

Reflection of Earthly Love in the Poetry of Mahsati Ganjavi: A Case Study of Shattering Literary Taboos in Feminine Poetry

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ABSTRACT

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"Mahasti Ganjavi" is one of the prominent poets of the 5th and 6th centuries AH who was able to create beautiful and clear images in the form of love and the relationship between the lover and the beloved in her quatrains. In her poems, by creating vividness and creating colorful contrasts, she expresses the relationship between the lover and the beloved in a way that, according to some great scholars, none of the ancient poets have been able to speak with such eloquence and sweetness as she did. Since Mahasti's poems had a special style, the main goal of this research is to show Mahasti's feminine characteristics in her quatrains and to examine her position as a leading and innovative poet in her time and to examine the three main elements of lyrical literature: "love", "lover" and "beloved". The importance of this research, which was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and library resources, is evident in analyzing the reflection of femininity in Mahasti's poems and evaluating her role in developing romantic content in Persian poetry, which can be useful in understanding the social, cultural, and literary conditions of that period. This research has been studied in a library and descriptive manner. By examining the works of Mahasti Ganjavi, we find that she is a modern and courageous poet in the Seljuk period who, with her creative and free-thinking poems, described earthly love and diverse lovers and played an important role in enriching romantic content in Persian literature.

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Introduction

In the classical Persian literary canon, lyricism and romantic discourse were predominantly constructed through a patriarchal gaze where the active lover was traditionally male, and the female figure was relegated to a passive, idealized, or distant beloved. Women poets rarely had the cultural agency to articulate their authentic emotional and sensory experiences without adopting a masculine persona. Operating during the Seljuk era (5th–6th centuries AH)—a period when mystical allegory was beginning to dominate the poetic landscape—Mahsati Ganjavi emerged as an unprecedented and pioneering female voice. Renowned as a master of the quatrain (*rubāʿī*) and the foundational figure of the *Shahr-ashub* (city-disturber) genre in quatrains, Mahsati boldly defied conventional literary norms by openly articulating feminine desire, passion, and personal vulnerability.

This study aims to examine the reflection of earthly, human love (*ʿishq-i zamīnī*) in Mahsati Ganjavi's quatrains, deconstruct her role in shattering traditional literary taboos, and analyze how she repositions the tripartite lyrical dynamics of Love (*ʿIshq*), Lover (*ʿAshiq*), and Beloved (*Maʿshūq*) from an authentic feminine perspective.

Method

This research employs a descriptive-analytical methodology based on textual and library-based archival analysis. The primary corpus comprises the collected quatrains of Mahsati Ganjavi. The study implements thematic categorization and frequency analysis to evaluate the conceptual and aesthetic representations of romantic motifs. The analytical framework concentrates on three core dimensions:

١. **The Nature of Love:** Differentiating between earthly/sensory love and mystical/transcendent love, and analyzing the dual existential nature of romantic passion (life-giving versus agonizing).
٢. **The Agency of the Lover:** Examining the structural inversion where the active, expressive lover is a woman enduring societal blame (*malāmat*), emotional pain, and social marginalization.
٣. **The Attributes of the Beloved:** Analyzing the descriptions of diverse male beloveds—including specific city artisans, guild

members (*shahr-ashub* figures), and real individuals (such as Pur-e Khatib-e Ganjeh)—alongside their physical and behavioral traits.

Results

Textual and statistical analysis of Mahsati Ganjavi's quatrains yields the following significant findings:

١. Predominance of Earthly Love over Mystical Imagery:

- Earthly and human love constitutes approximately 73% of the thematic content of Mahsati's quatrains, whereas mystical and transcendent themes represent only 11%.
- The thematic distribution reveals that descriptions of the Beloved account for 23% of references, followed by Separation and Grief (*Firāq*) at 18%, the Beloved's Hair/Locks (*Zolf*) at 12%, Social and Mystical Themes at 11%, the Beloved's Lips at 9%, General Love at 7%, Cheeks/Face at 7%, the Lover's condition at 4%, and the Beloved's Eyes at 3%.

٢. Inversion of Gender Roles and Agency:

- Mahsati completely subverts classical conventions by positioning the female speaker as the active, dynamic, and unapologetic lover (*'āshiq*), while the male beloved (*ma'shūq*) occupies the desired object position.
- Breaking deep-seated cultural taboos against naming beloved figures, she explicitly addresses her male lovers by name (e.g., the son of the preacher of Ganja) and celebrates young craftsmen and guild workers (e.g., butchers, archers, saddlers).

٣. Psychological Complexity and Khayyamian Influence:

- Mahsati's poetic persona exhibits a distinctive duality: an emotionally sorrowful and yearning sensibility regarding the pangs of separation (*firāq*), combined with an intellectually hedonistic, joy-oriented, and carpe-diem (*Khayyamian*) worldview.
- She openly accepts the social reproach (*sarzanesh*) and public stigma associated with genuine romantic expression,

explicitly preferring sincere non-conformity (*qalandarī*) over religious hypocrisy and cloaked deceit.

ξ. **Socio-Cultural Critique:**

- Beyond individual romance, Mahsati incorporates veiled and explicit critiques of women's domestic confinement and social subjugation, using her verse to assert feminine liberty and psychological autonomy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Mahsati Ganjavi was a revolutionary figure in Persian literature who fundamentally transformed the lyrical paradigm of her era. By grounding love in tangible, earthly reality and placing female desire at the center of poetic expression, she dismantled long-standing literary taboos that had silenced authentic women's voices. Her innovative use of the *rubā'ī* and *Shahr-ashub* genres provided a rich aesthetic framework for humanizing romantic discourse. Ultimately, Mahsati paved the way for subsequent generations of female poets in Persian literature, establishing that feminine emotionality, intellectual audacity, and artistic mastery could coexist in classical poetry.