

The Story of Hīr Rāmjhā

The story of Hīr and Rāmjhā is a beautiful epic that is read, sung and possibly even lived by many. Hīr was a beautiful young woman from a wealthy family. Rāmjhā was the youngest of four brothers from a poor family. After a confrontation with his brothers, Rāmjhā decided to leave home and see the world outside his little village. He comes across a new village where he meets Hīr. Hīr's family offers Rāmjhā a job herding cattle. Hīr becomes mesmerized by Rāmjhā's gentleness in caring for the animals and his skills at playing the flute. The two eventually fall in love with one another and meet secretly for years. One day while the two were together, Hīr's uncle Kaido sees them and tells Hīr's parents of their daughter's preposterous behavior. How could a wealthy girl like Hīr fall for the hired help? Hīr's family forces her to marry another man. During the ceremony Kaido pays the priest to perform the ceremony even though it was against Hīr's will.

Rāmjhā was left broken hearted, and while upset, met a religious person. Rāmjhā realized that his Hīr was gone so he decided to become a Jogi. He went from village to village reciting the name of the Divine. He arrived at a village where he was reunited with Hīr. The two escaped but were caught by the Māharājā's police. That night the city was in flames. The Maharaja freed Rāmjhā and allowed him to marry Hīr.

Hīr and Rāmjhā went back to Hīr's village where even Hīr's parents agreed to their marriage. On the wedding day, Kaido poisoned Hīr so that the wedding could not take place. When Rāmjhā was told the news, he rushed to her aid but was too late; Hīr had already died. Rāmjhā was broken hearted and died on her grave.

Courtesy of: http://www.Pañjābilok.com/misc/movies/story_heer_Rānjhā.htm

Hīr Wāris Shāh

In the tradition of Pañjābī Qissa poetry the arrival of Wāris Shāh was an epoch making event, which changed the status, tone and tenor of Pañjābī poetry. More than any other poet, it is Wāris Shāh alone who made Pañjābī language enter every heart and hearth of Pañjāb. Hīr is the supreme achievement not only of the poet but also of Pañjābī poetry. Wāris Shāh is a model poet who inspired and guided generations of Pañjābī poets belonging to the medieval as well as modern period. He borrowed the story and plot of the legend of Hīr - Rāmjhā and structured it anew and contrary to early happy endings raised it to the level of tragedy of classic dimensions. The beauty of this epic poem is that it has attracted every critic worth the name and has led to a variety of interpretations and critical approaches. Some have interpreted this poem from a Marxist point of view whereas others have analysed it from the Freudian angle.

Expression of the Pañjābī Psyche & Culture

Whatever be the conclusion of the critics, they are unanimous in their verdict that Wāris Shāh is the first secular poet of Pañjāb who sang full-throatedly about Pañjāb and Pañjābīat and left a writing which is the soulful passionate expression of the Pañjābī psyche, culture and aspirations. This poem can be viewed from the historical, sociological, mystical, artistic and poetic viewpoints.

One thing, about which there is no dispute between Pañjābīs across the borders, is their love, affection, regard and respect for Wāris Shāh. One can say that he is the most unique poet ever produced in Pañjābī literature. His Hīr is so popularly read and recited all over Pañjāb that people feel proud in owning Wāris Shāh as their very own bard whose poetry has already survived two centuries of criticism and scrutiny and will stand the test of time in future too.

He has left only one work behind. The immortal Hīr, which has enthralled and fascinated generations of listeners and readers, is not only a great literary achievement but also a spiritual testament. The story of Hīr and Rāmjhā had already become a great love-legend in a tradition of high romance and has been written by his predecessors like Damodar and Mukbal. In the hands of Wāris this legend was chiselled and distilled in a verse around 1766 AD, which became the great bard's poetic destiny.

The poet was so passionately possessed by this work that when he had completed 600 odd stanzas of varying length, he had practically written down Pañjāb's heart and soul for all times. After this great achievement, it became a tradition in Pañjābī poetry that every budding and aspiring poet had to reproduce, in poetic form, the story of Hīr and Rāmjhā so as to establish his poetic credentials but every poet accepted the superiority and nobility of Wāris and adopted him as a model and an ideal.

Though not much is known about his life, historical evidence shows that Wāris Shah was born in 1735 AD in a Sayyad family which enjoyed great respect and prestige in the village of Jandiala Sher Khan in the district of Sheikhupura, now in Pakistan. His father's name was Gulshar Shāh. Wāris Shāh has acknowledged himself as a disciple of Pir Makhdum of Kasur. Wāris Shāh's parents are said to have died in his early years and he must have received his education at the shrine of his preceptor.

Wāris Shāh give ample proof of his grounding in Islamic lore through Persian and Arabic. He is also well versed in Hindu tradition and folk-lore. His writing clearly shows that the extent of his knowledge is wide indeed, so that whenever he chooses, and he chooses quite often, he gives astonishingly authentic details, for instance about astronomy, medicine, social rites, habits of men and women, clothes, kinds of horses and buffaloes, the items of the dowry etc. What surprises the reader is his range of emotions and feelings.

Courtesy of: http://www.Pañjābilok.com/heritage/heer_waris_shah.htm