

## Heer's Peerless Beauty: A Translation from

### Waris Shah's Heer

Sakoon Singh

#### A Note on Translated Passage

These verses (59-60) from *Heer Waris Shah* describe Heer's beauty. The description, which is for the most part, about her physical traits- her eyes, cheeks, breasts, teeth, nose, forehead, eyebrows etc at, borders on the mildly erotic. This is further characterised by leaps of imagination used to draw several oblique comparisons. The extensive description of physical beauty is skilfully conjoined with the political and architectural space of Medieval Punjab that was fraught with battles and unrest. The use of hyperbole accentuated by fantastic metaphors and similes, is reminiscent of Metaphysical poets like Donne and Marvel. This passage attests to the poet's highly sophisticated idiom, underlining why this *qissa* is accorded a place in the pantheon of World Literature. It being a commemorative year of Waris Shah (1722-99), this is a nudge for readers to engage more comprehensively with his sterling poetry, whether through music (renderings by, *inter alia*, Pathanay Khan, Abida Parveen, Ghulam Ali, Gurdas Maan, Madan Gopal Singh ) translation, performance or private/community readings.

**Keywords:** Waris Shah, Heer, Translation.

What fitting praise can the poet possibly sing for Heer,  
On her youthful forehead gleams the splendour of the moon.  
And the luminous moon, surrounded by the night skies of her tresses,  
Flaming, like the scarlet of the red wine.  
She prances around with her friends,  
Flapping about, like the wings of a swallow.  
Delicate eyes, innocent like the fawn's,  
And on her cheeks, full roses quiver.  
Her eyebrows, arched like the vaults of city Lahore,  
Is there, really, an end to her beauty?  
Dark kohl gleams in the rims of her eyes and gliding off the edges,  
Rising, like the battalions of Punjab taking on Hind.  
She walks with abandon,  
swaying on sides, like the aristocrat's unhinged elephant.  
Those who wish to catch a glimpse of her,  
Must brace themselves for the sight.  
On her exquisite face, fine expressions glide,  
Like flourishes of calligraphy in a master's book.  
A glimpse of her is to witness the celestial *Lailatul Qadar\**, the night  
of revelation,  
It indeed, is a noble deed.

Red, luscious lips, like crimson rubies  
Chin, like apple, from far off lands  
Pearly whites of her teeth,

Set like rows of smooth pomegranate beads.  
Nose, aquiline, like the sharp edge of a heritage sword,  
Tresses, like serpents guarding treasures.  
Neck slender like a crane's, fingers tapering like bean pods,  
hands are smooth like budding leaves of Chinar.  
Her lips stained with twigs slay many,  
The men then go combing through the bazaar, looking for the notorious murderer.  
Her arms, like buttery dough,  
her fair chest like marble, peeping from under the Ganges.  
She's the fairy Queen's sister, she stands out in thousands  
She dallies with her friends, the conceited one,  
and runs amuck, like an impish fawn.  
She seems sculpted to perfection, having stolen the beams from the moon.  
She ambles in and out, slaying many,  
And then flies away, like the crane, that dithers out of the line  
Separating from her flying companions.  
Is she a Princess from Lanka or one from the court of Indra,  
A fairy emerging out of moonlight?  
Love oozes out of her every pore,  
Like a raga from vibrating strings of an instrument.  
She walks with a renewed zest, Like advancing bands from Kandhar.  
The suitors who come like moths, crash at the sword's razor edge  
And dressed to the nines, this undertaker saunters through the bazaar,

Whose turn is it today?

Waris Shah, the one who comes with beseeching eyes, falls down in this game of dice.

### **About the Author**

Sakoon Singh teaches Indian Writing and Cultural Studies in Chandigarh. Her research interests include Translation Studies, Sufi literature and Indian Writing. In the Land of the Lovers (Rupa 2020) is her debut novel.