A.D.

Scholars differ on the issue of her status in the family of Yusuf Shah Chak. Some of them believe that Yusuf secured for her a divorce from Aziz Lone, that he solemnised his own wedding with her and that she lived with him as queen. Others disagree saying that she was only a member of his harem and her rank could be no higher than of a mistress. Unfortunately, no sure guidance is provided by any of the works on history. Suka Pandit, the Sanskrit chronicler who was her contemporary and brought to a conclusion around 1600 A.D. the work of his predecessors Jonaraja and Shrivara, makes absolutely no mention

of her. This is, perhaps, not to be wondered at as even Jonaraja failed to make mention of the celebrated Lal Ded. However, well-known Persian chronicles of Kashmir like *Baharistani Shahi* (of Syed Mohd. Mahdi), *Waqayeti Kashmir* (of Kh. Mohd. Azam Kaul Deedamari), *Muntakhib-ul-Tawarikh* (of Narain Kaul Aajiz) and *Twarikhi Kashmir* (of Haider Malik Chawdurah) also make no mention of Haba Khatoon. Abdul Wahab Shaiq who flourished about two centuries after the death of Yusuf Chak is the earliest writer to make a passing reference to her in his Persian chronicle, but he is silent on what status she enjoyed in relation to Yusuf Shah. Pandit Birbal Kachru's reference to her in his *Twaarikhi Kashmir* written in Persian in 1835 A.D. indicates that she was not the queen consort. Pir Hassanshah Khoyahami repeats practically the same version. Later writers have not been able to adduce reliable evidence in favour of the one version or the other.

Nevertheless oral tradition has all along treated her as Yusuf Shah's queen and various anecdotes mentioned about her seem to lend credence to this hypothesis:

- (i) Various quarters in the city or landmarks elsewhere have been named after queens or ladies of distinction: Deedamar (Queen Didda), Aanta Bhavan (Amrit Prabha, Queen of Meghavahana), Sadramar (Samudra, Queen of Ramadeva), Lachhma Kol (Lachhma Khatoon, wife of Jalal Thakur), Noor Bagh (Nur Jehan). The hillock of Haba Khatoon in Gurais to which a reference has been made earlier could hardly have acquired the name if Haba had not been a queen.
- (ii) The power and prestige attached to her position as queen compelled recognition from musicians who would have ignored her otherwise, especially because of the deep-seated jealousy among the tribe.
- (iii) The legend of her having cured the moon-struck 'lover' of his infatuation would lose all its significance if Haba were not the queen as portrayed therein.
- (iv) The incident regarding Yusuf having invited her through a poetical missive to join him in the Tarsar-Marsar region for the enjoyment of superb scenic beauty would probably fail to impress if Haba had been only one of the mistresses of Yusuf Shah.

Birbal Kachru wrote his lines concerning Haba Khatoon nearly 250 years after her death and Pir Hassan Shah another half-a-century later.

Mohammad-ud-Din Fauq was perhaps the first writer to record, about forty years back, the traditional version of Haba Khatoon as the queen of Yusuf Shah Chak. He relied upon the information furnished to him, among others, by the late Pirzada Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor. No reference to Haba Khatoon is however found in *Baharistaani Shahi* which was reportedly quoted to him as the basis of the information.

Yusuf Shah Chak, whatever his shortcomings as a ruler, was a man of accomplishments. His was a sensitive soul devoted to beauty, arts and nature. Something of a poet in his own right he loved poetry, music and dancing. Quite a number of musicians and poets were attracted to his court which reverberated with the thrumming of various instruments and the enchanting lilt of songs. This garden was the right place for its latest nightingale, Haba Khatoon, to provide the stimulation she needed and she made the best use of it.

Many rulers of Kashmir were patrons of learning and the arts. Harshdev of the 12th century, a contemporary of Kalhana, lavished wealth over artists, actors and musicians and is remembered in our folk acting<sup>1</sup> even today. His successors, whatever their merit otherwise, similarly patronised art. The tradition continued with the early Muslim Sultans though an element of discipline and austerity was introduced. During the fourteenth century hundreds of Syeds found asylum in Kashmir against the persecution let loose by Timur (1345-1405) in the Middle East and Central Asia. With their settlement in the valley the language, art and culture were heavily under the Iranian influence. Persian was elevated to the status of a court language and was the medium of official communication. Though Zain-ul-Abdin (1420-70) tried his utmost to revive the Kashmiri tradition in arts and language, they succumbed to the Iranian influence. There is no doubt that the Iranian influence enriched the language and arts in the valley even as Sanskrit influence had done earlier. An anecdote is related about Florentines during the eventful days of the Renaissance when in their ex-

1. Courtesy to Mr. Mohd. Subhan Bhagat of Akingam Bhagat Theatre.

cessive zest for fullness and abandonment they so overpainted a boy-actor with gold that he felt smothered and perished. What happened to Kashmiri language and indigenous art forms is not far different. They were smothered and elbowed out of high places and were relegated to the countryside and the peasantry, illiterate and ignorant. Veterans like Sheikh Yaqub Sarfi were held in respect for their hold on Persian language and learning. Poets like Habibullah Nowshehri and Akmal Badakshi cultivated Kashmiri only by exception. Yusuf Shah Chak, the king, himself composed verses occasionally but only a few samples of his Persian verse and none in Kashmiri are extant.

Haba Khatoon reached the palace when dark clouds of apathy and disdain were rolling against Kashmiri language and art. Another princess with a less forceful character would have found her sensibility smothered and perhaps fallen in line with the average literati in upholding Persian at the cost of Kashmiri. But Haba Khatoon's devotion to her own language and culture proved stronger. A reference to chronology will perhaps help in appreciating her contribution in proper perspective. Lal Ded who is the first poet and dominating figure in modern Kashmiri flourished during c. 1335-85 A.D. followed by Sheikh Nur-ud-Din (1377-1440 A.D.). Except for some anonymous songs (attributed to the early sixteenth century) there is hardly any specimen of Kashmiri writing for practically another hundred years till Haba Khatoon resurrected it from indifference and neglect. According to Abdul Ahad Azad, the next poet whose contribution is substantial is Prakash Bhat who flourished two centuries after Haba Khatoon. Of the interregnum only a few verses of poets whose impact has not been of much significance have survived. But for her timely contribution the tiny stream of Kashmiri poetry might have been lost while her contemporaries tried to outvie one another in nurturing Persian. More of it, however, elsewhere.

Yusuf Shah Chak had gained an invaluable treasure in Haba Khatoon, a paragon of beauty, and was deeply attached to her. He spent most of his time in her company, absorbed in her music and poetry. He brought about the fulfilment of her frozen love and became the focus of her life, her gratitude and her devotion.

The object of her affection and her dreams, he occupied the pedestal in her heart where she had placed Aziz Lone once. She



grasped the purport of 'the epistle of love' on this second reading and offered Yusuf Shah what Aziz had failed to appreciate: her devotion, purity, innocence and sincerity. There was nothing for which any one could blame her and she herself had nothing to regret. In fact having gone through the period of enslavement, physical and mental, at Aziz Lone's house, she was, for the first time, on her own as a woman whose love was sought and reciprocated. Little wonder, therefore, that her separation from Yusuf Shah later provoked her to compose songs as sincere and poignant as ever.

Towns and villages were no longer enough to satisfy the craving of the royal couple and they sought the company of nature in its naked beauty, matchless grandeur and unparalleled sublimity. The credit for the discovery of the far-famed queen of the hills, Gulmarg, is given to Yusuf Shah and his consort who spent much of their leisure in its sylvan glades. They patronised such pleasure spots as Ahrabal, Achabal and Sonamarg. They sought enjoyment of nature as far away as the Gurais valley where a hillock has been named after Haba Khatoon. Some of these pleasure spots, especially Ahrabal and Achabal of the Pir Pantisal region, attained celebrity in the reign of Jehangir subsequently.

Several anecdotes relating to this stage of her life are recorded in chronicles. It is said that once owing to some difference between them Yusuf felt annoyed and left on one of his sojourns into the upper valleys, unaccompanied by her. Bestriding hills and spanning rivers with a grim resolve to banish for the time being her image from his mind he reached Lidarwat in the valley of the Lidar, beyond Pahalgam, and thence the tarns of Tarsar and Marsar. These twin sisters of nature's bounty stand in proximity to each other like two eyes in the human face, or two breasts. The profuse beauty of nature rich beyond measure in its variety and luxuriance, the hilltops draped in a scarf of snow, the sublimity of green pastures atop dense forests and the streams of limpid water, so overcame his mood that he rued his haste in leaving Haba Khatoon behind in the palace. He composed a couplet in Persian:

When I remember the two tresses of the comely beloved,  
Tears begin to flow from my eyes  
like streams from Tarsar and Marsar.

The verse was scribbled and despatched to Haba Khatoon who accepted the invitation gracefully and joined the Prince.

Matters of state were extremely complicated during the reign of Yusuf Shah and Haba Khatoon could not be expected to lend her hand in disentangling its bewildering strands. She was, however, not averse to bringing relief by a gentle word or a kind gesture to people in distress. One legend attributed to her proclaims her to be sensitive and sagacious who brought a healing touch through her understanding, intelligence and forbearance.

Tales of her beauty and accomplishments having spread all round, an eccentric young man imagined himself in love with the Queen and expected her to requite it. At first people were afraid of talking about it lest they incur the wrath of the King. But the malady of the silly eccentric grew apace and every one observed that he was 'far gone'. The expectation of his family that time would restore his normalcy and sanity was belied by the aggravation of his imbalance. The family took counsel with physicians, occultists and saints but nobody could find any cure.

His wife was naturally upset. Something had to be done to save the young man from losing his sanity beyond recovery. Wise men who knew Haba Khatoon praised her for being considerate and merciful. It was suggested to the miserable wife of the eccentric that if she was keen to save her man, she should run the risk of revealing everything to the Queen and hope for the best.

The wife sought an audience with Haba Khatoon. When ushered into the presence of the Queen she was already half-dead for the very shame of what she had to submit. The Queen's sympathetic attitude restored the confidence of the poor woman who was encouraged to disclose her worry. The Queen was amused to hear of the idiotic fancy of the eccentric young man. "Your majesty!" submitted the woman, "pardon my audacity. What is my life worth if I lose my husband?"

Somewhere in the distant recesses of the Queen's heart a small and delicate bell was set atinkle and she began to understand in the right perspective the predicament of the unfortunate woman. Before long she hit upon a plan. She had the moon-struck lover called to herself when all alone and gave him indication that she was not averse to the grant of her favours to him.

She, however, insisted on two conditions: that not a single light would be on in her chamber during the night and that neither of the two would utter a single word. The star-gazer could never dream of such a good fortune and accepted the conditions.

The Queen invited the sorrowing woman separately and had her attired in her own choicest silks, velvets and brocades. Costliest perfumes sprinkled on her made every pore of her body vibrate the message of longing and desire, love and fulfilment. The decoy was placed in the Queen's bed-chamber to which the fond lover was admitted at the appointed hour. He found the atmosphere inside so overwhelming that he felt he was in the seventh heaven of delight. Needless to say that the Queen's intelligence and sagacity restored the young man to sanity and normal family life.

The Mughals were consolidating their hold on the Indian sub-continent during the second half of the sixteenth century and their eyes now turned to Kashmir. Yusuf Shah Chak who ascended the throne in 1579 A.D. did not display the leadership that was the need of the hour and internal feuds took such a serious turn that he lost the throne in 1580 when he had been king for only a year and two months. With his overthrow the wheel of Haba Khatoon's fortunes changed.

Yusuf made several attempts to regain the throne but could make no progress. Within six months there was another occupant on the throne and Yusuf continued to be confined to the wings. At last he approached the emperor Akbar for armed assistance. Akbar who was watching the developments with no unconcern, gave asylum to the fugitive prince and attached him to the grand army. Thereafter he practically slept over Yusuf's plea for assistance to recover his lost kingdom. It was an unexpected trial for Yusuf's diplomacy and perseverance. At home Haba Khatoon was forlorn. Yusuf had left Kashmir with high hopes of returning in a few weeks with Mughal troops and funds to fight his enemies and recover his throne. But weeks slipped by, and months, and yet Haba Khatoon had no indication that he was coming back. The absence of her husband once again raised in her mind the spectre of her beloved being snatched from her. Her intense love would not let her rest in peace while Yusuf was away. Not conversant with the subtleties of diplomacy and

the efficacy of time in persuading Akbar to sanction assistance for Yusuf, her emotional reaction as a wife was that her beloved, who had been away for unending months, had perhaps been seduced by another woman. Was she aware that the emperor had bestowed two slave-girls upon her husband to beguile himself in the days of his exile? No one can say. She sings in *Neyree Yaar Chhaandon* (Let us go in search of the beloved):

Come friend, let us seek the beloved  
 At his usual resort;  
 Since the time he turned cool,  
 Affection for me has receded;  
 The moonlit fortnight has become sable dark,  
 For he seeks dalliance with others;  
 Who is the other woman who is shadowing him,  
 For haunting unknown places is he?  
 My neck he struck with a red-hot knife,  
 Unending streams my eyes discharge;  
 High or low, I shall seek him out  
 No matter where he be;  
 Friend, how can I escape the quirks of fate?<sup>1</sup>  
 He has made the jasmine wither;  
 The almond tree<sup>1</sup> of my youth has blossomed;  
 Would that he came to enjoy it!  
 To me his bewitching Yusuf's form  
 Is worth the whole world and more.

The lyrical outburst of Haba Khatoon, so innocent, so natural, so sincere, did not reach the ears of Akbar. Even if it had reached them, it would have made little impact on his diplomacy, for he prized Kashmir so much that a few years earlier he had recalled his envoy in Srinagar for some indiscretion and put him to the gallows. So Yusuf Shah Chak continued to fret while cooling his heels and Haba Khatoon, languishing for Yusuf, found no remission. She did not bemoan their loss of kingdom and power, but grieving for the absence of her lord she projected her dreams and reveries in a song:

1. The first to blossom among fruit trees in Kashmir in early spring. People resort to almond groves by the thousand to enjoy this re-awakening of life in inert, frozen nature.

*Chhumai Baali Tamanaa* (My yearning)

I yearn for him, my love,  
Who has kindled every tissue of mine.

He cast a glance at me over the wall,  
I'd attire him in a tosh<sup>1</sup> shawl;  
What has annoyed him?  
For long have I been yearning.

He peeped in through the door;  
Who had guided him to my house?  
Every pore of my body has been strained,  
For long have I been yearning.

She sees visions of the beloved showing a glimpse of himself through the casement, at the river-landing, through the skylight or in the pre-dawn moonlight. All this only sharpened her longing for him and added to her misery.

Eleven months is a long period for a king to spend dancing attendance on another sovereign, fretting and chafing at his own 'glorified humiliation'. At last the emperor provided Yusuf armed assistance to recover the kingdom. Through a stroke of destiny which had far-reaching consequences for himself and his state, Yusuf Chak gave his escort Raja Man Singh a slip and recovered the kingdom of Kashmir on his own after a series of manoeuvres at Sopore. Haba Khatoon was re-united with her lord but there is no evidence that she recorded the return of good fortune in any of her lyrics.

Yusuf effected the recovery in A.D. 1581. Though this period of exile had added much to his experience, it did not yet enable him to be a better ruler in the complexities of Kashmir's politics. The disgruntled elements who soon joined hands against Yusuf received encouragement from Lahore and Delhi. The pretence was over in 1585 A.D. when the Mughal army marched into Kashmir. The overbearing Mughals did not make much of a success of the campaign militarily but through clever diplo-

1. Shawl made of rare, precious and delicate wool, also known as Shahtosh, the king among fabrics, or worthy of kings.

macy they brought pressure on the vacillating Yusuf till he made his submission to emperor Akbar, despite his son Yaqub's advice to the contrary. Kashmiris coined a chronogram for this inglorious departure of their sovereign: *Nyuv giraftaar gow* (he has been seized upon—A.H. 993—A.D. 1585). He did not return to Kashmir again and died in exile at Basok in Bihar seven years later.

What happened to Haba Khatoon after the exit of Yusuf Shah from his kingdom? She once again fell on the sharp thorns of life and has bewailed the separation *Ca Kamyu Sw'ani Myaani*: (Who Among My Rivals:)

Who among my rivals, Love, has beguiled you?  
 Why have you started loathing me?  
 Yours is the only image in my heart;  
 Give up this dislike and displeasure,  
 Why have you started loathing me?

Tears stream down my cheeks unceasingly,  
 My doe-like eyes bleed with sorrow;  
 I yearn for you with my love-smitten heart,  
 Why have you started loathing me?

Wasting have I been as the snow in June,  
 What was a garden-jasmine has withered,  
 Come and enjoy the garden, Love,  
 It will bloom for none but you.  
 Why have you. . .

To please you, the apple of my eye,  
 I burnish my skin, perfect my make-up  
 With bridal robes and shining ornaments,  
 And feel puffed up with swelling youth;  
 Why have you. . .

I am entirely yours from the core of my heart,  
 Even the flowing water, I swear by you, my dearest,  
 Failed to catch a glimpse of my face at the river bank;  
 What then do you accuse me of that you don't ask for me?  
 Why have you. . .

I did not breathe our secret even to the spring breeze,  
 And this has been eating into my heart,  
 In deserting me thus to whose care have you entrusted me?  
 Why have you. . .

The fiery powder of love scorched my marrow,  
 That too I braved smiling,  
 I have wasted myself to win your pleasure,  
 Countless dreams have I buried,  
 Why have you. . .

The smudged moon-face proclaims her sorrow;  
 Zoon's<sup>1</sup> heart was stained the moment you departed,  
 That is what held my head in a vice;  
 Love, this is the agony I have been nursing;  
 Why have you. . .

It is difficult to precisely date her songs but the reference in the following lyric to the departure of the beloved leaves little doubt that it implies the final exit of Yusuf Shah from Kashmir and that this lyric embodies the scalding sorrow of the final separation.

Haba Khatoon could not expect hospitality from Yaqub, her step-son, who was raised to the throne. Yaqub was spirited and brave but not far-sighted. In fact his rashness and want of tact hastened the end of his father Yusuf. Haba Khatoon left the palace and the princely environment and once again entered the anonymity of the world of commoners. She sought no luxuries there but she was out of reach of harm. No reliable details are known of the last phase of her life. She, however, continued to sing her sad songs of unfulfilled love like the proverbial *chakwa* bird, and the separation from her princely beloved only enhanced the sweetness of her notes and sharpened their appeal. There is a clear undertone of resignation in these songs and she feels that the sun of her life is hovering over the western ridge. In her lyric *Lalo Kala' Aalwai* (Love, may I be your sacrifice?)

1. Zoon was the original name of Haba Khatoon. The word also stands for the moon.

Call me but once and all my ills go,  
I'll sacrifice my all for you, Love!

Tasty foods I have dressed for you,  
And delicious drinks invite you,  
I'll make for you choicest garlands,  
My darling, I'll sacrifice all for you!

My silvery frame I'll scour with cream,  
I'm restlessly longing for you,  
Sandal-scented water I'll shower over me,  
O Come, may I be thy sacrifice!

As the moon behind the ridge  
I stagger briefly before I sink;  
Where in deep slumber do you lie?  
I'll sacrifice all for you, my Love!

The cat lies in wait for the bird,  
Who can escape the stab of death?  
I've made my surrender to him, but  
Come, my Love, I'll sacrifice all for you!

What abject dread drove you from home?  
Why didn't you stay the night over?  
Haba Khatoon has had her say,  
Come awhile, I'll sacrifice. . .

There may have been a glimmer of hope in her breast even after the annexation of Kashmir by the Mughals in 1586 that she might meet her Yusuf again, no matter as king or commoner. But this dream proved short-lived because he died soon after. She lived after Yusuf's exit from Kashmir for nearly twenty years, or such is the tradition, moving from place to place with no attachments or possessions. Probably she composed lyrics also but the hankering in her heart has been stilled. There is sorrow in her wail, there is regret and there is bitterness, but there is also resignation. In one of the few extant lyrics of this period *Kaa'nsi Ma' Raa'vin Shoorey Paan* (Let no one lose the youthful years of life) she appears to sum up her experience of



the sweet and bitter of life:

I have to nurse the scorching flames in my heart,  
Let no one lose the opportunities of youth!

My parents fed me on candy and musk,  
They would wash me in showers of milk,  
The self-same person is now a hapless wanderer;  
Let no one. . .

My parents showered all love on me,  
A bevy of maids stood in waiting,  
Never did I dream the mansion  
                  would crumble to dust;  
Let no one. . .

When my parents gave me in marriage,  
My friends sang for me in joy,  
The love songs they chanted never came true;  
Let no one. . .

Calling me the "daughter of fortune,"  
"Your in-laws are waiting for you", they said,  
The bright-painted palanquin was bedecked with silver;  
Let no one. . .

I am here while you are so far away,  
Both were so fond of each other;  
Who dared imagine my world  
Would come to dust and rubble;  
Let no one. . .

If God withholds and destiny favours not,  
Could any one feed on a handful of grain?  
Haba Khatoon drank deep of love,  
Let no one. . .

This appears to be among the last lyrics composed before the passing away of Yusuf Shah in 1592. For two decades after his exile, his consort Haba Khatoon continued to bemoan

his separation. She lies buried in a grave at Paanta' Chhokh, near the cantonment at Srinagar, overlooking the river Jhelum.

A suggestion offered recently regarding the last phase of her life is totally different. According to this version, probably apocryphal, Haba Khatoon could not stand her separation from Yusuf Shah and left the valley in search of her beloved. She is believed to have reached Basok, which is about seventy five kilometres to the south of Patna, where Yusuf Shah lived after his final exit from Kashmir. It is not known if Yusuf was alive when Haba reached Basok where he enjoyed an estate. A second grave exists by the side of the grave of Yusuf and on the basis of a local tradition it is conjectured to be of Haba Khatoon. It may be said in this behalf that a number of Kashmiries lived in Basok along with Yusuf, and among them was his son Yaqub who put up a spirited resistance against the Mughals in Kashmir but was out-manoeuvred. The graves of Yusuf and other Kashmiris in Basok are said to bear close resemblance to those in Kashmir.

## CHAPTER 3

### Haba Khatoon's Poetry

KASHMIR had come under the spell of the literature and culture of Iran after Persian was raised to the status of the court language. It has been remarked that till mid-fourteenth century English language was despised in London because the king, his courtiers, the clergy and the learned spoke French. In the peculiar set-up in Kashmir during the life time of Haba Khatoon, the real language of the land was in a similar situation. The mere fact that Haba Khatoon wrote in Kashmiri despite the predominance of Persian is of immense significance. It is, therefore, well worth considering how far her language and diction have assimilated the Persian influence. As observed by the eminent linguist Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, modern Kashmiri is as different from that of the age of Lal Ded as modern English differs from that of Chaucer's age. This change was brought about largely by the predominance of the influence of Persian language and culture. While Kashmiri was enriched by the influx of Persian, it also burdened it heavily with the consequence that the original vigour of the native language, its vocabulary and diction were affected. The craze for Persianization, initially the mode of the towns, soon spread all over the valley. In later generations there are specimens of Kashmiri verse which are entirely Persian but for a word, or even a single syllable. Here is an instance from Maqbul Shah Kraalwaari (1820-76 A.D.), a front rank Kashmiri poet, author of the romance *Gulrez*:

*Dar bandi zulfat cheen o hind  
Shirin dahaanas yaar qand*

(Your tresses ensnare China and India; Yarqand<sup>1</sup> is at the mercy of your sweet mouth).

*Dahaanas* changed into *dahaanat* or *dahaanra* would make it completely Persian.

Persian influence had started making in-roads upon Kashmiri long before Haba Khatoon but the specimens of her Kashmiri lyrics give hardly any instances of her accepting it with eyes shut. Words of Persian origin have been sparingly used in her lyrics. Most of those we come across, e.g., *s'hamaa'* (candle), *ishq* (love), *burqa* (veil), *aab* (water) were already naturalised in the language of the people long before her advent. Use of the language actually spoken by the majority of men and women does not in any way detract from her poetry. On the other hand it gains in the power of communication and appeal and impresses the reader/listener as sincere and artless, sweet and musical. It has to be conceded that it creates an impact of verisimilitude on the reader who discovers in her lyrics the strength and variety of his mother tongue unaided by other influences.

It is not that posing as a 'purist' she was averse to drawing upon Persian. She has in fact made use of some such words with telling effect. She is perhaps the only Kashmiri writer to have used the word *moyaana* in the line

*Me' ho ka'ri' ce' kiti' phamba' moyaana'*<sup>2</sup>

*Phamba' moyaana'* is a jacket of pashmina stuffed with soft feathers or down. This indicates her familiarity with rare and precious articles worthy of being offered to the beloved but the word has not been used to display either her learning or her cultural sophistication. Another instance could be quoted of the use of the word *arbaab* in the line *maalin'*<sup>3</sup> *miaa'ni' arbaab aa'sy* (my parents were people of standing) which suits the context so appropriately. She could also coin a metaphor of Persian-based words with obvious ease and facility as in *ashqun khat* (love's epistle) in the line 'No one can have a grasp of the epistle of

1. Prismatic or cone-sugar was imported from Yarqand.

2. Line 23, page 18.

3. See line 24, page 14.

love in one reading!<sup>1</sup> On the whole her verse may be regarded as the 'well of Kashmiri undefiled' with adequate justification.

There is nothing either of the *vaakh* of Lal Ded or the *shrukh* of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din in the *vacans* or lyrics of Haba Khatoon. She gave to Kashmiri poetry a new art-form which it did not have before. According to some critics the art-pattern of her lyrics takes after Persian but it is doubtful if she modelled it consciously on any exotic form. That she started composing lyrics while still at her village Chandahar appears to weigh against such a presumption. The choice of the verse form was in all probability influenced by the anonymous songs including those of the folk tradition which had absorbed the influence of Persian ghazal and veered progressively close to its form. In course of time the impact of Persian art-form, prosody and diction was absorbed on a much larger scale even in rendering a Hindu epic like *Ramayana* into Kashmiri.

Haba Khatoon consciously made use of Persian in reviving Kashmiri music which had suffered neglect for lack of patronage. Yusuf Shah being a patron of art and music, Haba Khatoon was trained by renowned practitioners in rendering ghazals and songs in the Iranian style. Gifted as she was with a remarkable intelligence and a rare, melodious voice, she became in her own right a musician of note even among Persian masters. Kashmiri music cultivated by Harshdev of the 12th century and others had come heavily under the influence of Persian and Central Asian music with a variety of exotic instruments in play. Since Haba Khatoon was an adept in both it was only natural that she made her own contribution and she did so in the form of a new musical composition known as *raasti-kashmiri*, on the model of *raasti farsi*, which is sung in the last quarter of the night. She also earned renown in displaying her mastery over one Persian *raga* known as *muqaami-Iraq*. One of her own songs set to music in this *muqaam (raga)* is well-known for its autobiographical note, its melancholy, its restraint and its music:

*Gind'aney Draayas* (I left home to play)

I left home to play and was absorbed in it  
Till the day sank in the west!

1. See line 11, page 20.

I came of a noble family which gave me  
 Dignity and name.  
 Many a lover was drawn towards me  
 Till the day sank. . .

Within the house I stayed hidden from view,  
 Once outside, my name was on every tongue,  
 Hermits, in their urge to see me, gave up  
 their penance in the woods.

My shop was brimful with its stock,  
 And the whole world was keen to see it,  
 My precious wares exposed<sup>1</sup>, the prices crashed,  
 As the day, alack, sank in the west!

Haba Khatoon's music pushed her poetry gradually into learned circles. And those who had been fed on the works of the immortals like Firdausi, Omar and Hafiz were bound to raise their eyebrows at first. They, however, granted her recognition ultimately. As a consequence many of her Kashmiri songs and lyrics were interspersed in Persian music books with directions for their rendering. But for this many of her songs may have been forgotten and Kashmiri would have suffered irreparable loss.

Haba Khatoon's poetry hardly shows any trace of the influence of mysticism which her mighty predecessors Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din embody. Lalla and the Sheikh were primarily saints and had to impart instruction to their contemporaries. Their message was couched in verse. Haba Khatoon's own contemporary Khwaja Habib-ullah Nowshehri also was a *sufi* mystic and poet. Mystic poets have continued to be thrown up to this day from the soil of Kashmir which has been known from ancient times as the 'garden of the rishis'. Kashmiri mystic verse of the traditional variety emphasises the superiority of spirit over the flesh, transitoriness of life and the vanity of human wishes. It also castigates hypocrisy and selfishness. It emphasises oneness of all life, eternal truths and lasting values which, it is asserted, not only bring contentment but result in

1. Another version makes it 'lost'.

joy and rapture. The individual soul seeks to realise its unity with the universal spirit. Apart from this, poets drop a hint here and there of individual mystic experiences. Its imagery and metaphor are peculiar to the genre. Throughout the ages mystic verse has deeply impressed large numbers especially those overwhelmed with sorrow and misery.

Without making any comment on the relevance or significance of mystical poetry one can easily note that Haba Khatoon was undisturbed and unshaken by its tunes and airs. She seems to have practically side-tracked this mighty and influential movement. She is, on the other hand, the pioneer of a fresh movement in Kashmiri poetry which opened a broad new vista: that of humanistic and secular verse. She is the first front-rank Kashmiri poet to have consciously and consistently fallen back on song and lyric for expressing her feelings and experiences of her day-to-day physical existence: love, sorrow, frustration and aspiration without invoking the supra-mundane world of the spirit or the soul. People widely repeated the words of Lal Ded:

The idol is made of stone, the temple is made of stone . . .  
Whom are you offering worship?

Or

The *guru* taught me to forget the world of the senses and  
to search the recesses of my being inside!

or of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din:

Whatever you sow, so shall you reap

Or

He alone crosses the river of life and death,  
Who as himself his poor neighbour loveth.

The experiences of day-to-day physical existence, of love and expectation, sorrow and disappointment, were perhaps not rele-

vant to the standard the poet-saints set. How many could mortify the flesh as the saints had done? And there was much hypocritical talk by those who publicly swore by the sanctity of the teachings of the saint-poets but in their homes were given to a life of indulgence.

It does great credit to Haba Khatoon that she did not let her profound emotional attachment be overwhelmed by the existing mystical trend in poetical composition, especially when she could find a shelter under it in her days of affliction. She set out with all sincerity on a bold new path, wide and eternal. In a sense her voice was the voice of human personality which was keen to re-establish its dignity and self-confidence. She could not totally escape the admonitions projecting the transitoriness of human existence and the sermons advising mortification of flesh. In fact in composing one of her lyrics *Gindaney Draayas* she herself seems to have been influenced by the oft-repeated theme of popular mystic poetry emphasising that the net result of our selfish striving in an ephemeral world is nullity. But apparently she loved life with all its trials and tribulations not a few of which fell to her lot and which she suffered with patience tempered sometimes with a glimmer of hope, sometimes with protest and sometimes with resignation. Singing of sorrow, loss or pain she was the first true humanist and secular poet in the language with no other overtones. This warbling of Haba Khatoon under her peculiar compulsions and with her own limitations created the symphony of romantic verse running side by side with mystic poetry till it outstripped and outshone it.

Lyric poetry being subjective in nature, it is not surprising that Haba Khatoon has left the impress of her own individuality on the songs she sang with 'full-throated ease.' She clothes in words feelings true and sincere with an uncommon candour. Poets have often taken shelter under other objects: a nightingale, a skylark, a tiger, a chimney-sweeper, etc. to express their emotional upsurge symbolically. Owing to the truth of her experience and the sincerity of her feelings Haba Khatoon does not feel the necessity of falling back on such symbolism but gives tongue to her pain and sorrow with a spontaneity that is rare. Passion is, however, tempered with restraint. In song after song she continues to remind the 'callous' and the 'faithless' beloved of her



sufferings and her utterance is steeped in pathos which is natural under the circumstances.

Love in its varying moods is the theme of her songs. The moods vary from the expectation and buoyance of the lyric "Come and enjoy my blossoming" to frustration in "What do you stand to gain if I die?" In between comes the resignation in "I'll sacrifice all for thee" and the bitterness in "Ail is not well. . ."

It must, however, be admitted that her songs present a variation of the same theme, viz., unfulfilled love or pangs of separation from the loved one. Poetry, romantic or otherwise, is unlimited in range, intensity and depth and has the whole gamut of human emotions and experiences to exercise upon. Regardless of all this Haba Khatoon harps upon practically the same theme though with a fresh approach and imagery. Every lyric of hers is a call to the beloved to make a positive response to her love and longing. It seems she considers herself more intently as a lover than as a poetess. In consequence she is eternally obsessed with the urge to seek him out whether in the midst of flowers or beguiled and waylaid by her rival (*Tsa' Kam'yoo sw'ani myaani bram dith nyunakh<sup>1</sup>*). In this regard she is nearer her better-known senior contemporary Mira Bai<sup>2</sup> of Rajasthan though there is a qualitative difference. The poetry of Mira is measured, especially in comparison with what her great contemporaries Surdas and Tulsi produced. Her theme is her absolute love, dedication and surrender to her Girdhar Gopal in which alone she finds the fulfilment of her life. Apart from this, life has no other interest for her: She has profound faith in her divine beloved and is happy and contented, occasionally in raptures. Haba Khatoon's lyrics depict her as a lover using all her powers of persuasion, her importunities and blandishments to evoke a favourable response from her beloved, a mortal of flesh and blood: *Aki La'i Yehanna* (Would you come but once!).

The radiance of your form illumines darkness,  
Love, would you come but once?

1. P. 33.
2. Incidentally Mira also had to contend with her in-laws who even attempted to poison her. Herman Goetz places her as a contemporary of Akbar, while others believe she passed away in 1546 A.D.

The crimson tweed of my youth,  
 Where were you dyed thus flamingly!  
 I never thought moths would prey upon your heart unseen.  
 Love, would you come but once!

On pretext of fetching water I slip out of home  
                                   in the dark,  
 Leaving the water-pot in the stream I call at your  
                                   casement;  
 Tarry not, come to me, Love, lest the fierce northerly  
 gale break the earthen pail to pieces.

When the friend withdraws friendship  
 Love ceases to be whole,  
 But my heart is bursting for my beloved,  
 Love, would you come but once!

As said earlier, this longing for her beloved is repeated with minor variations in the extant poems attributed to her. The only lyric which does not conform to this theme fully is the one entitled *Gindaney Draayas*<sup>1</sup> (I left-home to play). Her lyrics are compact with the intensity of emotion at her separation from the object of her adoration. She is certain that he enjoys dalliance with other women but she, the ideal lover, does not let bitterness or hatred enter her heart against him. There is a fling at those who traduce her: "Would that they suffered agony as deep as mine," but for her lover the farthest she goes is in the line: "That simpleton lent his ear to my traducers." This is, in a way, a total surrender to the person she loves and is prepared to forgive all his faults.

One marked characteristic of these love songs of Haba Khatoon is that they are nursed on the pangs of separation. She does not portray the rapture of love in its fulfilment. Except for a brief period of about a year, she lived a very happy life for a decade and a half as the consort of Yusuf Shah Chak and was the recipient of honour, love and adoration, being the cynosure of all eyes. There is no indication in any of her lyrics of the ecstasy she undoubtedly enjoyed. Who among her former tra-

1. P-40.

ducers could not have felt jealous of the exaltation she attained, the luxury that came her way and the homage she exacted from the cream among the elite? But all this glory seems to have failed to inspire her to compose a single song depicting her emotional state. It could not be that she was really not happy at heart. There are also some songs written probably during the period of Yusuf's virtual exile from Kashmir when he was a refugee at the court of Akbar in expectation of military assistance to him. These poems of separation and sorrow delineate her feelings sincerely. Yusuf soon recovered his kingdom and throne through a significant military offensive and rode in triumph to the capital to be reunited with his family and Haba Khatoon. And this he achieved single-handed without the help of the Mughals and despite the machinations of his enemies at home. It is indeed surprising that neither Yusuf's splendid victory nor her own reunion with him inspired or even provoked her to record her ecstasy at the smile of good fortune and the return of honour. She does not find a ray of happiness or even consolation in nature, her companion from the days of childhood.

Why is it so? In such delicate matters hazarding a categorical opinion is never helpful. It is, however, difficult to resist the temptation of making a reference to Mahadevi Verma, the renowned Hindi poetess. Suffering is so deeprooted in her poetry that some critics dub her as an "exponent of the school of sorrow and pain."<sup>1</sup> She has observed: "Our innumerable comforts may verily fail to carry us to the first step towards humanity but even a single drop of tears shed by us will not fail to make our lives more fruitful." She seeks the beloved in suffering and looks for suffering in the beloved and confesses that pain and sorrow stick to her like a wet cloth. Fulfilment in love and union do not appeal to her because such an emotional stage in life signifies ageing and inactivity. She is consequently identified with the poetry of sorrow and pain. She observes:

I have so far not been able to recite the  
last verse of pain and suffering.

1. Dr. S. Sharma *Hindi Sahitya: Yug aur Pravartayan* (Ashok Prakashan, -1968).

Perhaps Haba Khatoon's verse deserves to be measured by a similar yardstick.

While her lyrics proclaim her deep emotional attachment and love for the beloved, Haba Khatoon has not cared to let the outsider have a glimpse of the beauty of his form, his appearance and personality. Poets have loved to share their delight in the captivating appearance of the beloved with their readers: his complexion, his stature, his large eyes, sharp nose, broad shoulders and powerful arms. While a lyric does not offer scope for such a detailed portraiture as, for instance, an epic, a narrative or a romance, poets attain this end by making a passing reference occasionally and seek thereby to heighten the emotional effect. Haba Khatoon makes a few brief references to her own appearance with the aid of such fleeting touches: pomegranate flowers, almond eyes, jasmine flowers, basil, argentine skin, but on the whole does not apprehend the external forms either in shape or colour. Probably she has made only two references to the appearance of the beloved: that he has a manly neck and that he has the complexion of Yusuf. One could say that she sought her way to the heart of the beloved instead of being held up by the detail of his outer form.

When it is recalled that the intellectual element was introduced in the Kashmiri lyric only recently, it would not be held as a serious fault that her lyrics composed four hundred years back are not intellectual. As a matter of fact the songs of the *vacan kaal* were simple, sincere and musical, and while the world appears to have tremendously advanced in intellectual sophistry during the last half-a-millennium, it has not probably made any significant progress in living happier—which is not the same thing as more comfortable—lives. Common people in her age had a good deal of suffering and misery for their lot but they had honest faith and led simple lives with contentment. The poetry in Hindi and other languages of India during the five-hundred years beginning roughly from the thirteenth century, which is devotional in character and seeks to glorify love of God and surrender to His mercy in many ways, fully brings out this fact. Such has been the case till recent times.

The reader is also likely to feel disappointed if he seeks a reference in Haba Khatoon's verse to the social and political turmoil of her own times leading to famine, unemployment and

economic suffering forced upon the common people. It would be conceded that even in literatures of the time created in other parts of the country though there is protest of a political nature against an intruder, tyrannical or otherwise, the suffering of the people who have been victims of famines, massacres or plunder, is not represented appreciably. Poetical compositions of the type of the *Deserted Village*, the *Song of the Shirt*, *Ye Bees of England* of earlier centuries and *Bharat Bharati* of our own times are rare, practically non-existent. The peculiar events in her own life which came to a crescendo with her stay in the palace for fifteen years could not fail to bring home to her sensitive nature the miseries of the commonfolk. But she ignores the theme as most other poets outside the valley have done. Only one reflection has been made by her and that too obliquely, in the verse:

If God withholds and destiny favours not,  
 Could any one live on a handful of grain?

Is it that the poets considered such topics unworthy of poetry when love and devotion loomed so large on the emotional horizon? In any case, Haba Khatoon was so engrossed with the separation from her beloved that everything else appears to be outside the scope of her songs.

Indian poets have always enjoyed close rapport with nature in all her variety of life and form and our poetry, epic, romantic or dramatic, is enriched with her sharp and scintillating portraits of snow-covered hills with their tarns or gushing streams, dense forests, palm or mango groves, sandalwood and sal trees, frightful cobras, milk-white swans amidst pink lotuses, crafty herons, roaring lions, stolid bovines, fleeting deer and dancing peacocks. Portraits have been so close, sharp and life-like that it has been possible to identify many a place. That we do not find such delineation in Haba Khatoon is because her songs are short and the limitations of the *vacan* model did not, perhaps, offer much scope though, it has to be admitted, that it does not altogether rule it out in such forms as simile, metaphor, pathetic fallacy, etc. Haba Khatoon was born and bred in the lap of nature but we do not find in her poetical compositions handling of nature as in Mahjoor's *Baagi Nishaata Ke Gulo* and Gree's *Koor* or Aazad's *Myon Yaawun* or Parmanand's didactic *Karma' Boomi-*

*kaji*. We are nevertheless impressed with her familiarity with wild nature: jasmine, basil, musk-rose, dandelion, mentha, cress, waterchestnut, almonds, pomegranates, mulberry, parrots, larks, bulbuls, feshet, stream, etc. Perhaps it is in harmony with feminine nature that she does not involve gigantic deodars, mighty lions, crafty owls or other gross or coarse objects in finding an utterance for her emotional reaction. When Shakuntala departed from the hermitage of Kanaw she took leave of her companions which included her friends, fawns, parrots and flowery shrubs. Haba Khatoon's lyrics seem to convey a similar impression of all life being one, and man, plant and animal being members of the same family. Basil and jasmine, musk-rose and pomegranate flower, mentha and dandelion, uplands and streams, have been her friends and companions from her early childhood in a sense it is difficult to imagine for the educated girls (and boys) of our own day. The spirit of this companionship could be visualised only by those among us who, casting away all sense of vanity, attempt to ferret out nature's secrets in a spirit of discovery, combining pleasure with sport while rewarding the mouth with delicacies of roots and berries, as some village girls still do in the manner of our distant ancestors who lived by food gathering. In her hour of grief when a vacuum seems to have been created in her emotional make-up she calls upon these companions of her childhood to bear witness to her sorrow, thereby trying to evoke their sympathy. This recollection of her early childhood with the association of her friends amidst the bounties of nature obviously gives her some solace. She feels a revulsion against the rabble for their irresponsible talk but she can reveal her inmost secrets to the basil plant in full confidence of its sympathy:

Let's go in search of basil, friend,  
 The gash he caused is hard to mend,  
 The callous man cares not to know,  
 How deadly aimed has been his blow.

And so to the red rose, jasmine and others. She cannot help measuring her sorrow in terms of the fading of her jasmine complexion to mentha shade.

Simple living is another bond that holds her fast to nature.

There is hardly any reference to her days of affluence, lasting a decade and a half, when no luxury was unattainable for her. No doubt she has cream as an aid to her complexion and makes a shampoo of sandalwood water, but these are recipes known in rural society for hundreds of years. Her table delicacies do not depend upon fish, fowl or mutton as one might expect nor the Central Asian confectionary with exciting names like *zan-bosa* (a lady's kiss) and *man va tu* (me and you), but a simple fare of curds, rice and pumpkin. Altogether she is simple and sincere and lives close to nature in body and spirit.

Haba Khatoon and Yusuf Shah Chak discovered many beautiful spots of scenic excellence and spent much time there. These spots of scintillating beauty also escape being reflected in her songs. Her intense love does not permit her to watch uninterruptedly for hours. She did not want any forms she created through her imaginative faculty to be more real than the one man, her beloved, who occupied the centre of her world.

Touches of local colour have, however, been given in a different form which in no way affects the main thread running through her songs, namely, her intense love for the beloved and the pangs of separation. She would like to present to her beloved a precious shawl or *shah-toshi* made of delicate wool of high-mountain goats, rare even in Kashmir, let alone other places. Another cherished gift, the pashmina stuffed with down has been referred to, as also her table delicacies. The spinning wheel moaning to the sad tunes of forlorn women, their constant companion, its spindle turning which their fingers are worn out, and the thread delicate like love and fragile like life itself, have been mentioned. She imagines her beloved peeping at her through *voga*, the skylight peculiar to old Kashmiri houses. She makes a number of references to the common practice among girls in Kashmir going in company to fetch water. The landing at the bank of the stream or the river is the familiar rendezvous for their 'club' (*yaaraba'li kaakni*). Disappearance of snow with the approach of summer could be used as a simile only in a place like Kashmir. Panting caused by ascending uplands with a headload could be cited familiarly only by a village woman. The scene at the departure of the bride from her parents after her wedding is graphically drawn in a few words. The eagerness for the adventure of wedded life,

hidden fear of the unknown, the bridegroom's party waiting for the bride with their palanquin colourfully bedecked by the bearers, the blessings of parents and well-wishers, marriage songs sung by her friends who step after the palanquin for a short distance to bid her farewell are portrayed movingly. What is important to note is that these touches of local colour have not been given for their own sake. Each of these touches owes its existence to a deep inner necessity of the poetess and has a bearing on her emotional state in the over-all pattern of unloading her smarting heart.

It has been observed that while Wordsworth insisted on a language commonly used by men and women, he introduced in his verse harmoniously some of the most uncommon, unfancied and complex words. In her own limited sphere and her humble way Haba Khatoon has along with the common vocabulary of the people used some words which are not easy to fit in verse. For instance, the word 'sickle' does not seem to strike one's ear with any poetical association. The use of the word in the *Solitary Reaper* also does not lend it any significance. Haba Khatoon practically transforms the implement and enriches the word by inducting it in the language of love:

*Haantsi kami draantsi sa'te katumum badno*

(On what suspicion has he sliced my body with the sickle)

The word *draantsi* (small sickle) has attained importance in that in rhyming with *haantsi* (suspicion) it makes the verse sonorous. She uses words *waan* (shop), *kraal* (potter), *rangur* (dye), rise and fall in prices and the like, but they enhance the emotional appeal of the verse wherein used. Apart from its sense each term has been used for its sound.

Haba's songs open with a captivating line (termed *hur* in Kashmiri) which together with the refrain forms a couplet. She writes in stanzas of three lines followed by the refrain with the odd lines rhyming together while the second is unrhymed. . . In some cases the same rhymes are repeated throughout the song-lyric while in others only the sound-endings of second lines differ. There are one or two instances of four-lined stanzas. She also uses frequently the medial rhyme. An instance has been given in the preceding paragraph. A few may be mentioned to



illustrate the rhymes at the beginning of the line in addition to end-rhyme:

- (i) Wuḍur *khasaan* kuḍur *gomo*
- (ii) Kaari *la'inum naara'* kartal daari *o'sh chhum jo'yey*
- (iii) Voga' *peṭha' vuchhnamai*  
           Shoga' *laa'gith boolnam*  
           Rogi *rogi goam gumai*

Other instances of this type of rhyme are found in lyrics *Chhu Me' Baali Tamanaa*; *Wo'lo Myani Poshey Madano* and *Chhaav Mya'ni' Daa'nai Posh*.

It is, however, not possible to formulate one's appreciation of poetry by analysing reactions under different heads. Various aspects of a poem have their own place in evaluation but they do not add up to the whole, the integrated impression that the work under discussion produces in its totality on the mind. To cut a lengthy argument short it is enough to say that Haba Khatoon's lyrics are captivating for their sheer poetry. Poets have endeavoured for long to follow her but with varying success. Her poetry belonged to her age but has become timeless.

## CHAPTER 4

### Haba Khatoon's Influence

HABA KHATOON stepped on the stage a century and a quarter after Shekh Noor-ud-Din, there being no positive evidence of any other poet of stature having consciously espoused the mother tongue during this long interval. Her contemporaries wrote thousands of verses in Persian. By education, later by social status and association, she could also have followed the vogue in composing Persian couplets. Instead, she relied upon Kashmiri in giving utterance to her feelings, thereby awakening the interest of others in exploring its capacity as a vehicle of emotional expression. That this had a snow-balling effect in course of time has earned for her the gratitude of the Kashmiri speaking people for ensuring the continuity of literary output in the language.

Consciously or otherwise, she set her face against the influence of Persian on Kashmiri. That Persian continued to dominate the culture in the valley, owing mainly to political and administrative reasons, is no fault of hers. Side by side with those poets who had been led to accepting the Persian influence were others for whom their own language had a stronger appeal. Haba Khatoon's verse was for them a source of inspiration.

Haba Khatoon's predecessors, Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din, used respectively the *vaakh* and *shruk* as the unit of verse composition. She, however, made a debut with the lyric which appears to have emerged through the *vacan kaal* or the epoch of songs in our poetry. She is undoubtedly the founder of the lyric of romantic love in Kashmiri. In form it appears to be close to the Persian model though it varies from it in other respects. She has been followed in this behalf by poets, genera-

tion after generation, including Arnimal, Mahmud Gaami, Rasul Mir and Mahjur down to our own day.

Kashmiri language had undergone marked changes between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Succeeding generations were highly impressed with the profundity of thought and poetic expression of the saint-poets preceding Haba Khatoon, but there was not the same response to their melody and music. Haba Khatoon's melodious verse heralds a new era in Kashmiri poetry which adopts with excellent results the whole scale of musical effects utilised by her in making her songs sweet.

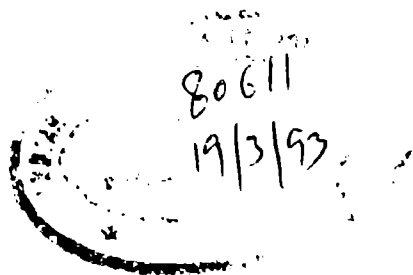
It is not necessary to trace in detail the influence of Haba Khatoon on later poets. Only one or two instances should suffice. Akmal-ud-Din Beg (A.D. 1646-1723) flourished over fifty years after her death. He was a poet of distinction in Persian but wrote some sweet songs in Kashmiri also. His well known song *Baali Hai Rumai Rumai* (Beloved, every tissue of my body is filled with longing for you) bears close resemblance to Haba Khatoon's lyric *Chhu Me' Baali Tamanaa*. Mahjoor (A.D. 1897-1952) shot to fame with his ghazal *Poshay Mati Jaanaano* (My Adonis, fond of flowers) composed in 1926. Abdul Ahad Azad has related in detail how Mahjoor was inspired to compose it when he heard village women recite melodiously the song of Haba Khatoon *Wo'lo Myani Poshey Mada'no*<sup>1</sup> while waters of the Doodh Ganga went babbling by.

In addition to ensuring continuity of the stream of Kashmiri poetry, and thereby giving it not only a fresh lease of life but also a strong momentum forward, she has contributed to the making of the language too. Obviously it is difficult precisely to evaluate her contribution in this respect, particularly in view of the paucity, in fact absence, of written records. While gleaning through the extant lyrics of Haba Khatoon a reader is not likely to miss that some of the idioms, metaphors and images one comes across in her verse appear to be still fresh and current even today. Almost four hundred years after her death, poets and writers still rely upon their effectiveness in communication. A few of these are:

*Sabkas traavun* (to put to school), *lwodmut loorun* (to raze to the ground), *dai nai diyi ta deki nai pooray* (unless God gives

and fortune favours), *kal ganeyam* (I have a longing for), *vadanas na'tsidh* (no cessation in tears), *seerus sarposh* (protector), *marna khota' sakh* (worse than death), *baara buka* (a heavy outpour), *kan bara'ni'* (to fill ears), *dwada har* (cream), *baana thurun* (to shape pots out of clay), *jaama paa'run* (to enrobe), *graayi maa-raun* (prance, strut), *vana kiy tapa reshi'tapa aai vasith* (hermits gave up their penance in the woods), *tsasith* (overful). Though it is not possible to indicate definitely how many of these have been coined by her, Haba Khatoon's contribution in this behalf could not be inconsiderable. The stamp of her personality appears to be unmistakable on such words and expressions of this mintage as have a plaintive, melancholy connotation.

A language, alongwith its literature, belongs to the people generation after generation. No individual, however high his or her stature, could claim outright the credit for making a language, or its literature. Sometimes the gift of a literary figure nurtured at the cost of his or her 'precious life blood' falls into disuse and is consigned to oblivion. But where the sensibility of the master spirit has freshness, vigour and depth, the contribution made by him or her holds readers for generations, setting aglow their imagination and apprehension. Haba Khatoon's contribution to Kashmiri falls in this last category. What she sang or composed is sincere, natural and simple and stands practically in a class by itself. Kashmiri language and literature will ever remain indebted to her.



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