

The Image of Women in Askar Mahkam's Poetry

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Abstract: *This article examines the image of women, which has always been considered sacred by poets throughout different eras, and the artistic attitude of the poet towards this image.*

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A Woman is truly a sacred being. She is the mother under whose feet lies paradise, the devoted partner, the kind sister, and the cherished younger sibling. A woman symbolizes modesty and loyalty, and her description knows no bounds. Poets have also written odes to her strength and virtues. Works like Abdulla Oripov's "Woman," Mirtemir's "Toshbu," and Halima Khudoyberdiyeva's "My love, you are nature" are shining tributes to women's loyalty, resilience, and courage, and calling them so is by no means an exaggeration. As Stanislas de Buffon stated, as long as there is even one woman on Earth, there will always be something new to say about her.¹

The talented poet Askar Mahkam also portrays the image of women in his poetry in a unique manner. His works such as "Seven descriptions of a woman," "I seem to have lost eve...", "Tabriz Muslim woman," and poems dedicated to his grandmother hold particular significance.

You are a lone leaf

By chance, clinging to an autumn tree's branch...

The bare trunk of the tree,

Whipped by the relentless frost,

Feels every lash you endure,

Echoing your silent torment.²

This poetic excerpt is taken from the poem "Seven descriptions of a woman", in which Askar Mahkam likens a woman to a bubble formed by rainwater, an icicle hanging from cold barriers during harsh frosts, a butterfly fluttering in the stingy rich man's garden, a dragonfly flying along a fast-flowing canal, and a single leaf clinging to the branches of autumn trees. These comparisons encapsulate the woman's resilience, endurance, and, as expressed in the vernacular, her "unyielding spirit." In autumn, trees begin to shed their leaves, and by the onset of winter, nearly all leaves are gone, except for a few that remain firmly attached to the branches. In these lines, Mahkam compares a woman to such a leaf, clinging steadfastly to its branch. This symbolizes a woman's unwavering dedication to her family and home. She faces the hardships and challenges of life—likened to "the frost that whips the bare trunk of a tree"—with courage and determination, without fear or hesitation. In subsequent lines, the poet compares a woman to the last star in the sky. Just as the star's radiant face absorbs the dirt of the heavens, so too does the woman's once-smooth and radiant face bear the marks of life's difficulties, the burdens of daily

¹ <https://ayol.uz>

² Askar Mahkam. This was love. – Tashkent, 2017, p. 120.

life, and the cares of household responsibilities. These trials leave wrinkles on her face, fading the bloom of her youthful beauty. Mahkam further elevates the woman's image by calling her a "royal princess." He describes her as a bewitching queen, one who disrupts the dreams of brave knights, dismisses the love of beggars, mocks the chants of dervishes, brushes her heels against the cloak of wandering mystics, ignores the melodies of bards, scoffs at the lamentations of poets, dances to the tunes of supernatural beings, sinks into the dreams of fairies, strides boldly over dishonorable men, snaps the strings of musical instruments, shreds the pen to pieces, and pours its ink into the trash. This depiction captures her extraordinary, mystical, and otherworldly essence, presenting her as a figure of awe and admiration.

...You cast anchors, yet my pirates

Had already pierced the boats...

The wind scratched the coastal stones,

The ember in my palm was devoured by darkness,

And suddenly, I saw you—oh, woman.³

These lines carry profound symbolism. In the poetic excerpt, the anchor represents the woman's pure dreams and aspirations, the boat symbolizes her heart, and the pirates stand for the sweet and bitter experiences of life. A woman often looks to life with hope, expecting gifts of joy and peace. However, life does not always present her with such offerings; it does not always bring comfort or tranquility. At times, even when she casts the anchor of hope into the river of life, her heart's boat may be pierced by despair, sorrow, and burdens. "*The wind scratched the coastal stones.*" Unexpected storms and trials may arise in her life, challenges she never anticipated. The beautiful creation called a woman thus finds herself ensnared in the merciless trials of darkness.

The talented poet Askar Mahkam, in his poem "*Tabriz Muslim woman*," masterfully crafts the image of a true Muslim woman, embodying her virtues and resilience.

I said, "What is your name, oh radiant moon?"

She replied, "My name is known only to God alone!"

I asked, "Can your name truly hold such mystery?"

She said, "Do not ask—you have already made me a sinner!"⁴

This poem is built on a dialogue between the lyrical protagonist and a Muslim woman. The words "*tobon*" and "*ayon*" form a combination of *murdaf* and *muqayyad* rhyme types. The stanza employs poetic devices such as invocation (*nido*), simile (*tashbeh*), and question-and-answer (*savol-u javob*).

The lyrical protagonist addresses a Muslim girl living in Tabriz, asking her questions. He calls her "*mohi tobon*"—a radiant moon—and inquires about her name. The girl responds, "*My name is known only to God alone*," refusing to reveal it. The protagonist, intrigued, asks in amazement, "*Can your name truly hold such mystery?*" The Muslim girl, however, perceives even engaging in conversation with a stranger and responding to his questions as a sin.

Askar Mahkam has also dedicated a poem to his wife. This poem, titled "*After me*" (*Mendan keyin*), is written in the form of a testament:

"I owe nothing to anyone,

³ Askar Mahkam. This was love. – Tashkent, 2017, p. 120.

⁴ Askar Mahkam. This was love. – Tashkent, 2017, p. 198.

But I have one request:

Speak to Mahmula

As Askar Mahkam spoke to her!"⁵

This poem is written in free verse. Despite its structure, it captivates the reader with its profound meaning and essence. The verses reveal the poet's gentle nature, spiritual depth, and moral excellence. His immense love and respect for his wife are evident in the way he cherished and honored her. He even bequeathed that after his passing, everyone should speak to his wife as he did—kindly and lovingly. He wished for no one to upset her or utter a single harsh word. This reflects how much he valued and respected her. It also suggests that his wife was a wise, devoted, kind-hearted, and sincere person, deserving of such admiration.

Every writer or poet's inner world is reflected in their works, as their creations stem from their emotional experiences, inner turmoil, and spiritual reflections. Askar Mahkam's poetry is no exception. His poems not only convey his heartfelt emotions to the reader but also reveal profound truths about life. His frankness and authenticity are evident in his verses.

The image of women holds a special place in Mahkam's poetry. The excerpts presented above attest to this. While portraying women as delicate beings, he also masterfully depicts them as resilient, selfless, and devoted individuals capable of enduring life's hardships and the challenges of marital life. Particularly, his depiction of the Muslim woman's image, crafted through poetic dialogue, demonstrates his artistic brilliance.

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⁵ Askar Mahkam. *This was love*. – Tashkent, 2017, p. 195.