



## Arnimal: The Kashmiri Ancient Poetess of Lyricism, love and Optimism

*Abdul Majeed Dar*

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Dept. of English, JNU University, Jaipur, India

Email: [abdulmajeeddar26@gmail.com](mailto:abdulmajeeddar26@gmail.com)



### ABSTRACT

The lyrics of Arnimal traverse the entire range of emotions, including protests, love, sorrow and weariness. She has succeeded in transferring her personal trials and tribulations into universal ones. In this way, Arnimal has become one of the leading lights of the Kashmiri Hindu women who are the best examples of self-sacrifice and embodiments of love. A cursory study of her life and lyrics is enough to establish the poetic genius and mastery of technique achieved by that unlettered woman who belonged to the dark age of Afghan rule in Kashmir in the eighteenth century and yet she stands as the leading light of the unhappy period of history in the life of Kashmiri Pandits, both men and women. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the life and main contributions of Arnimal in the development of Kashmiri literature in general and how Arnimal's poetry was full with the themes of love and optimism.

### Keywords:

Lyrics, Kashmiri Hindu women, Afghan Rule, Optimism

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### Introduction

Arnimal was born in the picturesque village of Palhalan, thirty kilometres away from Srinagar, on 1737, nearly two hundred years after Habba Khatoon. She was brought up in the charming surroundings of broad leafed

Chinars, tall, slender poplars, calm lakes and majestic mountains at her father's place. Daughter of a respectable family and wedded to a person of a great family, Arnimal was pretty, imaginative and accomplished, but all through her life she suffered pangs and torments of separation. As a common practice in those days, Arnimal was married in her childhood to



Munshi Bhawani Das kachroo, but before attaining the bloom of her youth, she was deserted by her poet husband for some unknown reasons. The separation from her husband proved painful and tormenting for Arnimal and her emotions were terribly stirred. As a result of this sorrow and unhappiness was born the most melodious poetry full of pathos and grief. Munshi Bhawani Das kachroo, a learned Persian scholar in the court of Jumma Khan, was the Afghan Governor of Kashmir from 1788 to 1792 AD. Arnimal was a talented, sensitive and sophisticated girl, deeply devoted to her husband. Apparently, she was quite happy in the new surroundings and had a carefree time throughout her childhood days before attaining adolescence. But just before flowering into full womanhood, she got a feeling that her husband was too preoccupied with his literary and other pursuits to pay proper attention to her. She tried hard to draw him towards her, but fate had planned it otherwise. Munshi Bhawani Das, for some unknown reasons ignored her, tortured her and tormented her. His husband who was an important person in the Darbar fell into bad company and deserted her. Due to this, Arinimaal's heart broke and she became dejected and forlorn. Possibly due to this painful separation, she must have taken to poetry. Arnimal sang of love, beauty and sorrow. Her poetry speaks of agony, dejection, pathos and disappointments. Her poetry melts the people's hearts. Through her poetry, one comes across how she loved her husband. After the separation, she returned to her parents' house who were kind and sympathetic towards her. After some time, Bhawani Dass realized that he had been unkind to his wife. He decided to be with her again. He proceeded towards her village, and

when he reached Palhalan, he saw that she was being carried for cremation. And it was too late.

#### **Arnimal as a Lyrical Poetess:**

Arnimal's lyrics are masterpieces of Kashmiri language. The word pictures of delicate sentiments drawn by her are so vivid, real and charming that very few Kashmiri poets have reached the standard set by her. Most of these lyrics have been set to music and are sung even now by Kashmiris. Arnimal lived during the tyrannical and barbaric rule of Afghans when girls for fear of being lifted away were married off before the onset of puberty. The social structures of that period were very iniquitous and discriminatory. The status of women was worse than what it was in the Mughal rule. Their life and living with in-laws was a woeful and ignominious saga. They were treated as lifeless commodities by a male-dominated society and were fraudulently posed as models of renouncement, patience, piety and love when actually they were subjected to untold oppression and exploitation and were ruthlessly traumatized and rejected.

The importance of the love-lyrics written by Arnimal lies in this, that they reflect the sorrow, sufferings, passions and longings of common Pandit women of the valley of Kashmir. Lamenting the absence of her beloved husband, Shri Bhawani Das, Arnimal said :

*(Owing to the pangs of separation) my complexion  
"Which was like July jasmine  
Has assumed the pallor of the yellow rose  
O, when will he come to let me have  
A look at his beloved face!"*



The animal thinks that people, devoid of fine feelings and sensibilities, cracked jokes at her expense. She has become the object of taunts. But all this does not change her mind. The intensity of feelings made her complaints deeply touching. She continues to long for her beloved husband with great devotion and love. She says:

*I have filled cups on cups for love  
Go and cry out to him  
Across hillsides and meadows green  
I send him tender thoughts  
Like deer he roams the woods afar  
And leaves me here to grieve  
Go and cry out to him*

Animal's lyrics are musical; it has melodious music with its musical rhymes and ever-recurring refrains, its alliterations and its assonances that come most spontaneously from the depth of her heart. All her songs deal with human emotions and are intensely subjective. Animal uses images and settings most familiar to her. "Animal" for instance, literally interpreted, means in Kashmiri "the garland of Arni rose," the wild pale rose common in the country side. She weaves a delicate imagery out of her own name when she says:

*A summer jasmine I had bloomed  
But now have turned a yellow rose  
When will my love come unto me?*

All her songs have been set to music and their imagery and pathos are moving to the extreme. The music and pathos in the following lines are very touching:

*When will thy feet touch lay courtyard  
I will place them on my head, O come!  
For love I left my home and hearth  
And tore the veil, O come!  
Again she says  
May Love, my jasmine, I long for thee  
Come O come, I long for thee  
I plighted when young my troth to thee  
Why didst thou break thy plighted troth?  
O sweet, O dear, I long for thee*

Genuine love is abiding and perennial; it can never die or disappear; it knows neither dismay nor frustration. The sole desire of the lover is that the beloved may be happy wherever he is. The hope that both will be reunited sustains Animal through thick and thin. The thought of such future re-union gives her joy and courage to endure the mocks of friends and sneers of foes. She says :

*"My rivals are throwing taunts at me  
Since the beloved has ceased to talk to me  
Won't he come for a short while and show me  
His face, so that I should offer  
My arterial blood as sacrifice for his safety?"*

The poetry of Animal is devoid of the mystic touch and of religious experiences. It speaks of the heart of the human soul. After separating from her husband, the spinning wheel became her constant companion and she composed her songs in tune with the sound of the revolving wheel. Its sound could not but remind her of the tragic story of her own life. She sang:



*Murmur not my spinning wheel,  
Thy straw-rings I will oil  
From under the sod, O Hyacinth,  
Raise thy stately form  
For look, the narcissus is waiting  
With cups of wine for you  
The jasmine will not bloom again  
When once it fades away*

Arinimal's songs are poignant in their pathos, helplessness and resignation to one's fate but there is no malice found anywhere in them. There is an undercurrent of quiet fortitude which is characteristic of the age-old suffering of a Kashmiri Pandit woman, especially when she is unhappily married or due to ill luck separated from her beloved husband. There seems to be little doubt that Arinimal, deserted and maltreated by her husband, lived at her father's home for long spells of time. In most of her songs, therefore, she expresses frustration. She always craved for the nearness of her husband. She pleaded him with all sweet things in life, but he always duped her. She pleads:

*I treated him to candy sweet  
He took my heart and I was duped  
Now he is gone, and I am made  
A laughing stock for an to see  
Will no one tell him what I feel?  
Let us arise at early dawn  
And seek my love  
On hills and mountains high  
I wait and wait expectantly,  
When will my love come unto me?*

Besides fortitude and resignation, these lyrics breathe a note of dissatisfaction if not revolt against the age-old custom which condemned the Hindu woman of Kashmir if she experienced unhappy marriage and unfaithful love. Thus her lyrics give voice to many voiceless Kashmiri

women of her time and these lend the same musical and spontaneous voice to all such women who suffer silently in all ages. Composition of songs became a spontaneous mode of expression with Arinimal. Gradually she acquired mastery over words and invented a unique style of expression. Some of these lyrics have become classics in Kashmiri language. She surpasses some of the most talented English poets in the use of alliteration and imagery. Just listen to the lyric she wrote:

*Tell me, O Friend, who can trust whom?  
What deception he worked on me!  
Pulling at my wrists in deep sleep,  
He hurt my very vitals.  
Taking away, all my gold,  
What deception he worked on me!*

In English poetry one comes across instances of such intense emotions coupled with an intense display of imagery and alliteration. John Keats, a great poet of the romantic era of the nineteenth century scintillates his odes with many verbal gems. Like Arinimal, he experienced frustration in love and knew the pain and fever of passion. In his Ode to Autumn, he makes use of alliteration spontaneously. He writes :

*Seasons of mists and mellow fruitfulness  
Close bosom friend of maturing sun*

In his book 'Gems of Kashmiri Literature', Shri T. N. Kaul writes, "As was the common practice during the Afghan rule, Arinimal too was married in her childhood to Munshi Bhawani Das Kachru, a renowned Persian



poet, scholar and servant. He belonged to a respectable family settled in Rainawari, Srinagar and held a position of honor in the court of Jumma Khan, who was the Afghan governor of Kashmir from 1788 to 1792". Elaborating about Arinimaal, Shri Kaul says, About Arinimaal's compositions, Shri Kaul says, "Arinimaal excelled in Vatsun, the genre originally evolved by Habba Khatoon 200 years earlier. Several of her delectable creations are extant. All that she had written, has not been retrieved so far. Only about two dozen lyrics have passed to the successive generations by word of mouth."

Arinimal is the composer of the 'komal' poems. These poems have a special 'color' - a deep anguish and the simplicity & influence of folk songs which has made an inherent place in the people's mind. In spite of the neglect and disgrace, she continued to consider her husband as her beloved, and believed that one day he would come back to her. Having waited for him all through her life, she died at a young age of 41 years. This may only be a heresy, but the agony of her wounded love, and the restlessness on account of her desire for proximity to her lover, became the main theme of her poetry. The beauty and intensity of her thirst for love and the painful manifestation of craving in her poetry, made considerable impact on the people's mind.

Arinimal had herself also recorded a large number of her poems while she remained separated from her beloved at Palhalan village. After her death, these creations were

handed over to the old man's ancestors who kept them in safe custody. But in view of the atrocities perpetrated by the Afghans in the closing years of their rule on the civilian population and the consequent risk of damage to the invaluable poems, the Kachrus were obliged to deposit this treasure in a 'Chah' (dry well) near the Hari Parbat hill.

#### **Arinimal as a Love-Lorn Poetess:**

It is a pleasing yet strange coincidence that Lal Ded (14th Century), Habba Khatoon (16th Century) and after a lapse of two hundred years Arinimal adorned Kashmiri literature through their poetical geniuses.

Arinimal spared no effort to establish an emotional bond with her beloved husband. She picked up the tunes of music and tried hard to acquire the graces behaving Muslim court ambience. But, to her ill-luck, she failed to achieve much of a success. Burning in the agonising fires of separation, Arinimal in all disgust and melancholy returned to her parents' living at Palhalan, a hamlet (in Baramulla district). A line from her sufficiently supports it-

*O golden Jasmine, you blossomed in jungles, bushes and shrubs  
but Palhalan is your parental abode.*

Her captivating songs ooze out varied shades of pain and agony. Separation from her spouse was what tormented her. Rejected love was what agonised her. Here is a lyric soaked in pain and agony-



*Wreaths of flowers I wove for my husband  
Would that he were to accept it  
Cups of wine I filled for him  
Would that he were to come  
I yearn to clasp him in my arms.*

Stung by intolerable pangs of separation, she is deeply pining for her husband who is distances away from her. In agony she addresses her friend-

*O friend, tell him about my agony  
I know not what my fault is  
Repaired he to my cruel co-wife -  
He is hers, since I learnt it  
My whole being is set afire I lost my appetite  
I am eagerly waiting for him  
How I wish he were with me  
Despaired and forsaken Arnimal expresses her pathos -  
Soaked in tears my hem is  
awaiting you my days dragon  
Why this futile vanity -  
She again sings in melancholy -  
When will your soft feet touch our threshold.  
I place them on my pate  
In agony I came out searching for you  
removing veils and barriers all  
Pray come to me*

The marital life of Arnimal Kachru was seething with pain and anguish. Says she-

*O friend, why my husband separated from me  
I bathed clean for him  
All adornments went useless, he did not come,  
O loveless, I can't bear with your separation any longer  
Without you I shall fade away  
Now no more can I wait even for a short while*

Arnimal has sought ample succour from nature to ventilate her heart-ravaging pain and anguish. The

creepers (hiya), yellow roses (arni-posh) and narcissuses (nargis) have oft found a mention in her lyrics. Multiform manifestations of nature like vast green fields, flowing rivers and murmuring rivulets, awesome mountains and snow-capped peaks have deftly been delineated in the context of her gloomy moods and pathos-laden feelings caused by separation from her husband.

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

Again she says -

*I am a youthful beauty, abandoned my abode for him  
whole day passed awaiting him*

*His gnawing indifference has rendered me mad  
I bear with taunts flung by one and all*

Addressing her husband she in all despair busts out -

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



### Arnimial as an Optimistic Poetess:

There is an exemplary confluence of hope and despair in the love-laden lyrics of Arnimal. Helplessness, unfathomable perseverance, endless wait and incessant agony are the emotional states that weave the warp and woof of her lyrical orchestrations. But the world of her intense emotions is lacking in a broad sweep. Her lyrics limpid mirror the mind of a deserted woman who is in deep despair, lonely and yearning for a rendezvous with her spouse distances away from her. She is in anguish, yet she is hopeful and optimistic. She is a broken reed, yet she yearns for a concourse with her husband who has forsaken her. Malice and ill-will never come her way. She could have screamed fire and fury at her husband who has cruelly left her high and dry. But she maintains her calm and poise. Says she -

*Your love impelled me to abandon my abode  
you knit up your brows and frowned at me  
I wished you long life as that of Lomesh Rishi  
Who ill-advised you not to return to me?  
Pouring out her heart Arnimal says -  
Would that he were to come once  
I would sacrifice my life for him  
Why he trampled me, a creeper that has fully bloomed  
O friend, I have none to confide  
I am teased and mocked at  
What if he does not talk to me  
Let him live long and be happy  
Let him be with my co-wife*

Arnimial is tormented by pangs of separation and is in hell-fires of despair, yet she sings of hope and happiness

*O hope of the hopefuls! enliven my heart with hope  
Remove dark despair from it  
He repaired to Lahasa for benefits  
I am eagerly awaiting him  
Sow the seeds of warm friendship  
And wish no hurt even to enemies*

She is under the perpetual grip of blues and greys. She is wretched and forlorn. Says she-

*He never stood by his promises  
He bewitched me & went away  
O friend, can you manipulated his return?  
Everything in this world is fleeting and transitory  
Flowers bloom and soon fade away*

Memories of her spouse cause her pain and anguish. She weeps and wails for his quick return. In pain and grief, she sings-

*When will he return to me, a woman in bubbling youth?  
I am shedding tears endlessly  
Can I ever forget the deep craving for him?  
My whole being is afire like a coniferous twig  
My pains know no end, tears in torrents  
Go on dripping from my eyes.*

Despite her husband's indifference and sullenness, Arnimal never ceased to yearn and long for his close companionship. A lyric of hers opening with the yellow-hued rose (arin) is highly popular with lovers of Kashmiri poetry and music. She sings -

*Mine is a life brimming with pain and agony  
you got my heart perforated by the taunts of others  
You got it burnt like a half burnt cloth-piece  
Who will convey my wretchedness to him  
When will he turn up to show his coatenance to me  
Cheating me he stole away  
He mocked at me in presence of strangers  
When should I expect him back?*



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This is quite a popular lyric, almost on the tip of every Kashmiri's tongue. Mehmood Gami impressed so much by the lyric has in one of his lyrics immortalized the refrain. 'Arnirung gom shrawn'.

The famous and quite popular lyric of Arnimal is that of 'spinning wheel' which became her inseparable companion after separatism from her spouse. The lyric is bequeathed to us from our mothers and grandmother and is typically Arnimalian in content and style.

*O spinning wheel! do not murmur and grumble  
Thy straw-rings I shall oil  
Raise thy head from under the earth, O! hyacinth*

**Conclusion:**

Arnimal is a master craftsman of simple, bewitching and melodious language, which is not excessively burdened with Persian and Sanskrit vocabulary. Each word of hers is natural, plain, musical and lilting. Her love-lorn mindscape is deeply touching and pathetic. The lyrics of Arnimal are suffused with an optimism as she never let go hope about the return of her husband. As per an oral tradition, Bhawani Das Kachru having been tired of ostentatious court life returned to meet Arnimal. But the pangs of protracted separation had seared her so much as to cause her death at a young age of forty-one in 1778.

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