

Arinimaal – An enigma?

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Arinimaal, the poetess wife of Bhawanidas Kachroo, a Persian poet himself, was born, as we understand from the available literature, sometime in 18th century. It is said that like Lalla Ded and Habba Khatoon, her family life was unhappy, which was the main source of inspiration for her poignant poetry. Ultimately Bhawanidas Kachroo deserted her and she lived mostly in her father's home.

Some Muslim writers and critics do not subscribe to this story. In their opinion, Arinimaal never existed. Prominent among them, Mr. Amin Kamil has this to say (Kuliyat Habba Khatoon - Published 1995)

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“Alongwith Habba Khatoon, the name of Arinimaal is often propped up. And comparing the (literary aspect of) both, Arinimaal is said to merit above Habba Khatoon. But the fact is that no ‘*Gonmath*’ with the name of Arinimaal ever existed. This, in fact, is the result of a wrong thinking, and so much has been said and conveyed of her, that her existence now becomes undoubtful.”

In a ‘Talk’ broadcasted by Srinagar Radio in Oct. 1988, Amin Kamil categorically rejected the existence of a poet of this name. He however opines, “One could differ with me on this issue, but it does not mean we must bury our opinions. If this trend (of not allowing others to put forth their point of view) continues to be adopted in literature, it can not flourish and research will come to a halt”. But in

the same breath, he pronounces his judgement, "However, the main issue is that, when Arinimaal did not exist at all, attributing poems to her or discussing anything related to her, is just without any meaning."

Does Amin Kamil's statement carry any weight? What are the views of other writers and scholars on this account?

According to the 'History of Kashmiri Literature' by A.K.Rahbar, Arinimaal was born in 1738 A.D. and she passed away in 1778 A.D. Prof. Hajini refutes this year of her death and says that she died in 1800 A.D. With this, Prof. Hajini confirms that the Poetess existed.

In his book 'Gems of Kashmiri Literature', Shri T.N.Kaul writes, "As was the common practice during Afghan rule, Arinimaal too was married in her childhood to Munshi Bhawani Das Kachru, a renowned Persian poet, scholar and savant. He belonged to a respectable family settled in Rainawari, Srinagar and held a position of honour in the court of Jumma Khan, who was the Afghan governor of Kashmir from 1788 to 1792." Elaborating about Arinimaal, Shri Kaul says, "Arinimal 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." 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."

In his book 'Kashmiri Sahitya Ka Itihas' published by J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages in 1985, Shashi Shekhar Toshakhani, a well known scholar writes:

"When barbaric Afghan invaders were trampling the Kashmir valley in the 18th century, this poetess (Arinimaal) was composing the 'komal' poems. These poems have a special 'colour' - a deep anguish

and the simplicity & influence of folk songs which has made an inherent place in the people's mind. Her husband Munshi Bhawani Das Kachroo was a famous courtier of the Afghans and also a veteran Persian poet. He abandoned Arinimaal a little time after marriage. This was a great shock to Arinimaal, and this made her a poet. Born in Palhalan village, about 30 kms. from Srinagar, Arinimaal's beauty and love meant nothing for her husband in comparison to his royal appellations. To attract her husband, this young poetess did everything possible, to mould herself in the royal ambience. She learned royal etiquettes and music, but this had no effect on her husband. 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. And once he did come, dejected by the superficial glitter of his courtiership, but it was too late. Having waited for him all through her life, she died at a young age of 41 years. This may only be a hearsay, 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. . . . Like Habba Khatoon, Arinimaal was not the beloved of a king, but 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."

Another writer Jawahar Kaul Ganhar writes about the Poetess thus:

"It is said that Arinimaal was married in her childhood to Munshi Bhawani Dass Kachroo. Bhawani Dass was a respected person in the Afghan court. Jumma Khan, the Governor of Kashmir from 1788 to 1792, was less harsh than other Pathan rulers and he respected scholars and patronised the men of learning. By dint of hard work and intelligence, Bhawani Dass acquired mastery in Persian. Afghan dignitaries and officials were surprised over his calibre and erudition. He was a poet in Persian language. His Persian poems, entitled "Bahar-i-Tavil" is considered a major contribution to the Persian language. He wrote under the pen name of 'Naiku'. The early period of Arinimaal's married life was happier one. But these days did not last long. Her 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. Arinimaal 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 separation, she returned to her parents' house who were kind and sympathetic towards her. After some time, Bhawani Dass realised 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. The people of the village used to cut jokes at her expense. But it did not change her. It is said that, at an advanced age, Arinimaal took to the spinning wheel and spent her days in the hope that one day her love (husband) will return."

So much in detail about the Poetess, but Amin Kamil considers all this a cooked story and myth. Let us take a look at what another veteran Muslim poet Abdul Ahad Azad thinks of her. In the first volume of 'Kashmiri Zaban aur Shairi', Azad introduces the poetess thus:

"Famous Persian writer Munshi Bhawani Das Kachroo was a 'saintly person' and an expert on politics. His wife 'Arinimaal', whom we call Mrs. Bhawani Das, happened to be a jovial with a well balanced temperament. Maiden name of the poetess was 'Hiyamaal' and that at her in-laws was 'Arinimaal'."

Equating Arinimaal with Habba Khatoon, Azad writes, "Like Habba Khatoon, this Hindu devi was also an expert on Persian music. She also tuned her Kashmiri verses with the Persian music. This lady added a second storey to the building constructed by Habba Khatoon, which looks stronger, more beautiful and cleaner than the first storey. Her poems stand at a higher level than those of Habba Khatoon for the emotional elegance, clarity of language and suave usage of idioms, but confined only to her vexations."

Some critics do not consider 'ârinî rang gòm shràvan hîyè' as that of Arinimaal. They say that it has not been a custom to write one's pen name at the start of a poem, as the practice in 'East' has been to write it at the end. Pt. Jia Lal Kaul is of the opinion that (by writing her pen name first) she weaves a delicate imagery out of her own name. Kamil does not agree with him. He says, word 'ârinî' has so many times and in so many ways been used in the Kashmiri poetry.

Commenting on Azad's repeated reference to the poetess as 'Mrs. Bhawani Das' (and not Arinimal), and titling a chapter on her with the same name in his book 'Kashmiri Zaban aur Shairi' Vol: 2, Mohd Yousuf Teng, the then Secretary, J&K Akademy of Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar says, "Azad has titled this chapter as 'Mrs. Bhawani Das'. Since Arinimal was famous by her own name and also used the same in her verses, there is no reason that she should not be remembered with that name like we do for Lal Ded and Habba Khatoon.' Teng even changes the title of the chapter from 'Mrs. Bhawani Das' to 'Arinimal'. But Kamil has a different view. He comments, "Teng Sahib does not know that till 1946, 'Arinimal' name had not commanded that amount of fame, which it commanded in 1960." Kamil gets confused with his own story. Here, he does not refute her existence, but only advocates that Azad Sahib was right in naming her Mrs. Bhawani Das as against Arinimal because this name had not been very famous.

To add more weight to his argument, Kamil says, "Abdul Ahad Azad refers to her eleven times as Mrs. Bhawani Das and four times as Arinimal. It seems that he has straightway taken her name and biodata, even the word 'Mrs' from Kaul Sahib. Even dissimilarity in the style of writing 'Arinimal' clearly points out that this name had not made any impact till 1946, when Azad's book was published."

As we know, there was no standardised script for Kashmiri language earlier. This was also reflected by Azad himself when he recorded, "Non-conforming standard of the present script is responsible for the under development of Kashmiri language. The script in the present form can not represent the 'sur and awaz' of the language".

Government constituted Script Committees in 1951 and 1954. Amin Kamil himself writes in 'Kashmiri Zabaan aur Shairi' Volume 1 published in 1959: "Now the script for Kashmiri language has been developed, which is becoming very popular. So there should be no problem on this account".

Kamil is basically not comfortable with Azad projecting the Poetess's names (Hiya Mal and Arinimal), saying these names were not repeated in the second volume of the book. This itself is contrary to the facts. It is correct that Azad had titled the chapter as 'Mrs.

Bhawani Das', which eventually Mr. Teng changed. But Azad has at the start of this chapter noted, "About 200 years after Malika Habba Khatoon, a Pandit devi poetess was born with high intellect in Palhalan, 19 miles to the west of Srinagar. Her real name was Arinimaal." Azad continues further, "Some of the writings of Arinimaal have been lost. Some of it has transferred from generation to generation by the word of mouth, like that of Habba Khatoon. Since this poetess also possessed tremendous expertise in music, she has been able to preserve some of her writings in various meters and rhymes of music.

Kamil's conclusion is that Azad wrote only what was conveyed to him. This in turn means that a person like Azad gave place to myths and fabricated statements in his book and did not do anything on his own!

Let us consider what Kamil himself has to say about Azad (Kashmiri Zaban aur Shairi, Volume 2):

"Considering that Azad was not highly qualified, his evaluation of reason, politeness in writing, extent of thought and vision, and scholarly ways tell us all about his great personality and wisdom. It is correct that some times you come across tautology, conflict of views and inconsistent way of deriving conclusions in his work, but in spite of all this, you will accept it as a historical achievement."

There are a few anomalies in the statement of various writers locating Arinimaal's paternal home. Azad says she belonged to Palhalan. Avtar Krishen Rehbar also refers to her as '*palhàlanûch rângìn tâbíyat gàrnû kùr*'. Kamil says that he did not find mention of '*palhàlan màlyún chhúy*' in any of the poems he collected and compiled into a book titled '*lòlû nagmû*' as late as 1965. Obviously, he had not included Azad's poem in the collection. However, according to Jia Lal Kaul (Studies in Kashmiri), Arinimaal was born and brought up in a house in Srinagar.

Was Arinimaal born in Srinagar or at Palhalan? The statements are at variance. But this variation only shows that much work has not been done to collect correct and authentic information about the poetess. This however, does not provide a proof that the Poetess did not exist at all. Kamil makes his own conclusions, "Habba Khatoon was, but Arini Mal was invented. The former was given a colourful

appearance to make her a 'Afsana' but the latter was casted as a poetess by attaching commendable poetry to her name". He does not indicate who tried to make Habba Khatoon a 'Afsana' and why?

For a comparison, let us study the phenomena of varied statements in respect of the great poetess Habba Khatoon:

Regarding birth place of the Poetess, Birbal Kachroo & Mohi-ud-Din Foq say that she was born at Tsandahar village. Gulistan-e-Shahi tells us that she was brought up at Tsandahar (It does not mention her place of birth). Masnavi Habba Khatoon gives her birth place as China while Malla Habib of Hajin claims it to be Gurez.

Regarding Habba Khatoons first marriage and subsequent divorce, Birbal Kachroo says that she was married to one from her own clan. Her in-laws were against her passion for singing, so she was divorced. Hassan Khoihami says that she was married to a vile-natured and pauper person'. She got in conflict with her in-laws because of the vicious character of her husband, and finally the divorce took place. Anees Qazimi, quoting from 'Gulistane Shahi' writes that Habba Khatoon, on her mother's death was brought up by Abdi Rather of Tsandhar and he got her married to Kamaal-ud-Din of Jamalata, her maternal cousin. According to Hanfi (Masnavi Habba Khatoon) Malik Darob, the king of China gifted his daughter (Habba Khatoon) to Khoja Hayaband, a businessman of Srinagar, in exchange of 3300 Mohars, which Malik Darob owed him but was not able to pay. Hayaband brought Habba Khatoon to Kashmir, where he got her married to his son Khoja Lal. After an intriguing drama of events, Khoja Lal pinned the 'divorce paper' to her robe while she was asleep upon his knee at Pantachhan. Another writer Malla Habib has a yet different version. According to him, a 'Boutta Raja' of Gurez owed one '*manut*' (one and a half seer) of gold to Khoja Hayaband and his son Habba Lala of Lalahom village. Not in a position to pay, he handed his daughter (Habba Khatoon) to them and they brought her to their village. Hayaband got his son married to Habba Khatoon, but they could not pull on because Habba Khatoon's in-laws considered her poetry very offensive. Once, on their return from the city, Habba Khatoon and her husband rested a while at Athwajan, where Habba Khatoon fell asleep. Habba Lala pinned the 'letter' to her robe and left.

Regarding Habba Khatoon's union with Yusuf Shah Chak, different people have given different versions. Abdul Wahab Shayaq writes that when Yusuf Shah was coronated, he had a high calibre saint-poetess named Habiba (in his court!). Birbal Kachroo says that after desertion by her in-laws, she was spotted by Yusuf Shah's men. Fascinated by her beauty and voice, they took her to the prince (Yusuf Shah). He was highly impressed by her beauty, so he married her. Hassan Khoihami has this to say, "She (after divorce from her first husband) was sighted by Yusuf Shah while she was reciting a Kashmiri poem. Yusuf Shah could not control himself and the next day he presented lot of wealth to her parents and married her". Mohd. Din Foq says, "One day, while singing in her fields, she was spotted by Yusuf Shah. He got attracted to her. He summoned her husband and paid him five thousand Dirhams to divorce her. Then Yusuf Shah married her". Masnavi Habba Khatoon has another story to relate. It says, "Yusuf Shah dreamed that a beautiful woman (after being divorced by Khoja Lala) got drowned in the river at Pantachhan. He left for the place on a horse and also sent his Darbari poet Mulla Salman in a 'Parand' to rescue her. They came to know of her abilities while she pointed out certain discrepancies in the musical notes of Mulla Salman. Yusuf Shah brought her to his palace and kept her, not as his wife, but as a counsellor and advisor".

What do the above variations indicate? Do they provide a proof that the stories were cooked and that there was no Habba Khatoon?

Arinimaal's poem 'mê shòkû yàrû sùndí bārímas pyàlû tû, àlav dîtòsè' appeared in the Pratap Magazine (1936 Silver Jubilee Issue) among ten of the 'Prachlit Geet', not attributed to any author. The same poem had already appeared in the book 'Studies in Kashmiri' authored by Jia Lal Kaul, where it was attributed to Arinimaal. Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din has an objection, not for showing this poem later as a 'Prachlit Geet', but for having it previously attributed to Arinimaal?

There can be lapses while compiling and editing volumes. If the relevant poem was falsely attributed to Arinimaal (as Mr. Akhtar seems to communicate) in his book by Mr. Kaul way back in 1968, it is strange that no body pointed out to this anomaly till August 1978.

Regarding lapses in publication, Mr. Kamil has already come across such a situation. He corroborates, "I was able to get seven

'bands' of 'dòlki shàr' written by Nunda Dar Katheel from Qadeem Shah of Sadrabal. I handed over two of them to Hajini for inclusion in the book 'kàshír shäyírì'. Instead of giving any reference to Qadeem Shah, Hajini referred to them as 'zabaani revayath'.

Contrary to the doubts expressed by learned writers regarding her existence, Arinimaal continued to be popular among the masses. Azad says, "Had the charismatic narration of Habba Khatoon and Mrs. Bhawani Das not maintained this exclusiveness (of love poetry), most of their verse would have not found place in the literal and universal congregations. Since the verse was sweet and melodious, and very popular with the public in general, other poets also followed this trend."

Above statement can not be termed as a casual statement by Azad. He must have been witness to the popularity of Arinimaal's verses. And if there was no Arinimaal, there would be none of her verses and thus no popularity. Now, where did Azad find her verses popular with the public? Did he travel extensively to know the facts. This is what Mohd. Yusuf Teng has to say in this regard: "This work of Azad (Kashmiri Zabaan aur Shairi) is the first memoir of Kashmiri language and literature, as also its first history and almost first critical appreciation. Azad is the first Kashmiri researcher who travelled through length and breadth of Kashmir to study the genealogy of poets and trace their poetry. He met their relatives and friends, and faced their frowns and refrains. But he continued with his mission."

Jia Lal Kaul's book 'Kashmiri Lyrics' (1945) changes the name of the Poetess from 'Rani' to 'Mrs. Bhawani Das - Arinimaal'. Mr Kamil considers this a clever move to make the name more receptive (in the public).

It has been customary for Kashmiri Pandits to give their brides a new formal name as also a pet name. This pet name has always been used by one and all in a family, with a touch of love and respect. Hiyamal became Arinimaal for the world and 'Rani' for the inmates. Referring to her as Rani, does not restrain anybody from referring her as Arinimaal.

One point needs attention and analysis. About Azad's work, Mohd. Yusuf Teng writes on 12.11.81:

"Manuscripts of the Ab. Ahad Azad's book 'Kashmiri Zabaan aur Shairi' were divided into three parts. First part consisted of general studies of the language and literature, critical appreciation and comments. The committee which compiled the manuscripts for this part comprised Mr. Mohd. Amin Kamil, Prof. Shakeel-ul-Rehman and Dr. Padam Nath Ganju. And this part was published in 1959."

One fails to understand that Mr. Kamil, who was a member of the above Committee had no objection whatsoever to the content of Azad's manuscripts. In fact, the content was compiled and okayed by the said committee before it was printed in 1959. Why did he have to wait till 1988 to express his modified view point on air, or till he edited the book on 'Habba Khatoon' in the year 1995? It is important to note that Abdul Ahad Azad died in the year 1848 and was not alive to counter Kamil's theory.

Professor Margoob Banihali states in the 15th Edition of Anhar, Volume 12 (1989) that Arinimaal gave birth to two children, but they did not live. Because of this, her in-laws developed hate for her." Kamil does not accept this theory. He doubts Banihali's statement.

Kamil says, "It was said that Arinimaal returned to her paternal home immediately after her marriage (without any issue). But on learning from 'Tawareekhe Hasan' that Birbal Dhar was married to Munshi Bhawani Das's daughter, Rehbar Sahib (Avtar Krishen Rehbar), in order to save the situation from going out of hands, conceived a novel idea that possibly Bhawani Das had married twice".

There is every possibility of Rehbar's statement being correct. There are so many instances to show that Pandits till recent past, married more than once. And one thing is not clear. Instead coming to conclusion that Arinimaal's childless theory was wrong, Kamil is bent upon proving that the woman did not exist at all.

Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din, in a letter to Kamil says, "There is some difference in the texts of 'mê shòkû yàrû sùndí bårímas pyàlû tû' as given in Jia Lal Kaul's 'Studies in Kashmiri', and that given in the 'Pratap' Magazine by the same compiler. Some times I doubt whether the wife of Bhawani Das Kachroo was a poet at all? If she was, was she named Arinimaal?"

There are numerous instances to show that verses of various poets have been recorded differently at different places. Even Amin Kamil accepts this in the Chapter 4 of his book 'Kulyat Habba Khatoon'. He records, "Our old poetry has passed from one generation to another through word of mouth only. So some was lost and some was saved. Some reached us in the original form, and some lost its shape." 'Kulyat Habba Khatoon' stands testimony to this fact, as the author has painstakingly recorded the changed versions (or the original versions?) in the margins. If Mr Kaul has recorded two forms of the same verse at two different places, only he is to take blame. This however does not nullify very existence of the author.

Kamil Sahib refers to 'Bahare Gulshan Kashmir', a collection of poems of Kashmiri Persian writers, published in two volumes in 1931, which, according to him, also contained Kashmiri poems of Lalla Ded and Ropa Bhawani as examples. "Had there been an Arinimal, she would not have been ignored by its compilers", he says. Kamil Sahib does not mention if Habba Khatoon was included? If she also did not figure in the said collection, does it mean that there was no Habba Khatoon?

At another place, Kamil writes, "Let us not forget that Mahmud Gaami is a historical fact and Arinimal a conceived character." All this to show that the poem 'āríní rang gom shràvan híyè' is that of Mehmud Gaami and not that of Arinimal.

On the controversy regarding this poem, Azad has this to say, "We often find such lamentation in the verses of Arinimal. ... This poem has been published in the name of Mehmud Gaami, but the circumstantial evidence and peculiarity of the ode tell us that it reflects the emotions of Mrs. Bhawani Das."

T.N.Kaul in his book 'Gems of Kashmiri Literature' writes: "It will not be out of place to mention here that some cussed and overzealous literary critics have wrongly attributed one of Arinimal's most pathetic ditties - 'āríní rang gom shràvan híyè', to her contemporary, Mahmud Gami (1765-1855)." T.N.Kaul further writes:

"However a 90 year old descendant of the Kachru family told this author (Kaul himself) in an exclusive interview in Srinagar in 1987 that 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.

Shashi Shekhar Toshakhani, in his book '*Kashmiri Sahitya ka Itihas*' clarifies further. He writes: "This is one of the most popular Kashmiri songs, because of its melody and compassion. It is so popular that Mehmud Gaami, a famous poet has also used its few lines in one of his poems. Because of this, some critics like Ghulam Nabi Khayal consider it to be originally of Mehmud Gaami. But by detailed analysis and comparison, Autar Krishen Rehbar has proved that the basic lines are that of Arinimal only. Rehbar has clearly shown that these are two different poems, only its refrain, '*āríní rang gom shràvan híyè*' is common in both."

There are several instances where verse of one poet has wrongly (may be inadvertently) been attributed to other. This is amply clarified by the following instance:

Commenting on the confusion regarding year of birth of Mehmud Gaami, Naji Munawar writes, "After going through the manuscripts titled '*Yakh Hakayath*' and '*Ponpuri*' we can come to the conclusion that either the Mehmud's era has wrongly been calculated or, there has been another poet named Mehmud, whose verse has got messed up with that of Mehmud Gaami, like, some of Maqbool Amritsari's poetry was being printed in the name of Maqbool Kralawari."

Kamil does not stop here. Regarding '*käv^í víhínúm aríníní ...*' poem, he says, "This is said to have been attributed to Arinimal only because it contained the word '*Arini*'. It is clear that this poem was not attached to her as late as 1946." Azad, on the other hand assumes the poem to be that of Munshi Bhawani Das. In another twist to the issue, Kamil feels pleasure in putting this poem in the basket of Habba Khatoon. He says, "This poem is also said to be that of Habba Khatoon. And genuinely so, because she has, during her royal times, composed some poems with twisted words (*lafzû gyúnd kâríth*). This

poem also contains the same twist.” Kamil does not mention who told him so and with what proof?

Another point of contention has been the verse 'tarvûní margû tû vasvûní bàlò', in the poem 'mê shòkû yàrû sùndí bârímas pyàlay', as it appeared in the Pratap Magazine edited by Jia Lal Kaul in the year 1936. Amin Kamil, as also Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din are of the view that the verse should read 'khasvûní margû tu vasvûní bàlò'. They use it as a proof of bungling by Mr. Kaul.

Literary, a 'marg' is the plain area at the top of a mountain or between the mountains, which can only be crossed and not ascended. Hence, 'tarvûní margû' is more authentic.
