



Songs of Love and War: Afghan Women's Poetry

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The preeminent Afghan poet of the twentieth century, Sayd Bahodine Majrouh, has here collected the songs of anonymous Pashtun women from the time of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

These landays consist of two-line verses of nine and thirteen syllables. Their brevity and rhythm are meant to catch the ear. Village women improvise landays as they gather water from springs and when they dance and sing at weddings, with the most resonant of them claimed by their collective memory.

As part of an oral tradition, these poems avoid the complex, mystical, and abstract forms of their cultural canon. There is no aspiration whatsoever toward an unfathomable and incommunicable heaven, nor devotion to the lord, nor praise for an absolute master, nor any Adonis. To the contrary these poems are songs of the earth.

Here the active voice of the Afghan woman affirms simple pleasures and bemoans widespread suffering. The poems celebrate nature, mountains, rivers, dawn, and night's magnetic space. They are songs of war and honor, shame and love, death and beauty.

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