



About the Folktales in *Marrying Ameera*

Stories give meaning to culture and our lives. The stories referred to in *Marrying Ameera* show us the power of love, how it can cross borders, like music. These stories that Ameera remembers are very old. Samina Quraeshi (2004) states the Indus River civilisation was one of the world's first and the stories in oral form go back that far (p. 62).

A recurring theme in the folktales is the conflict between law and love. Each of the tales Ameera remembers tells of a love that defies the traditional boundaries of faith and class. 'The overwhelming power of love breaks all fetters with which the traditional law surrounds the individual and the society' (Schimmel in Quraeshi 2004, p. 17) and so the lovers must pay with their lives if they cross the borders of lawful society imposed on them.

These folktales are cautionary tales about star crossed lovers. Most of the tales from Pakistan belong to this group. Pakistan is a country where family honour is strictly observed and so the true lover is an outcast, and the woman who follows the path of love must pay with her life. 'The authors seemed to comprehend that the intensity and purity of the emotions they narrated would lead to tragedy for the sake of that pure, intense love' (Quraeshi 2004, p. 57). Quraeshi says she was told the stories when she was too young to think of them as tales to warn of the dangers of falling in love with someone of a different religion or class. 'To us they were simply good stories.' (p. 59)

Dadi jan's account of the Sikh singing a verse from 'Hir and Ranjha' on a train during the Partition is true and a longer account of this can be seen in Quraeshi 2004, p.31. Asani says the folk legends are not only sources of entertainment and show heritage but promote communal harmony among people of different faiths by creating shared understandings of life and providing common frameworks for moral and cultural discourses (in Quraeshi 2004, p. 32).

On one level, Quraeshi (2004) says, all the stories are one story, a universal story of love, hope and perhaps the mystical idea of the lovers' reunion with the divine (p. 59). They play a role in shaping a tradition of spirituality and mysticism. 'Hir and Ranjha' is commonly interpreted as a mystical allegory within Islamic mysticism, showing various stages of transformation of the ego with self until finally, through yearning and longing, it becomes one with the Divine beloved (Asani in Quraeshi 2004, p. 32).

'If war and hatred are about fear of the Other, then these stories of love are about the universality of emotion, the only thing strong enough to heal the scars of hate' (Quraeshi 2004, p. 61).

In my journal Ameera thinks about all of this, a thought that didn't make it into the final manuscript: *Tareq and I may not die in a sandstorm or drown together in a river but there will be sacrifices for the trials our forbidden love will set for us* (Hawke, p. 52). She was right about the trials, even she didn't realise the extent of them.

Water in the folktales



The river dominates these folktales. Even in the desert tales, water or the lack of it is evident in the plot. Sand is seen as water's opponent as in 'Sassi and Punnu'. Water is the source of life and of growth and of identity, yet it can also take away life. In the Pakistani folktales water is present in wells, fountains, springs, water pots or bags. *Marrying Ameera* has a motif of water running through Ameera's story just as the Indus runs through the Pakistani folk tales and Pakistan itself.

Music in the folktales

Music and love are intertwined in the folktales. This could explain how legalists have an aversion to music as they think it distracts the listener from his religious or social duties.

Reference

Quraeshi, S 2004, *Legends of the Indus*, Asia Ink, London.