

## **The story of Momin Khan and Sheerinay**

### **Translated by Faiza and Areej**

In the mountains of South Waziristan, lived two brothers: Samander Khan and Qalander Khan. Samander Khan had seven sons, and a daughter named Sheerinay. On the other hand, Qalander Khan had a son named Momin Khan.

As the brothers aged, they died. Momin Khan's family grew poor while Sheerinay's family became rich. Despite this, Momin Khan was known for his bravery. One day, after an argument, his opponent taunted him, and challenged him to ask for Sheeriney's hand in marriage. He was of the view that Momin Khan was bound to be rejected. Momin Khan took this as a blow to his family's dignity, and their poor economic status. When Momin Khan asked for Sheerinay's hand, her brother Zafar Khan asked for seven mules loaded with gold. Zafar Khan placed this high demand only to dissuade Momin. But Momin Khan was not someone who gives up so easily. He knew that due to their poor financial condition, he couldn't fulfill this demand. So, he decided to embark on a journey to Hindustan, which is known for its abundance of gold. He thought he would be able to procure Zafar Khan's demand there by some honest means.

On the third day of his journey, he set up a camp near a river. After a while, a young woman accompanied by two men arrived and began talking in hurried tones near a bunch of trees. At first, they didn't notice Momin Khan. He went up to the group and asked about the matter. They told him that the young woman was the King's daughter, and she was to be left there alone for the giant serpent to devour. To save the village, each year one person was sacrificed to satiate the desire of a giant serpent. This year it was the princess' turn. Momin Khan grew angry. His sense of justice and chivalry did not allow him to let this matter go and save his own life. He vowed to confront the giant serpent and defeat him. The princess, named Gul Khubana, begged him to leave. But he didn't. He stayed there with her.

When the princess was about to fall asleep, she asked Momin Khan to wake her up when the serpent arrived. She said that when he does, Momin Khan must run away. Momin didn't respond to the last part of her request. Soon it was midnight. A strange and horrible hiss started coming from behind the trees. Momin Khan stood up and unsheathed his sword. The giant serpent was a monstrous and grotesque creature. He was heading towards the sleeping princess, but Momin Khan blocked his way. The battle went on for thirty minutes and somewhere in the middle of it the princess had woken up. Both, the serpent and Momin Khan went on tirelessly. In the end, Momin was able to tie the serpent with a rope, and strike him in all the right places with his sword. The princess couldn't believe her eyes. For a century, the giant serpent had remained undefeated.

When the King heard the news, he was elated. He invited Momin to his palace. Khan's wounds were tended there. In the days that followed, Momin Khan remained at the palace, as the physician had restricted him from travelling and physical exertion. During his stay, princess Gul Khubana fell in love with Momin Khan. The king offers him to be his right hand in exchange for his marriage with his daughter. Momin politely refuses, saying that he loves someone else, and

has promised marriage to her only. He reveals the purpose of his journey. The king helps him by granting him gold and mules. Instead of choosing the easy way out, Momin Khan's dignity doesn't allow him to accept something for which he hasn't worked.

One day while hunting in the forest with the king, Momin meets someone from his homeland. This man informs Momin that Sheeriney has many lovers and is betraying him. Momin Khan doesn't believe him, but the man sows a seed of suspicion in his mind.

Distraught, he takes the king's permission and leaves. Upon reaching Sheerinay's house, he climbs up the wall and jumps down into the courtyard (as the gate is locked and it's past midnight). The whole family is sleeping out in the courtyard under the open sky. To check her loyalty, he touches her arm. She stirs and in her sleep she cries out for her brother. Since it is dark, Zafar Khan doesn't see that it's Momin Khan, and stabs him with his dagger.

When the sun rises at dawn, the family is appalled to find out that Zafar has killed Momin.

Sheerinay and her mother's mournful wails echoed in the mountains of South Waziristan. Momin Khan's mother comes running from her house. When she sees her son's blood-stained body, she dies out of shock. Zafar Khan is condemned to a life of endless guilt.

Gul Khubana embarks on a journey towards Momin Khan's village. Upon arriving there, she finds out about Momin's death from the aggrieved Sheerinay. In a state of mournfulness, they both take their lives.