

## LYRICAL MOTIVES IN NATAVAN'S POETRY

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Khurshudbanu Natavan takes an important place in the history of Azerbaijani classical poetry. Her poetry reflects the Oriental women's thoughts and feelings and shows the life of her contemporaries, their concerns and sorrow.

Her realistic, lively and romantic poems convey the feelings and experiences of Azerbaijani women that were kept secret for years.

Khurshudbanu Natavan was born in Shusha (Karabakh) in the khan's family in 1832. Her father, Mehdigulu khan Javanshir, was the last ruler of Karabakh<sup>1</sup>. Her mother was Bedirjahan Beyim, Ganja's ruler Javad khan's great granddaughter.

From her young age Natavan was taught by palace educators and mirzas (scribes). People called her "Khan gizi" (the khan's daughter). Along with Azerbaijani Natavan had a good command of Persian and Arabic languages. Since her school age she started writing poetry, did serious reading and was good at painting. Due to the knowledge of Persian language she read the works of such classical poets as Firdovsi<sup>2</sup>, Sadi,<sup>3</sup> Nizami,<sup>4</sup> Hafiz,<sup>5</sup> Navoi<sup>6</sup> and Fizuli<sup>7</sup> and referred to them in her poetry. The fact that she was well aware of classical poetry rules can be understood

<sup>1</sup> Karabakh is a historical autonomy in Azerbaijan. It covers the territory stretching along Low Caucasus mountains between the rivers Kur and Araz. This territory began to be called Karabagh since the 12<sup>th</sup> century.. The most ancient settlements were found in this place. The strongest state established in the forties of 18<sup>th</sup> century was Karabakh Khanlig. At the moment a great part of Karabakh has been occupied by the Armenian aggressors. Great literary figures and composers were born in Karabakh.

<sup>2</sup> Firdovsi Abulgasim (about 934-1020), a Persian and Tajik poet. He is the author of "Shahname"-the monumental epos of the Persian literature and one of the masterpieces of the world literature.

<sup>3</sup> Sadi is the pen name of the Persian poet Muslihaddin abu Mahammad Abdullah ibn Mushrifaddin (1203-1292). He began writing poems when he was a student and became a very popular poet. He took the pen name Sadi that means "lucky". He is famous for his works "Gulistan" (1258), "Bustan"(1257)

<sup>4</sup> Nizami Ganjavi (Ilyas ibn-Yusif)(1141-1209) a great Azerbaijanian poet and thinker was born in Ganja. Nizami is his pen-name meaning "one who strings syllables". His most famous works (that have become a worthy contribution to the world literature), are five long poems, of 30,000 distiches, known as Khamsa (Quintuple): Storehouse of Mysteries(1173), Khosrov and Shirin (1181), Leyli and Majnun (1188), Seven Beauties (1197), Iskander-Nameh (1203)

<sup>5</sup> Hafiz is the pen name of the Persian poet Shamsaddin Mahammad Shirazi (1325-1390) He recited the holy book Koran. His pen name Hafiz means "a person with great memory and reciting Koran". He is the author of 418 gazals, 5 odes and different forms of poetry belonging to Persian poetry

<sup>6</sup> Navoi Alishir N'vai Nizamaddin Mir Alishir (about 1441-1501) - an Uzbek poet, thinker and statesman. The peak of his creative activity is considered to be his book "Khamsa" in Uzbek language that was written as an answer to Nizami's "Khamsa"

<sup>7</sup> Fizuli Muhammed Suleyman oglu(1498-1556) a great Azerbaijanian poet of 16<sup>th</sup> century was born in Kerbala. He wrote in three languages: Azerbaijanian, Arabic and Persian and used all genres and artistic forms known in Medieval oriental literature. He was considered to be one of the major poets of his day due to his gazals and a romantic poem "Leyli and Mejnun" written in Azerbaijani.

from her poems. A certain period of her life Natavan spent in Tiflis, among the Russian aristocrats and received her education in Russian there. The fall of the khanlig establishment caused much trouble and excitement to Natavan's family that found reflection in her pessimistic poems full of concern.

In 1845 Natavan's father died in the accident when he fell off the horse during hunting. Natavan was thirteen at that time. Since that time a lot of aristocrats proposed to Natavan as they wanted to be close to the khan's family. Besides the government made pressure on Natavan's mother and managed to take away the part of the lands from the family.

In 1850 Natavan was married to a Dagestanian aristocrat Hasay khan Usmiyev, though the marriage wasn't based on love. Natavan had to stay in Tiflis for over two years because of her husband's business there. The life in Tiflis enlarged her world outlook and influenced her ideas and thoughts.

During her stay in Baku in 1858 she met a famous French writer Alexander Duma, the father, in the house of the judge Piguliyevski. A.Duma and Hasay khan became close friends. The writer remembered Natavan's family with much respect in his book "The Journey to Caucasus".

Natavan got separated from her husband in early 1860s – she refused to follow her husband to Dagestan and stayed in Shusha.

Both her children from the marriage with Hasay khan – her daughter Khanbike and her son Mehdigulu khan who used the pen name "Vefa" - became poets. Natavan had five children from her second marriage with Seyid Huseyn from Shusha. One of them, her son Mir Hasan, was also a poet and wrote under the pen name of "Mir". Natavan's relatives were strongly opposed to her second husband and marriage.

Natavan made a great contribution to the enlightenment and cultural development of Azerbaijan. She helped the poor and assisted to Shusha's welfare. She arranged the construction of the water pipeline for Shusha citizens called "Khan gizi's bulag" (the khan's daughter's spring).

Natavan's literary activities started in 1850s. She wrote a lot of gazals<sup>8</sup> in Azerbaijani and Persian languages. Unfortunately, the full version of her divan<sup>9</sup> hasn't been retained.

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<sup>8</sup> The Gazal "is a poetic form with a long history in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic dating back to the seventh century. In the classical version, the thematically discontinuous couplets of the gazal have a rhyme scheme (called *qafīa*) and refrain (called *redif*), and the last couplet includes the poet's name." (The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry, Volume II. Edited by Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellman, Robert O'Clair. 3rd Edition, Norton: New York, 2003. p 893.) Gazal belongs to the Eastern poetry by origin whereas the birthplace of a sonnet is considered to be Western literature.

<sup>9</sup> Divan is a collection of lyrical poetry in the classical Near and Middle Eastern and Azerbaijani literature. The poems included within divan were placed in order according to the Arabic alphabet and were based on the final letters of rhyming words or redif. The poets who were willing to create a divan had to write poems beginning with all letters of the Arabic alphabet. The representatives of the Azerbaijani classical literature Gatran Tabrizi, Khagani, Nasimi, Khatai, Fizuli, Saib Tabrizi, S. A. Shirvani etc. were famous for their divans.

Natavan's creative work was strongly influenced by Fizuli's poetry. But though Natavan learned a lot from Fizuli's writing and was influenced by it, she tried not to imitate it and was striving to something new and independent in her poetry.

Unlike her contemporaries who were mostly writing lyrical love poems, Natavan wrote both about love, and people's miserable position and the beauty of nature and at last in the latest period of her creative work about her personal grief, the mother's sorrow.

Natavan's poetry was of peculiar character. She tried to bring new meaning and content to the life experiences and the beauty of nature. She created beautiful samples of gazals, bringing different colours and motives into them. Though Natavan's literary legacy isn't very numerous, the works that she created won her glory and fame.

Natavan's poetry is full of excitement, anxiety and complaint. No matter what she wrote about, she filled her poems with anxious pain and complaint of Azerbaijani women - even the most beautiful things in life are described by the poetess with worry and concern.

Natavan's personal life gave rich material and variety of themes for her poetry. It was so full of unforgettable and significant events and contradictions that there was no need for the poetess to create new topics for her poems. That's why she wrote her poems with true inspiration and passionate love. She didn't give way to the repetition of the same topics, events, thoughts and phrases in her poetry.

The theme of love takes one of the important places in Natavan's creative activity. Natavan described pure love, lovers' parting, love yearning, desire to meet with a sweetheart with great sincerity. Natavan wrote about her contemporaries who were deprived of free and mutual love. Natavan herself was forced to marry her first husband.

Natavan tried to reflect in her love poetry the desires that she couldn't realize in her real life and environment.

Natavan's love poems convey skillfully both the soul's sufferings and tears and the purity of a person's dignity and morality and the poetess's complaints about her fate and time.

Time has plunged me into an ocean of pain and woe,  
Parted me with my sun-faced; all is dark wherever I go.

My patience has reached its limit, O God Almighty on high!  
Either allow me to join him, or have mercy and let me die.

In vain I implored and begged you, you left and never returned.  
Now come and look at me, sun-faced, see into what I have turned.

How long must I pine in longing – my life is all misery.  
Have pity, at least for a moment; beloved, remember me.

What terrible tortures I suffer! Our parting I cannot bear.  
Am I worthy of nothing better than eternal grief and despair?

Our parting has stolen my reason, my soul has forgotten repose.  
Behold how merciless fortune has doomed me to endless woes.

I wonder why my cruel lover will not have pity on me.  
I burn in the flame of parting – the one who lit it was he!

How beautiful were those days when I was together with you.  
Now I am broken-hearted, sadly my fate I rue.

For a while I was reunited with my lover, that pitiless man.  
But now I am once again lonely – I have become Natavan.

*(Translated by Dorian Rottenberg)*

The love that Natavan describes in her poems is the one that brings people fidelity, belief, persuasion and sincerity; the one that inspires people to live, the one that is high in its meaning and content. Eternal pure love, truthful belief and promise, free love form the main love ideas in Natavan's poetry.

Though Natavan's love causes her only sadness, worry and concern, these love pains for her are of greater importance than happiness, pleasure and peace.

Most of Natavan's love poems incarnate devotedness, love yearnings and sorrow. A number of her gazals express disappointment, excitement, love complaints and resentment.

Beloved, how could you break the oath to me you swore?  
Beloved, am I today not the same as I was before?

You seek new company, love, with other women you meet,  
Have you forgotten me, the one that you once called sweet?

Yes, you have found another before whom you bare your soul;  
She is receiving the joy which from my life you stole.

My life is now a nightmare of infinite, black despair.  
People talk of my madness always and everywhere.

Your heartlessness, o beloved, is driving me insane.  
Have pity on me, have mercy, come back to me again.

O Destiny, how cruel, how ruthless you are to me!  
Who does he give his love? Who can the lucky one be?

Life overflows with anguish, with tears overflow my eyes;  
But he, my fickle lover, turns a deaf ear to my sighs.

Why, have you been avoiding me all this time,  
Me, the unlucky slave of a lord so truly sublime?

Love, you have driven your slave to the limit of desperation,  
Gossips are calling me now the victim of sinful temptation.

Have pity on me, your slave, o my lord, my Padishah!  
My lamentations echo throughout the world, near and far.

You and your love make merry, carousing day and night,  
And I, your unlucky victim, have forgotten what is delight.

There was a time when you wanted nobody else but me.  
Now you have changed, and your old love you even refuse to see.

What was the cause, my monarch, explain to your subject pray?  
What have I done that you leave me like a flower plucked and thrown away?

What shall I do, distraught and unhappy as I am now?  
How could I ever have given my heart to you, oh how?

Make merry, my love, with my rival, feast and have a good time,  
While I must weep tears of anguish because you're no longer mine.

Chirp with your newly-found mate like two nightingales on a bough:  
And I – remember what I was like, and what have I turned into now?

Kill me, let Allah give strength to your ruthless hand!  
What have I done to you that such torture I have to stand?

I sigh and I weep in sorrow, pain is tearing my heart.  
Poor Natavan, your lot was unfortunate from the start.

*(Translated by Dorian Rottenberg)*

The poetess advises her readers to stay away from cruelty, envy and hypocrisy. She calls to them to estimate high the purity of love, to protect a person's dignity and honour.

Natavan is good at describing beauties in her poems. The description is so vivid and imagery that the readers can fall in love with these beauties. Along with the heroine's external beauty the poetess underlines her moral beauty. Natavan compares the beauty's black eyelashes with arrows and her hair with snakes. She compares her lover with a nightingale who is trapped because of a flower. Thus the two important images come out of Natavan's poems: the image of a kind, polite, sorrowful and sensitive lover and the image of a pitiless and cruel beautiful mistress.

Your love brings me love, everlasting love,  
Love always conflicting us, leading us to fight.

It's your wonderful tresses that drive me crazy  
What disaster comes to me, comes from their sight.

Could I see your moonlike face at the moment,  
Wouldn't my heart beat faster, and rejoice inside.

Your eyes, brows and lashes shooting their arrows  
Cruelly attack me, pinning me always so tight.

Your black curls are the merciless invaders of my soul,  
They disarm me like troops and camp forever in my mind.  
Could a camel have taken Majnun<sup>10</sup> to his beloved Leyla<sup>11</sup>  
Had Leyla's love not been so strong and bright.

Who else could bring Yusif from the lover's thicket  
But Zuleykha did it, with her love full of light.

Deaf Yusif was bought by Zuleikha in old Egypt,  
Even a slave can prepare for his lover's delight.

For love you sacrificed your whole body, Natavan,  
Good news! Tonight he comes, death's decree at his side.

*(Translated by Shahla Naghiyeva and Alison Mandaville)*

Unlike other poets Natavan paid more attention to the person's inner world.

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<sup>10</sup> Majnun-(literally means insane), a legendary hero often figuring in oriental poetry as ideal lover, mostly known as the main hero of the poem "Leili and Majnun" by Azerbaijani poet Mahammad Fizuli

<sup>11</sup> Leili-the beloved of Majnun

When describing the character's beauty Natavan uses vivid colours and searches for persuasive stylistic devices. The creation of this beauty was the result of the poetess's rich observations, her real attitude to beauty and sincere feelings.

The lyrical hero in Natavan's poems undergoes a lot of sufferings and testaments, but his love becomes stronger and causes him to do honorable actions.

Natavan's poems devoted to loyalty and friendship glorify charity, compassion and humanity. She was looking for happiness not in the imaginary world but among friends. In her poetry she condemns and criticizes the forces and people who try to ruin or break somebody's friendship.

The poetess writes about her enemies in a number of poems. She shows contempt to hypocrisy and envy. Natavan calls for her friend to be aware of evil people.

Natavan wishes to see her lyrical hero both beautiful and clever, because beauty and mind complete each other to her mind. She implores God to punish the enemy who creates difficulties and obstacles for the lovers.

With the purpose of uniting the literary forces of Shusha Natavan established a literary society (mejlis) and led it for a long time. When Natavan left Karabakh for Tiflis the creative activity of "Mejlisi – Uns" society slowed down.

Natavan's poetry made influence not only on Karabakh poets but also on the poets from Sheki, Shirvan, Baku, Guba, Derbend and Ganja.

During the active work of "Mejlisi Uns" a great tragedy happened to Natavan's family. Her loving son Mir Abbas from her second marriage died of a serious disease in 1885. Natavan experienced a great moral depression.

Because of this hard loss she felt terrible sufferings and wrote her poems with much pain.

Natavan complains about her fate, about fate's cruel treatment with her. She feels hurt and tired of life.

The loss of her son gave Natavan the endless themes for poems. She described the tragedy and loneliness of an unhappy mother, the loss of the son as a loss of a friend, a morally close person. While reading these poems one can feel the mother's pain and grief.

In the poems "Grief", "Regrets", "Don't go away", "Without you" and "To my son" Natavan was grieving over her son's death. Her mourning wasn't of a personal character – it was universal. Everyone who read these poems saw their own pain in the mother's grief.

*To my son Abbas*

Parted with you, I burn night and day,  
Like a thoughtless moth in a candleflame.

Like a rose you were destined to fade and die;  
Like a nightingale mourning its rose sing I.

My heart aches with longing to see you, my star,  
I roam like Medjnun in search of Leili.

I whisper your name, for your presence I sigh,  
Like a grief-stricken dove on a bough sing I.

Like Farhad from the source of my happiness banned,  
At the foot of the mountain of parting I stand.

Your name all these days I have chanted and sung  
Like a parrot with sugar under its tongue.

Haunted with sorrow, all day I wander;  
Burning with grief like a Salamander.

My heart, that once soared in a heaven of love,  
Broke its wings and was dashed to the earth from above.

Blind to the light of the sun and the moon,  
Like a moon eclipsed, I am shrouded on gloom.

Through my tears your image I always see,  
You dried up so soon, o my cypress-tree!

Oh, would I were blind not to see you dead.  
The sun now scorches the earth, your last bed.

My hopes were frustrated; you left me and died,  
I did not live to see you join your bride.

Your brown eyes expectantly looked at me;  
Was it only that mine your shrine should be?

I weep tears of blood, to sunlight I'm blind,  
As a lost soul I wander, Abbas, my child.



The anguish of losing you gnaws at my breast,  
Tears flow from my eyes without respite or rest.

*(Translated by Dorian Rottenberg)*

The poems devoted to Natavan's personal tragedy take the greater part of her creative activities. The readers feel both joyful and sad under the mysterious influence of Natavan's poetry. It's difficult to find another poetess-mother who wrote about her grief with so much skill and unique natural colours. The poetess who wrote of a mother's grief and the intricacy of a woman's psychology by using poetic images managed to raise her personal tragedy to the level of universal tragedy. Natavan's poems teach the readers to deeply understand the meaning of life, to tolerate the difficulties of life, to stand the child's death with courage, how to live through the happiness and tragedy.

After Mir Abbas's death Natavan fell ill. "Mejlisi Uns" society stopped its activities for a year. But the poets and writers didn't stop visiting Natavan. They helped her to recover both physically and morally.

If Natavan's poems of the first period of her creative work were full of joy, happiness, love to life and people, the gazels of the second period showed the moral and inner crisis, restless and dissatisfied feelings, the pain of worn-out and hurt love. Because of the sorrow and hopelessness of her mood Natavan sometimes gave way to sentimental descriptions. The poems like "My soul", "Goodbye", "I wish it were" and "The left woman" are of this kind.

Beloved, my poor, disastrous love drove me insane,  
Destroying my treasury of words and leaving me alone.

Could I ever achieve the happiness of your love? Never.  
Wild plains and barren deserts will be my home forever.

My sultan of love issued a decree for my death,  
And so sincere, I obeyed without a breath.

So sweet the sorrow of love, I never sighed  
But led that bitter life from the bottom of my heart.

Doctor, either leave your career, or treat me.  
Examine me and diagnose this mortal malady.

There is no one to treat this fatal sorrow, my God.  
So I treat my own wound, greasing it with my own blood

My tears burst forth, flooding the entire world  
Just as Noah's storm was everywhere heard .

Natavan, that merciless one ignored my mournings  
Though I suffered whole nights to mornings.

*(Translated by Shahla Naghiyeva and Alison Mandaville)*

Though Natavan sounds hopeless in these poems she doesn't call for death: she doesn't think that one can escape all the happenings in life by dying. One should live through these difficulties and pain, she thinks.

There is a great gap between Natavan's desires, dreams and the life reality. And though she realizes it she doesn't want to put up with the society and nature laws and even the Judgment Day. She doesn't understand why she was born and reproaches God Almighty for sufferings and tortures she had to experience. She doubts God's justice and grace because of the inequality, lawlessness, contradictions in the world, because of her tears and yearning for the lover.

She rebels against both the heavenly and worldly powers and desires the destruction of the unfair society.

Natavan's poetry isn't limited only to love motives. The description of nature occupies an important place in her works.

Joyous to me is the smell and beauty of the flower.  
Though I suffer for it, without loyalty is the flower.

Hurt in the garden, the nightengale fled from it.  
Then whom did she take to be her lover, the flower?

She dreamt of Fall and easily broke her vow.  
Nightingale grieved the betrayal of the flower.

My eyes burst crimson blood instead of tears,  
Filling my soul with the sorrow of the flower.

Should it be written dot by dot, spelled letter by letter,  
Never will it end, this life saga of the flower.

At such a sad scene the whole world moans and cries,  
Oh, my God, day by day feeling the grief of the flower.

In error, she cruelly tortured the nightingale.  
Her fault has punished her, changed the fate of the flower.

My soul, even so, all the world would rejoice and smile  
 If as a murderer the nightingale didn't kill the flower.

And were it still beautiful, bright and sweet in spirit,  
 It could replace the sun for the world, the flower.

*(Translated by Shahla Naghiyeva and Alison Mandaville)*

Natavan understood that women, her contemporaries, didn't have any rights and she envied free nature, free birds and flowers, and wished the women were as free as them ("A flower", "A moth", "A nightingale", "A Carnation", "A violet")

### *Lilac*

O flowering lilac, whose was the skilful hand that drew you?  
 O radiant –featured, was it a loving slave that drew you?

Chancing to penetrate into your palace, garden,  
 O poppy-cheeked, was it a skilful gardener drew you?

In this flowerbed world there were all too many plain faces:  
 Was that the reason why the almighty keeper drew you?

The flowers take their colours and fragrance from you,  
 As a flower the hand of the world's creator drew you.

What a wealth gentleness shows in your beauty!  
 With her gift of fancy bestowed by God, perhaps it was  
 Natavan that drew you?

*(Translated by Dorian Rottenberg)*

The gazel "Grief" written with redifs<sup>12</sup> (words repeated after rhyming words at the end of every other line in a gazal) takes a special place in Natavan's creative work.

Natavan's poems are outstanding for high figurativeness, colourfulness, the simple language, inner rhymes, repetitions, playful manner of writing, harmonious meters, unity of thought and so on. It explains the influence she showed on the poets of the following generations as about fifty of the poets who lived in the second half of

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<sup>12</sup> The word redif is of Arabic origin and means a row, strict order

It's a word or a phrase repeated at the end of a line after the rhyming word in Near Eastern, Middle Eastern and Azerbaijanian poetry. It is also used to emphasize the meaning as a literary device. We can see this literary pattern in the poems of the Azerbaijani poets like M. P. Vagif, M. V. Vidadi, M.A. Sabir etc.

XIX c. and the beginning of the XX c. devoted their poems to Natavan and wrote their gazals imitating Natavan.

Despite the fact that there weren't any printing houses in Natavan's time her works were widely spread in Azerbaijan and were discussed at all literary meetings.

Natavan didn't only gather Ganja's poets around herself but also promoted to establishment of literary societies in other parts of Azerbaijan – Shamakhi, Baku, etc.

Natavan was also famous as an artist. Her famous collection of paintings named "The album of flowers" is kept in the Azerbaijan Institute of Ancient Manuscripts. The pictures of flowers were followed by poems. She also made embroideries that testify to her excellent artistic taste.

Natavan's son's death ruined her health and life. Her financial position also worsened at that time. Her greedy solicitors and advisers took advantage of her helpless position and stole the khanlig's property. By the end of her life she became impoverished and had a lot of debts.

Devastated by financial need, grief and tragedy Natavan died in 1897 at the age of 67. She was buried in Agdam region of Azerbaijan in the place named "Imaret".

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*Summary***LYRICAL MOTIVES IN NATAVAN'S POETRY**

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The article entitled "Lyrical Motives in Natavan's Poetry" deals with the great woman representative of the Azerbaijani classic poetry Churshudbanu Natavan's life and creative activity. The article also puts light on specific features of her poetry and her contribution to the development of the Azerbaijani literature. Presentation of several samples of her gazals translated into English and footnotes of the words rich with national colour in the article will enable the English-speaking readers to more clearly understand the poet's poetry.