



Conserving The Folklore Of Laila-Majnu Through Mazaar And Mela: A Case Study Of Binjaur Village In Rajasthan

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Abstract: The legend of Laila-Majnu, a story of never-ending love, passion, feeling and emotion tells us the true meaning of love. The different versions of stories associated with Laila-Majnu have passed through generations in the form of cinema, oral histories, etc. The present paper aims to highlight the role and importance of *Mazaar* and *Mela* in the conservation of the folklore of Laila-Majnu in a village named Binjaur, located in the district of Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan. The paper also focuses on the approximate number of people who come to *Mazaar* and took part in the *Mela*. The objectives of the paper include an examination of the various practices performed at the *Mazaar*, the belief system about the place, the local stories associated with Laila-Majnu, the impact of *Mela* on village economy, the geographical location of the *Mazaar*, etc. The methodology of the research includes the use of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources mainly include the site visit and oral interviews. The secondary sources are based on the available literature and includes articles and research papers. The key findings of the research show the historical importance of the sacred place in the form of *Mazaar* and cultural importance in the form of *Mela* and how these can be used as tools for conservation of the historical traditions. It reflects the communal harmony between people of the different religions who are visiting the place. The paper also helps in providing information about the geographical and economic relevance of the place.

Keywords - Folk, Mazaar, Mela, Love, Belief, Culture, Story, Conservation, Worship, Sacred, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

‘Laila Majnu do badan ek jan the.... jajaba e ishk o wafa ki shan the’, the lines from a song of the famous movie “Laila Majnu” directed by H.S Rawail in 1976 depicts the kind of love and passion which existed between the two lovers Laila and Majnu. Although, there are various versions associated with the story of Laila-Majnu based on different cultures in India, Arabia, Pakistan, and Persia, the widely accepted version is based on Nizami Ganjavi’s “Layla and Manjun”. According to the folktale, Qays ibn al-Mulawwah falls in love with Layla bint Mahdi. Qays got so much obsessed for Layla and showed intense love for her in the public sphere that he eventually known as ‘Manjun’ (meaning possessed or mad in Arabic). Gradually, both Layla and Qays developed feeling of immense love for each other which was not accepted by their clans or families. Layla was married against her will to a rich man named Ibn Salman. This led Qays (Majnu) to wander in the wild deserts, singing verses in the memory of Layla and started to live the life of an ascetic. Soon, Layla fell ill knowing about the condition of Qays (Majnu) and died in sorrow. When Qays (Majnu) got to know about the demise of Layla, he visited her gravesite and died eventually. It has been said that they finally united, but only after their death. They were both buried nearby and their graves have become a pilgrimage site today. The immortal love story of Laila-Majnu is still very popular among the people in different regions and continues to inspire the youth even today.

During my visit in the Binjaur village, I found that there are various interpretations regarding the story of Laila-Majnu. Some believe that both Laila and Majnu were born in this village and were in love with each other since their childhood. Their love was not accepted by their respective families and they decided to die together and got united in the next life.

According to others, Majnu was a Hindu boy born in this village and Laila was a Muslim girl from Pakistan. Their families did not accept their relationship because of the religious differences and they eventually got killed by each other's family members. But, during the conversation with Mahender Singh Ji aged 78 (caretaker of the Mazaar), it can be found that majority of the people believe that they both were from Pakistan. They were escaping from their families and took shelter in the Binjaur village. But, due to the hunger and thirst and harsh conditions of the desert region, they died together. The people of the village built their graveyard at the site. The same story was also published in an article of Dainik Bhaskar newspaper which mentioned that they both were born in the 11th century A.D and came here in search of water. Eventually, they died due to thirst.



(From left to right) Manoj Kumar, Mahender Singh and Myself

II. THE MAZAAR OF LAILA-MAJNU IN BINJAUR VILLAGE

The Mazaar of Laila-Majnu is located in the Binjaur village which is approximately 11 km from Anupgarh, a town in the Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan. According to the local tradition, both Laila and Majnu died at this spot and a mausoleum was built over their graves by the locals in their memory. However, according to a report by Resham Sengar in Travel News, the mausoleum was not belonged to Laila-Majnu. The original mausoleum was of a saint and his disciple which was built to show the mutual love between them. Gradually, the site became a sacred place and people came here in large numbers for worship and to take the blessings of the Laila-Majnu. The Mazaar is located near the Indo-Pak border which is around 7-8 km from the village. The geographical location of the Mazaar makes it a great tourist spot as its location near the border make the people believe in the folk stories about Laila-Majnu who came from Pakistan.



The Mazaar of Laila-Majnu in Binjaur Village

According to Manoj Kumar, (a local from Binjaur village) apart from Rajasthan, people from all corners of India came to visit the Mazaar. The majority of the population comes from the states like Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand. He also mentioned that people even from countries like New Zealand and England often visits the Mazaar. About the number of people, he said that approximately one lakh people visit the Mazaar in a month. The majority of the people who came to Mazaar are Hindus although it is a symbol associated with the Muslims. The Mazaar in the village is managed by a committee under Pritam Singh (current head of the committee).



Graves of Laila-Majnu

According to Mahender Singh, the Mazaar is famous in the region because of the belief of people that the Mazaar has some miracle powers. People come to the Mazaar and seek blessings at the graves of Laila-Majnu. There is a great belief in the region that every wish is fulfilled at the Mazaar. Many people tied threads and bangles near the graves to mark their wishes and also offered Chadars to the graves of Laila-Majnu. Along with this, they also use incense sticks (Agarbattis) and buy some Prasad to perform the prayers. Most of people come to Mazaar specially on Thursday and special kind of food like rice and curry is also offered to the people on that day in the Mazaar.

III. MELA OF LAILA-MAJNU

Mela is a great symbol of cultural and historical importance which is held to celebrate the traditional beliefs. As said by Manoj Kumar, every year from 11 June to 15 June, a Mela is organized in the village in the memory of Laila-Majnu. A great crowd gathered in the mela from nearby villages and also from different regions of the country. The Mela is celebrated as a symbol of love and many newly-wed couples came in large numbers to take blessings at the Mazaar. Apart from them, many young boys and girls also attend the Mela in a belief that they will get the love of their life.

In the cultural sphere, the Mela plays an indispensable role as people belong from different religion and communities came together to attend the Mela. They sang songs and poems associated with love and romance in the memory of Laila-Majnu. The Mela is also significant for the organization of Langar by the locals and for the making of local sweets and dishes, and the joy of traditional Jhoolas



Image Source: Google

In the economic sphere, the Mela is marked by a small market of local traders and vendors who set up their stalls to sell various things, especially the things related with love and romance. These include things like local music instruments, earrings and rings in different colours and artistic forms, paintings of Laila-Majnu made by local painters, etc. According to Manoj Kumar, the Mela is great source of income for the local villagers and is an important boost to the economy of the village. He estimated that they earn 4 times in the Mela from what they earn in the normal days in the year.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be said that both Mazaar and Mela are indispensable tools of conserving the culture, tradition, identity, beliefs, etc. They both serve as great artifacts of preserving the folk stories like Laila-Majnu. The Mazaar become a great tourist place and people come here in large numbers to believe in the oral stories they heard about Laila-Majnu and also to worship their graves as a symbol of love and passion. The Mela is also a significant means of keeping intact the local cultural traditions in the form of various folk activities like singing in regional language, preparing local food, making stalls of handmade instruments, etc. They are also important in establishing communal harmony between people belonging to different religion, caste and community, who came together to enjoy the Mela. As the Mazaar is located near the border of India and Pakistan, one of the BSF post in the region is named as "Majnu Post" and this is great evidence of the historical and cultural significance of the Mazaar of Laila-Majnu.

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