

Ashik Basti: My Saz¹ Wails for My Beloved

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Abstract

This article introduces the main features of the art of Azerbaijani ashik (*aşiq*) and also presents the life and a selection of the poetry of Ashik Basti (1836-1936), an outstanding female ashik of Azerbaijan during the nineteenth century. The art of ashik is a genre of Turkic folklore common to Central Asia and especially in Azerbaijan. It takes the form of the oral performance of mostly love narratives and sometimes epic stories accompanied mainly by the *saz*, a slender-necked lute, alongside other musical instruments. The Azerbaijani ashik, who combines the skills of a singer, dancer, storyteller, poet, word-master and actor, has been the key carrier of the ancient musical traditions of Azerbaijan throughout history. Ashik Basti's "Basti and Khanchoban", an epic literary-musical composition known as the *dastan*, is presented for the first time here in English translation. The phonic beauty of Ashik Basti's poems is sadly lost in translation but the close literal renditions reveal the resounding cry of the pain of tragic love.

Keywords: Ashik Basti, Azerbaijani, Turkic folklore, saz, dastan, love poetry

In the literary heritage of every nation, there are poetic and prose forms and other written materials which "reflect the discourse, ideology and cultural norms" of its society (Amirdabbaghian 470). In Azerbaijan, one of the main components of its literary traditions is its poetic folk literature. Its folksongs and verse forms arise from particular socio-historical situations and are closely connected with the lifestyle and living conditions of the people. It reflects the people's desires, specific features of their past, the period they lived in and their aspirations for the future (Fərəcov, *Hindistanın Böyük Azərbaycanlı Şairi: Mirzə Əsədulla xan Qalib* [India's Great Azerbaijani Poet: Mirza Asadullah Khan Qalib]).

The ashik form, which has its origins between the tenth and eleventh centuries, is one of the main branches of Azerbaijani folk literature. It is the art of words based on the quotidian experiences of the people. It deals with a range of themes, from moral values to the deeds of human beings, love, the beauty of nature, and heroism. Since

the early centuries, the art of ashik has been composed and transmitted orally. The first known written work of Azerbaijani folk literature is the *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud [Book of Dede Korkut]*. This first manuscript is believed to have been completed in the seventh or eighth century while the present compilation in Azerbaijan is the version that was written in the twelfth century in twelve volumes (Rinchindorji 386). Each canto of the book was composed by an ashik who deals heroically with the struggles of his time in his poetry (Rzayev).

The word *aşiq* comprises more than one meaning. First, it is believed that the word *aşiq [ashik]* was derived from the Arabic/Persian *eşq [eshq]* which means love (Hacıbəyli). Additionally, it is also suggested that *aş [ash]* is the root for *aşılamaq* which means *oxumaq [singing]* (Təhmasib). It is also recorded that the suffix *-iq* is based on the rules of the Azerbaijani language and has been used as an honorary title since the twelfth century in the works of Ahmad Yasawi, the founder of Turkish Sufism (Məmmədov).

Generally, ashik writings are produced by individuals who are not anonymous. Also, the time and setting in ashik writings are made clear and distinct. Several forms of ashik poetry created in the past are now available in written form (*Aşiq Sənəti [The Art of Ashik]*). Ashiks write poems, narrate tales and dance to different melodies based on the traditions of folklore (Nağıyeva and Məndəvilin 126). An ashik, therefore, performs multiple activities simultaneously. S/he creates a poem, composes the music for it, performs this music on a saz, sings the composed music skillfully and dances to the music with gestures in accordance with the meaning of the words of the song. This cultural and creative process, which is performed like a small scene, is sometimes also accompanied by a balaban² (Nəbiyev).

Oldfield, who refers to the ashiks as poet-minstrels, highlights their importance in the Azerbaijani community:

Aşiqs have always been mobile, and sharing music and narratives across larger geographies is integral to the tradition; as they traveled, aşiqs became conduits for music, stories, and news, creating a larger sense of community that went beyond nationality and language (Oldfield, “Reimagining the Caucasus: Music and Community in the Azerbaijani Aşiq Tradition”, 230).

The Azerbaijani ashik can be compared to the poetic art of the troubadours of various other nations. The Turkmen *Bakshy*, Kazakh/Kyrgyz *Aqyn*, Kyrgyz/Tajikistan *Bastakor*, French *Le Trouvère*, the ancient and medieval Scandinavian *Skald*, the European Minstrel, the ancient Greek Rhapsode and the Gaelic/British Bard are not so distant relations of the Azerbaijani ashik.

A vital part of the art of ashik is the saz. All ashiks must master the saz, which is descendent of the *gopuz*, a three-stringed ancient Azerbaijani musical instrument. The saz of Azerbaijan is described as follows:

The Azerbaijani saz is an instrument with eight or nine strings. It belongs to the lute family and is made of mulberry wood. The strings of the saz have a mellow metallic sound, which, when played expertly, can best be described as resembling the sound of waters of a rushing mountain river. (Oldfield, “Music of the Bards: So You Want to Become an Ashug”, 64).

The *hava* (pronounced ha-VA), which means *air*, is the name of a melody played on the saz. It is not a fixed melody but “a musical structure based on a modal scale with a recognizable pattern, which is flexible in performance” and has a range of invocations, mostly known by descriptive names such as “Yanıq Kərəm (Burnt Karam), Ruhani (Spiritual), Göyçə Qara Gözü (Black-Eyed [beauty] from Goycha) and Misri (Egyptian)” (Oldfield, “Music of the Bards: So You Want to Become an Ashug”, 64).

One of the most outstanding female representatives of the art of ashik in nineteenth-century Azerbaijan was Ashik Basti. Her happiness was tragically cut short, as reflected in her tales and dastans (epic poems). Basti was born in 1836 to a poor family in the Loh³ village of the Kalbajar region (Nağıyeva and Məndəvilin). At an early age, she showed signs of standing apart from her peers. However, the restrictions of her time posed many barriers; her father Karbalayi Bayramali did not see the importance of giving Basti an education. Despite her lack of education, Basti’s talent was evident at the professional saz ceremonies that she attended. She had a deep knowledge of Azerbaijani folk literature and was able to recite poems of her own at these folk ceremonies. She also learned to play the saz.

Playing the saz and becoming an ashik was a unique and lasting literary experience in Basti’s life as well as a revolutionary move for a woman in the nineteenth-century world of Azerbaijan. It was extremely challenging for a woman to handle the saz and perform as an ashik in a society where the religious prohibitions were firmly upheld by feudal-patriarchal rules (Fərəcov, Həyanım Yolları, Bir də ki Sazım [Roads and My Saz are My Best Supporters]). But Basti was a woman ahead of her time; she was also known to be an active member of ‘Gurban Bulaghi’, a famous literary *majlis* or gathering of her era (Pirusltanlı, Aşıq Bəsti "Bənövşələr" [Ashik Basti's "Violets"]). Her poems are the bold expressions of her will for a free society, her rejection of the prohibitions of her times and the struggle for the rights of the women of Azerbaijan.

The highlight of Basti’s life story was when she fell deeply in love with a shepherd sometime between the age of seventeen and eighteen. Her first love, however, was killed by a nobleman in her presence (Fərəcov,

Həyanım Yollardı, Bir də ki Sazım [Roads and My Saz are My Best Supporters]). Having helplessly witnessed this scene, Basti was thrown into a state of mental turmoil by this tragedy. In her poems, Basti refers to her sweetheart as Khanchoban⁴. In her lifetime, an epic dastan called ‘Basti and Khanchoban’ was created to deal with her ill-fated love. She avenges the nobleman who had killed her beloved by cursing him in her goshmas,⁵ as seen below:

Azerbaijani

A bəy, nə gəzirsən halı-havalı,
Süleyman mülkünün ziyəsi kimi.
Nədəndir yaxşının başın kəsməyə
Hazırsan xəncərin tiyəsi kimi.

Güvənməyən dövlətinə, malına,
Lənət olsun qeyrətinə, arına,
Haqdan zəfər dəysinbürcü barına,
Lüt qalınən palaz iynəsi kimi.

Ağladım doyunca, gülmədim haşa,
Bir ah çəksəm, dağlar gələr baş-başa.
Bəsti deyər: səni də düş ataşa,
Yan novruz şamının piltəsi kimi.

English

Oh, nobleman (bey⁶), why do you go about so
haughtily
like the owner of Suleyman’s⁷ estate?
Why are you always ready, like a sharp dagger,
to slash and cut down good people?

You, who boast of your fortune and fame,
Cursed be your pride and manliness.
May God tear down your tower of treasure,
and may you walk naked like the carpet-
weaving needle.

I am fed up with crying, with never a smile.
I sigh once and the mountains go head to head.
Basti says: You too — climb into the fire.
Burn like the wick of Novruz⁸.

The poems below depict Basti consoling herself by losing herself in nature as she longs for her dead lover; she sings her sorrow to the clouds, poppies, mountains, and valleys:

Azerbaijani

Yarın qanlı köynəyi tək,
Qızarır yol üstə lələ!...
Xançobanı gətir dilə,
Bir şirin can istə, lələ!

Dərdim dönüb hekayətə,
Canımı dözər bu zillətə?
Yar məzarın ziyarətə,
Gəlib dəstə-dəstə lələ!

Hara getsəm gələrəm mən,
Ahu kimi mələrəm mən.
Bəsti deyər: ölərəm mən,
Bu dağlardan getsə lələ.

English

Like the beloved's bloody shirt
the poppy blooms red along life's road.
Make the chief shepherd sing!
Ask for a sweet soul, Oh poppy.

My grief has become legendary.
How will my soul survive this sorrow?
Many bouquets of poppies have come
to visit my beloved's resting place.

Wherever you go, I would follow.
I would bleat like a gazelle.
Basti says: I would die
if ever the poppy leaves these mountains.

She mourned all her days for the untimely death of her beloved and railed on the cruelty of life. Basti dealt with her sorrow not only in her bayatis⁹ and garaylis¹⁰ but also expressed it in the melody of her saz. She was also not afraid of criticizing the khans¹¹ of her time for their torture of the poor and needy and against whom she had to struggle throughout her life. Some of these feelings are expressed in the lines below:

Azerbaijani

Məleykə boyludur, şirin ləhcəli,
Əzəldən tamaşa olan bu dünya.
Qoca cadugərdir aldadar səni,
Cavanlıq donunda qalan bu dünya.

English

With an angelic stature and a sweet voice,
This world is a mere show from the beginning.
It is an old wizard who may cheat you,
Still dressed in the clothes of youth.

Qananı eyləyib talesiz, baxtsiz,
Əyibdi qəddini, qocaldıb vaxtsiz.
Çoxlarını qoyub eyvan-otaqsız,
Varlığın dərdinə qalan bu dünya.

Qəmdən pay götürdüm, nalədən qismət,
Görmədim bir ləzzət, çəkdim əziyyət.
Canda eşq atəşi, dildə məhəbbət,
Bəstini odlara salan bu dünya.

This world makes wise people, ill-fated, and
unlucky.
Untimely their backs are bent and they grow
decrepitude.
Turning multitudes out of their homes,
This world only cares for its rich.

I have taken my share of grief and wailing,
I have seen no joy but felt only pain.
And yet, love's fire is upon my heart and
tongue —
You, the universe, has set Basti on fire.

After the tragic turn of events in her life, Basti left her native village of Kalbajar and wandered around the villages of Goycha (Piruslanlı, Aşıq Bəsti "Lalə" [Ashik Basti's "Poppy"]). She settled in the Basarkecher region for a while (Piruslanlı, Aşıq Bəsti "Bənövşələr" [Ashik Basti's "Violets"]). As she got older, she missed her birthplace and went back to Kalbajar, where she spent the rest of her life. She also visited the Dashkasan, Gadabay and Samukh regions in her lifetime (Piruslanlı, Aşıq Bəsti "Lalə" [Ashik Basti's "Poppy"]). She was often invited to wedding ceremonies.

Basti went on to lose her eyesight from her endless crying and she grew old well before her time (Piruslanlı, Aşıq Bəsti "Lalə" [Ashik Basti's "Poppy"]). She was called *Blind Basti* by her people and a saying was created about her: 'Even the stone was crying when Basti cried' (Əliyev). However, she lived a long life in light of what was seen to be her rich soul (Piruslanlı, Aşıq Bəsti "Lalə" [Ashik Basti's "Poppy"] 6). She died in 1936, at the grand age of one hundred.

Basti's poems resonate with her deep affinity for the rich Azerbaijani natural environment and landscape in which she was raised: the mountains and valleys, fruits, flowers, birds, and water springs, and these form the metaphoric core of her poetic expressions. The following lines from a stanza express this inseparable kinship between her and nature: "It is my grief within me, / My breast is my autumnal garden. / My sigh is my blowing wind, / And my eyes are my water springs." Likewise, the imagery of fire recurs in her poems as a metaphor for her vehement anger against the injustices she and others had suffered at the hands of the feudal rulers: "I am Basti,

whose whole body has caught fire; / You burn me in the fire, partridge [partridge is with reference to the oppressors, the sultan and the khans]; / You burned Basti to the ground with fire”.

Basti’s poems are not only distinctly visual with her dense use of metaphor and Azerbaijani idioms (for example, “I wish to decorate the place between the crescent-shaped eyebrows”; or, “your own words may turn into a scorpion and snake against you”) but also reverberate with undaunted courage in the face of pain. A fearless and relentless hope for retribution for the oppressors is, for example, can be sharply sensed in her tirade of curses: “May the tongue be cut off, / Of the one flattering the betrayer. / May the hailstones fall upon his farm, / That has so soon become green. /... May the betrayer’s abode be destroyed, / And people pave their path on it. / ... May that nobleman’s arm be cut off / Who left Basti, howling.” As for her phonic artistry, which comprises a fine mesh of sound patterns, as in for example the “a-a-a-a/a-a-a-b/a-b-a-b” end rhymes, alliterations, and assonance, they were near impossible to be transposed into the English language, as found by the authors of this paper. The following stanza is an example of the intricate network of sounds typical of Basti’s poems:

Azerbaijani	English
Ağladım doyunca, gülmədim haşa,	I am fed up with crying, with never a smile.
Bir ah çəksəm, dağlar gələr baş-başa.	I sigh once and the mountains go head to head.
Bəsti deyər: səni də düş ataşa,	Basti says: You too — climb into the fire.
Yan novruz şamının piltəsi kimi.	Burn like the wick of Novruz

The ashik art of Basti is linguistically and stylistically opulent while still being raw and stark in its emotions.

In 1969, Pirsultanli gathered Basti’s poems and published them under the title, *Lalə* [Poppy]. The anthology was highly lauded by the Azerbaijani literary community and scholars (Pirusltanlı, Aşıq Bəsti "Lalə" [Ashik Basti's "Poppy"]). They wrote articles and carried out research on Basti’s creativity. Lines from her poetry were quoted as epigraphs in literary works. Well-known scholars like Tahmasib, Afandiyev, and Gurbanov, as well as writers such as Rafibayli, Elchin, and Aslan, wrote valuable reviews of her poems. Jafarzade included much of Basti’s poetry in an anthology entitled *The Ashik and Women Poets of Azerbaijan* which was published in 1974. In 2013, Pirsultanli published another collection of Basti’s poems entitled *Bənövşələr* [Violets] in Ganja after his thorough research on Basti’s poetry and visiting her close relatives living in different regions of Azerbaijan (Pirusltanlı, Aşıq Bəsti "Bənövşələr" [Ashik Basti's "Violets"]).

Basti's poetry is deeply rooted in the norms of folk literature and has been the subject of much research by Azerbaijani scholars for many years now. Ashik Alasgar, the legendary master of the art of ashik in Azerbaijan, lauds Basti's poetry and singing and refers to her as the 'singing nightingale' (Nağıyeva and Məndəvilin).

Had Ashik Basti lived in this era, she would have been very pleased to know that she was amongst the rebel pioneers who had been pivotal in forcefully opening up the doors for women ashiks to gradually take center stage with male ashiks as is the case in present-day Azerbaijan. Oldfield and Nikaeen (2018) inform us that professional women ashiks are increasingly seen and heard on radio and television in Baku, the capital and commercial center of Azerbaijan.

Ashik Basti's Poems

Azerbaijani

Ayrı

Əlbət yarım yada düşüb,
Ölürəm dağlardan ayrı.
Bu el mənim, o el sənin,
Ölürəm dağlardan ayrı.

Məzarına gül bağlayan,
Dumanı-çəni ağlayan.
Xançobana yas saxlayan,
Ölürəm dağlardan ayrı.

Ağçınqıldı mənim dağım,
Bəsti, hanı öz oylağım?!
Dil deyir, getmir ayağım,
Ölürəm dağlardan ayrı.

English

Apart From

My beloved is etched in my thoughts,
I am dying apart from the mountains.
Wandering, wandering around the villages,
I am dying apart from the mountains.

Scattering the flowers on his grave,
I weep with the fog and clouds.
The mountains are mourning for Khanchoban,
I am dying apart from the mountains,

Aghchingil¹² is your mountain,
Basti, where is your own land?!
My tongue wants me to, but my feet aren't
moving,
I am dying apart from the mountains.

Dağlar

Dağ üstündən çəkdim dağı,
De, nəydi günahım, dağlar?!
Sən mənə kəsildim yağı,
Tutsun səni ahım, dağlar.

Qara gəlibdir dövranım,
Əl vurma, tökülər qanım.
Hanı mənim Xançobanım,
Oydu qibləgahım, dağlar.

Niyə belə yazdı fələk,
Ayrılığa dözmür ürək.
Bəsti kimi sən də qal tək,
Olmasın pənahım, dağlar.

Tapılmaz

Üzülübdür canım el tənəsindən,
Hamı deyər: Bəsti evdə tapılmaz.
Bir sazıdı, bir sözüdü, bir özü,
Bir beləsi daha Löydə tapılmaz.

Bu qınağa vallah, mənəm dözüürəm,
Usanmışam, ölməyə də hazırım.
Dərdimi deməyə divan gəzirəm,
Yerdə axtarıram, göydə tapılmaz.

The Mountains

You have wounded me again and again
What was my guilt and sin, oh mountains?!
You have turned into my painful enemy,
May you be cursed, oh mountains!

My destiny has grown dark,
Do not touch me, I may bleed.
Where is my Khanchoban,
Who was my sole support, oh mountains?!

Why did my God decree me such a fate?
My heart cannot endure this separation.
I wish you too suffer loneliness like Basti
For not being my supporter, oh mountains!

You Cannot Be Found

I have grown weary of the people's blame
All say no one can find Basti at home.
She is only a saz, a word and herself
You cannot find one like her in Loy¹³

I alone have to bear all this blame,
I have laid myself down, even ready for death,
Seeking for a court to hear my plea,
on Earth, in the Sky, but it cannot be found.

Hanı Xançobanı, a qoca dağlar,
Tutulub gözlərim, görməyir ağlar.
Nə tez viran oldu bağçalar, bağlar,
Barlı kollarımda meyvə tapılmaz.

Dəyməmiş

Varmı ürəyinə zalım dövrəndə,
Fələyin əlindən zədə dəyməmiş.
Namərdin ucundan, nadan dilindən,
Çatıb qulağına hədə dəyməmiş.

Demirəm mələyəm, nə də ki, göyçək,
Sözümdə yalan yox, gerçəyəm, gerçək.
Ötməyib böyrümdən bir erkək milçək,
Astanama sultan, gədə dəyməmiş.

Bəstiyəm, odlara qalandı canım,
Bu tənəyə necə dözümlü, dayanım.
Gəlmədi ağ günüm, təzə dövrənim, Düşmənlər
yummaz ağzın pedə dəyməmiş

Where is my Khanchoban, you, ancient
mountains?

My eyes are blind, I cannot see but only weep,
So early faded are the gardens and the valleys,
And, fruits in my once-fertile shrubs cannot be
found.

Untouched

Is there anyone in these cruel times,
Who has not suffered an injury from fate?
Who from the sharp tip of a fool's tongue or
cursed person,
Has not received any threat or menace?

Neither an angel nor a beauty am I,
A lie I do not tell, I am all truth,
Not even a male fly passed me by,
Nor a sultan or a lad stepped on my threshold.

I am Basti, whose whole body has caught fire,
I have no more strength to stand this blame.
The happy chapter of my life and my lucky
days never did come,
The enemy will not shut his mouth unless
beaten with a baton.

Necoldu?

Başına döndüyüm, ay uca dağlar,
Səndə gəzən ağır ellər necoldu?
Ala çayvan-çadır, dəyə quranlar,
O polad biləklər, qollar necoldu?

Söylə bir, növrağım niyə pozuldu?
Ağ günüm üstünə qara yazıldı.
Cəfa gördüm, əlim-əldən üzüldü,
Su üstünə gələn yollar necoldu?

Canım ola hilal qaşın əyrisi,
Dərdin çəkən varımı, məndən qeyrisi?
Vur başına, ağla illər ayrısı,
Bəsti, soldu çəmən, güllər necoldu?

Bilmirəm

Uçubdu könlümün bürcü-barısı,
Neçə bənnə ilə hörə bilmirəm.
Ağlamaqdan tor gəlibdi gözümə,
İşıqlı dünyanı görə bilmirəm.

Where Have They Gone?

You, my lovely high mountains, I would die
for you.
Where did the people go who were walking on
you?
Pitching a tent, building shelters in your valley,
Those with strong wrists and arms, where have
they gone?

Tell me, why have my happy moments
collapsed thus,
Black was engraved upon my white life.
Much was I tortured and from my lover's
hands wrenched,
Roads leading to water springs, where have
they gone?

I wish to decorate the place between the
crescent-shaped eyebrows,
Is there anyone who carries your pain other
than me?
Hit your head with your hands and weep for
years,
Basti, the green lawns are faded, where have
the flowers gone?

I Do Not Know

The fence of my heart has fallen,
I cannot restore it with bricklayers.
My eyes have turned blind from crying,
This bright world, I can see no more.

Əyibdi qəddimi çərxi-zamana,
Qiymət qoyan yoxdu yaxşı-yamana.
Gədələr bəy olub girib meydana,
Bəs kim dözər bu dağlara, bilmirəm?!

Əzəl gündən qara gəlib rüzgarım,
Bu qəmü-möhnətdən artıb azarım.
Qəlp çıxıb mətahım, yoxdu bazarım,
Bəstiyəm, dərdimə çara bilmirəm.

Soruş

Nəyinə gərəkdi, gəlinəm, qızam,
Bunu özümdən yox, ellərdən soruş.
Dilinlə ürəyin bir qərar olsun,
Düzü düz danışan, dillərdən soruş.

Boş danışma, boş başına zor olar,
Boş başına dünya bir gün dar olar.
Öz sözün özünə əqrəb, mar olar,
Taleyini gələnlərdən soruş.

Taleyimin sultanı mən, xanı mən,
Dürüst bax, Bəstiyəm, yaxşı tanı, mən.
Başına çevirəm bu dünyanı mən,
Dünyanı düz gəzdim, yollardan soruş.

These hard times have bent my body,
There is no justifier of people's deeds.
The boys act like their noblemen,
Who can bear such grief, I don't know!

I have not been lucky from the first day,
My disease has gotten worse with this sorrow,
My time has passed, there is no place for me,
I am Basti, my illness is beyond cure.

Ask

Why do you care if I am married or not?
Ask about it from others, not from me.
Let your heart and tongue tell the same,
And ask for the truth from unlying tongues.

Do not talk nonsense, it will damage your
empty head,
This world, for once, will seem small for your
useless head.
Your own words may turn into a scorpion and
snake against you,
Ask the years to come about your destiny.

It is me, the Khan and Sultan of my destiny,
Look at me in the eye, and know this Basti
well.
I am able to turn this world upside down.
I took the right path in this world, ask the roads
about it.

Basti's Gerayli Poems

Kəklik

Qah-qahın alır canımı,
Canım oda yaxan kəklik.
Sən ki, belə sitəmkarсан,
Ya soltansan, ya xan, kəklik.

Qayada-daşda gəzərsən,
Çəməndə gülə bənzərsən.
Gəlin kimi bəzənərsən,
Açılıbdı yaxan, kəklik.

Bəsti deyər: pis günümdə,
Gəl oxuma, nəş günümdə.
Ağçınqılda, yas günümdə,
Ələ xına yaxan kəklik.

Daş, Ay Gəlin

Görməyəydim bu dağlarda,
Haray, səni, kaş, ay gəlin!
Söylə, sənə kim qarğadı,
Niyə oldun daş, ay gəlin?

Hardan bilim haralısan,
Dağ görmüsən yaralısan?!
İsmətlisən, həyalısan,
Özü qələm qaş, ay gəlin.

Partridge

Your singing takes my spirit from my body,
You burn me in the fire, partridge.
Since you torture people so much,
You are either the sultan or khan, oh partridge.

You walk on the rocks and stones,
You look like a flower on the grass.
You are made up like a bride,
Your garment is unbuttoned, oh partridge.

Basti would say: on my unlucky day,
Come, but don't sing, on my aching day.
On my mourning day, in Aghchingil¹⁴
You henna¹⁵ your nails, oh partridge.

Overflow, Oh Bride

I wish I had not beheld you upon these
mountains,
How I wish I had not, oh Bride!
Let me know who cast a curse upon you,
And, turned you into a stone, oh Bride?

How do I know where you are from?
Have you had sorrow, are you wounded?!
You are chaste and modest,
Your eyebrows are like pencil-drawn, oh
Bride.

Qoymaz burdan dərdsiz keçəm,
Duruşu qəm, baxışı qəm.
Ağlar Bəsti taleyi kəm,
Durmaz gözdə yaş, ay gəlin.

Görəydim

Dağlarda lalə, nərgizi,
Gülləri dəstə, görəydim.
Yasəmən, qızılgülü,
Dərəydim, dostu verəydim.

Gül dərməsin, a yağımı,
Çəkər piltə, a yağımı.
O yağının ayağımı,
Məzarı üstə görəydim.

Yoxdur, Xançobanım hanı?
Uçub dağların bir yanı.
Bəsti, səni ağladanı,
Şivəndə, yasda görəydim.

Löydə Qalib

Yolçunu yoldan eyləmə,
Bala, sazım Löydə qalib.
Qocalmışam, itib huşum,
Cəmi sözüüm Löydə qalib.

I cannot pass by here without grief,
Sorrow upon my countenance, sorrow upon
my face,
Unlucky Basti would weep,
Tears cannot be stopped in her eyes, oh Bride!

I Wish I Could See

I wish I could see the poppies and daffodils
Bunched together in the mountains.
I could pick the jasmines and roses
And present them to my friend.

May my enemy never pick up flowers,
My wounded leg would pull me back,
I wish to see my foot
On the grave of my enemy¹⁶.

Where is my Khanchoban, where?
One side of the mountains has collapsed.
Basti, I wish to see in painful mourning
The one who made you moan.

Left in Loy

Do not stop a traveler on his way,
Darling, I have left my saz in Loy.
I have become older, lost my consciousness,
And, have left all my words in Loy.

Köhnə dərdim təzələmə,
Yara üstə duz ələmə.
Qocalmışam, söz eləmə,
Zər-qotazım Löydə qalıb.

Vədə olub yar olmuşam,
Mən də baxtavar olmuşam.
Ağlamaqdan kor olmuşam,
Bəsti, gözüm Löydə qalıb.

Gəldi

Göz dikmişdim ağ buluda,
Yağa-yağa qara gəldi.
Səhər burdan qalxan duman,
Qayıtdı, dağlara gəldi.

Ey Xudaya, nə gərmişdi,
Uzaqlara şimşək düşdü.
Can üşüdü, tük ürpəşdi,
Könül ahu-zara gəldi.

Ağçınqıldan endi sürü,
Boş qaldı dağların səri.
Bəsti deyir: bir bax bəri,
Xançobanım hara gəldi?

Düşdü

Başım üstədən bulud keçdi,
Göz yaşı çəmənə düşdü.
Xəbər aldı Xançobanı,
Şivən qurmaq mənə düşdü.

Do not remind me of my old grief,
Do not sieve salt onto my wound,
Do not gossip about my age,
I have left all my embellishments in Loy.

Once I was someone's beloved,
Once I was the happiest,
Now I have become blind from weeping,
Basti, I have left my eyes in Loy.

Came

I was staring at the white cloud,
While raining, it turned black.
Fog rising from here in the morning,
Returns to the mountains.

My God, what time has come,
Lightnings crashed far away.
My body was cold and shivered,
And my soul grieved.

The flocks descended from Aghchingil,
And, the mountain peaks became empty.
Basti would say, listen to me,
Where has my Khanchoban gone?

Fell Down

Clouds have passed over my head,
Their tears fell upon the meadow.
They asked me about Khanchoban,
It was me on whom sorrow fell.

Ađı deyib çox ađladım,
Göydə buludu saxladım.
Daş-torpađı qucaqladım,
Ah-naləm, Vətənə düşdü.

Bəsti neylər daha Löyü,
Bay olmasın bəylər bəyi.
Ünüm tutdu yeri-göyü,
Dağ, dumana, çənə düşdü.

Düşsün

Müxənnətə can deyənin,
Dili düşsün, dili düşsün.
Vədəsiz göy zəmisinə,
Dolu düşsün, dolu düşsün.

Dil dedim, ađladı cahın,
Bir sırım qalmadı pünhan.
Yurdu olsun yerlə-yeksan,
Üstdən elin yolu düşsün.

Düşmənlə kim peyman bağlar?
Sinəmdən getməyib dağlar.
Bu Bəstini qoyub ađlar,
Zalım bəyin qolu düşsün!

I mourned and wept torrents,
And stopped the clouds in the sky.
I embraced the stone and soil,
My cry echoed through Motherland.

Basti does not need Loy any more,
May you never be happy, bey of beys.
My sorrow filled the Earth and the Sky,
And, enveloped the mountains and the fog.

May It Fall

May the tongue be cut off,
Of the one flattering the betrayer.
May the hailstones fall upon his farm,
That has so soon become green.

I lamented and the whole world cried,
I have had no sorrow in secret,
May the betrayer's abode be destroyed,
And people pave their path on it.

Who dares to make a vow with the foe?
All these sorrows press upon my breast,
May that nobleman's arm be cut off
Who left Basti, howling.

Heç

Gah ağladım, gah sızladım,
Şad olmadım, gülmədim heç.
Qara gəldi, ayım, ilim,
Ömür getdi, bilmədim heç.

Ağçınqılda gözüm qaldı,
Sinələrdə sözüm qaldı.
Güllər düzüm-düzüm qaldı,
Yara gül də dərmədim heç.

Ayrılıq mənə dərd oldu,
Zamana çox namərd oldu.
Ev-eşiyim yer-yurd oldu,
Bəsti, Löyü görmədim heç.

Ayrim Elindədir

Aşıqların dastanları,
Sözü ayrim elindədi.
Ala gözlü gözəllərin,
Gözü ayrim elindədi.

Şirin-şirin xəyalların,
Gözəl mixəyi xalların,
Ceyranların, maralların,
İzi ayrim elindədi.

Mərcan-mərcan bulaqların,
Mənzərəli oylaqların.
Sərin sulu yaylaqların,
Özü ayrim elindədi.

Never

Sometimes I burst into tears and weep,
Neither am I happy nor do I laugh.
My months and years have turned unlucky,
How my life has passed, I do not know.

For Aghchingil, I have always longed.
In people's minds, I left my words,
The flowers lie in bunches,
I never picked a flower for my beloved.

This separation has been my sorrow,
My time has been most wicked,
My house and land were annihilated,
You, Basti, would never see Loy.

In Ayrim¹⁷ Land

Ashiks' dastans and words,
Are in Ayrim Land.
The dreams of the blue-eyed beauties
Are in Ayrim Land.

Sweet, sweet dreams,
Beautiful, brown moles,
The footsteps of deer and stags
Are in Ayrim Land.

The coral-like water springs,
The exquisite valleys,
Summer pastures in cool-watered mountains,
Are in Ayrim Land.

Xəzan tökdürməsin barın,
Əhdinə düz olan yarın.
Bəsti deyər: hər ilqarın,
Düzü ayırım elindədi.

Bənövşələr

O yar gəzən oylaqlarda,
Bir də açdı bənövşələr.
Səpələndi dağa-daşa,
Yaldan aşdı bənövşələr.

Yaralı bülbüllər kimi,
Kola düşdü bənövşələr.
Yarəb, o Tutqu çayını,
Necə keçdi bənövşələr?

Bir quş kimi yoxa çıxdı,
Hara uçdu bənövşələr?
Bəsti, Xançobanım kimi,
Vaxtsiz köçdü bənövşələr.

Əylənməz

Meyvələri kal-kal düşər,
Hər ağacda bar əylənməz.
Uca dağlar saxlar qarını,
Alçaq dağda qar əylənməz.

May the fallen not spoil the mood,
Of the beloved devoted to his vow.
Basti would say: being faithful to the promise,
Is in Ayrim Land.

Violets

In the valleys where my beloved walked
Spring again, the violets.
Scattered on the mountains and rocks,
And over the hills, are the violets.

Like wounded nightingales,
Fallen into the bushes, are the violets.
Oh God, I wonder, how the Tutgu river,
The violets have crossed.

Like a bird, they disappeared,
Where flew the violets?
Basti, like your Khanchoban,
Untimely passed away the violets.

Cannot Keep

The fruits will fall unripe,
Not every tree can keep its fruit.
The high mountains keep their snow,
But on the low mountains, snow will not stay.

İtkin yarı soraqlaşdım,
Alçaq, uca dağlar aşdım.
Səni gördüm, yolu çaşdım,
Yox, bu yerdə yar əylənməz.

Bəstini yandırır-b yaxdın,
Sən hardan uğruma çıxdın?
Qara pula dönsün baxdın,
Ac qarında var əylənməz.

Bayatılar

Əzizinəm oy dərdim,
Oy dərmanım, oy dərdim.
Girdim yarın bağına,
Gül yerinə, oy dərdim.

A Bəsti, bulud ağlar,
Göy kişnər, bulud ağlar.
Səni qəhər boğanda,
Gözündə bulud ağlar.

Ağlamasın neyləsin,
Dərdin kimə söyləsin.
Bəsti xəstə ha deyil,
Loğman çarə eyləsin.

Bəstini qəmi üzər,
Dərdi-ələmi üzər.
Gözün yaşı göllənsə,
İçində gəmi üzər.

My eyes searched for my lost beloved,
Scanning the high and low mountains,
I beheld you and lost my way,
No, my love, you cannot abide here.

You burned Basti to the ground with fire,
How did you, khan, cross into my destiny?
May your destiny be as worthless as a penny,
A starving stomach understands not the value
of wealth, but food.

Bayatis

My dear, my sorrow,
Oh, my cure, my pain.
I entered the beloved's garden,
And picked up sorrow instead of a flower.

Oh Basti, the clouds will weep,
The skies will roar; the clouds will wail.
When you are drowned in sorrow,
The clouds in your eyes will rain hail.

If not weep, what would she do?
To whom would she share her grief?
Basti has not fallen bodily ill,
How would Luqman¹⁸ then heal her?

Basti's sorrows will destroy her,
Her grief will destroy the whole people.
If her tears form a lake
A ship could sail on it.

İçimdəki dağımdı,
Sınəm xəzan bağımıdı.
Ahım əsən küləyim,
Gözlərim bulağımdı.

A Bəsti, baxar doymaz,
Yandırar, yaxar doymaz.
Baxdıqca gözlərimdən,
Qanlı yaş axar doymaz.

Xançoban, el götürər,
Torpağı bel götürər.
De, Bəsti, ağlamasın,
Qəbrini sel götürər.

Dağların daşı mənəm,
Bulağın başı mənəm.
Yar deyib, kim ağlasa,
Gözünün yaşı mənəm.

Bəsti deyər: deryada,
Gənim qalib deryada.
Ağladım, göz yaşımıdan,
Doldu, daşdı derya da.

It is my grief within me,
My breast is my autumnal garden.
My sigh is my blowing wind,
And my eyes are my water springs.

Hey Basti, they would stare at you,
And, burn you to the ground, relentlessly.
As I watch her, from my eyes,
Tears flow like streams of blood unceasingly.

Khanchoban, the natives will bury you,
It is the shovel that will heap the soil,
Tell Basti, do not weep,
For tearful floods may stream into the tomb.

The stones of the mountains, I am.
The head of the water spring, I am.
My love said: If someone cries,
Tears in their eyes, I am.

Basti would say: out at sea,
My ship was left out at sea.
I wept and down cascaded my tears,
overflowing and drowning the sea.

Notes

¹ The national musical instrument of Azerbaijan; a long-necked stringed instrument of the lute family.

² Balaban or balaman is another national musical instrument of Azerbaijan. It is a cylindrical-bore, double-reed wind instrument of about 35 centimeters (14 in) in length with eight finger holes and one thumb hole.

³ The name of the village originates from the name of the Loh castle. The village was called Löy in the early ages. After the establishment of the Soviet Union in Azerbaijan, the name of the village was written as “Lev” in official state documents between 1930 and 1940.

⁴ The head or chief shepherd.

⁵ Qoshma/Goshma is an ashik syllabic poetic form in quatrains with a strict rhyme pattern.

⁶ The title for a chieftain, traditionally used to refer to the leaders or rulers of small and big domains.

⁷ The name of a sultan.

⁸ Novruz is an Azerbaijani name for the traditional ancient New Year as celebrated at the time of the spring equinox throughout the greater region of Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

⁹ Folk literary genre of lyrical poetry. Each verse consists of four lines with seven syllables. The third line is based on free verse, while the other three lines must rhyme. The main idea of the poem is encapsulated in the last two lines.

¹⁰ The main genres of Azerbaijani Ashiq literature include goshma, dastan, ustadnameh, as well as their poetic forms — gerayli, divani and tajnis.

¹¹ A title for a ruler in Turkic languages.

¹² The name of a mountain.

¹³ The name of a village.

¹⁴ A mountain in the Kalbajar area in Azerbaijan.

¹⁵ A ceremony of “henna smearing” is held on the evening of the first day of the wedding at the home of the bride. The bride’s nearest female friends and relatives are invited to this event. A group of young boys and girls with musicians come from the groom’s house. The nearest relatives of the groom smear henna on the bride’s fingers and give gifts.

¹⁶ A metaphor in Azerbaijani referring to victory over an enemy.

¹⁷ People living in the mountainous places who have a specific dialect of the Azerbaijani language.

¹⁸ A wise man in the Islamic tradition; the ‘Surah Luqman’ which is the thirty-first chapter of the Qur’an is named after him.

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