

**LAXMI PRASAD DEVKOTA'S**  
**Muna Madan**



**ADAPTATION BY PALLAV RANJAN**



artwork by Param Meyangbo

### **Muna Madan and The Pilgrim**

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## *Feature*

### **Muna Madan**

The kingdom's most  
popular long poem

# Muna Madan

[Muna]

Fire,  
a fire burns in my mind.  
Don't leave, my life,  
don't leave.  
Brightness of eyes,  
my star of night,  
don't take your light.  
Tear open this chest of mine  
perhaps the pictures  
in my heart,  
when you see them,  
will change your mind.  
Give me poison  
to drink instead.  
See? My pain  
falls with my tears,  
but tears do not speak,  
thoughts stay within the mind.  
Love, even my tears  
fail to speak.

[Madan]

Darling Muna,  
don't speak like this,  
I will be returning.  
For twenty days  
I will stay in Lhasa,  
I will travel twenty days  
on the road.  
Smile at me,  
for if you would smile  
I could raise myself

to Lord Indra's Heaven.  
My intentions  
are to achieve or to die,  
do not put a barrier of tears  
upon my roads.  
The cranes return  
with the sun.  
It will be a great day,  
the day of our meeting.

[Muna]  
My Rama, my Krishna:  
the sun at night,  
smiles as you prepare your flight,  
how shall I combine these?  
Don't leave me here.  
I sparkle beside you,  
without you I am stone.  
Take me with you,  
hold my hands,  
we will face jungles,  
mountains, cliffs,  
and murderers.

[Madan]  
Muna, my Muna,  
look at mother, look at her,  
the oil that feeds that lamp  
is about to dry.  
Both of us can't leave her,  
stay, care for her.  
Her eyes that have seen  
three twenty winters  
shine as she looks  
upon your face.

[Muna]

Pale hair, brittle body,  
a mother's love  
could not tie your feet.  
Shadows of her affection call  
but cannot hold you back.  
What will you gain  
in that land  
as precious as her love?  
Bags of gold,  
they are the dirt of hands,  
the soup of nettles,  
our vegetables,  
a peace in mind  
are better. Stay,  
satisfy your thoughts.

[Madan]

But what do I do?

- a gulp of milk  
for my mother's throat,
- her dreams to build a resthouse  
and taps for her people,
- on your delicate hands  
pretty bangles,
- a strong foundation for a home  
made insecure by loans

these wishes sing in my mind,

their voices are in my mind.

The music moves my feet Muna.

There is God above  
and I have a heart.

I will cross those angry floods.

I mean well, but if things go wrong,

at least I will have died

with a song.

[Muna]

You tighten the knot  
inside my heart.

Do not return then,  
I will draw an unforgettable  
picture of your face  
for remembrance.

The maidens of Lhasa dance,  
they seem as if they are carved of gold,  
their voices laugh like the streams  
as they play on barren hills and fields.

Leave, my love,  
darkening the home and the city,  
even tears do not have strength.

Maybe in darkness,  
memories will gleam  
or flash like lightning.  
And sorrow shower  
upon my clothes.

[Narrator, describing Madan's journey]

Naked earth, cloud mists,  
climbs are hot, flowers poison,  
poles with flags are death.

There, see monasteries  
and Lamas with shaven heads.

One day the roof of gold  
against the skies  
beneath the Potala Palace,  
Lhasa smiled.

Yak skin walls,  
angels on cloth.

Young Bhotenis white as bones,  
passers by bowing  
before gurus with sunken eyes.

[Narrator, describing Muna at home]

Pearls fell. Pearls fell  
when Muna smiled.  
But now she wilts.  
In sleep, tears wet her face,  
her days are long,  
her nights are long,  
her time is sad.  
In her voice, hear,  
there is a soft tearful drizzle.  
After the end of light,  
even a flickering lamp is bright.  
Women came with stories,  
men showed they cared,  
*When you see a rose, brother,  
do not touch it.  
Do not with lust, spoil it.  
A wondrous being  
is a jewel of God  
do not try and corrupt it.*

[Muna]

Go to the worms of the city  
and tell them your words.  
Make the moon fall,  
make mountains rise,  
I will wait for his feet  
and my Heaven,  
God has created  
four beautiful days,  
that is life,  
don't throw mud  
to spoil them.



[Narrator, describing Madan's journey]  
Smooth pebble gold,  
new country, fresh light,  
the smell of musk.  
Madan stayed, six months passed  
before memories came like water:  
ill mother, Muna's eyes large with weeping.  
At night he was unable to sleep.  
Hiding a heavy bag of gold in clothes,  
gathering the musk,  
he met up with a few friends  
and left for home.

[Muna]  
What a nightmare!  
A buffalo dragged me down!  
I fell in mud, mother,  
the darkest buffalo dragged me down.

[Madan's mother]  
Come, darling,  
don't shiver with fear,  
I will take all the ill  
that comes to you  
upon my head,  
don't shake.

[Muna]  
My eyelids quiver,  
my heart is pain,  
a shadow of evil  
has come into our home.  
Perhaps he has no time,  
perhaps he hopes to come soon,  
paths lead through high mountains  
maybe this is why he has not come.

[Narrator]

*Madan falls ill with cholera on the road home.*

[Madan]

Don't leave! Don't leave me  
to the crows and vultures!  
My friends, I will not die yet.  
I will stand,  
my throat is dry,  
my chest is burning,  
wipe these tears from my eyes,  
I still have breath.

[Madan's companions]

We have no medication  
and no one's here.  
Stay! Each of us  
has to leave someday,  
God will give you salvation.

[Narrator]

Madan wakes and leans on his elbows,  
his friends have left, the day drowns in red,  
wind sleeps, birds are quiet, it is cold, he falls.

[Madan]

What is this fire?  
Does the forest burn?  
Is this fire going to kill the dead?  
Is it a robber or a thief?  
Is it a demon?

*Madan decides to call for help.*

[Tibetan]

Who cries?...

Your friends are bad.

My house is some miles away,  
you will not die. I will carry you there,  
you'll be all right.

[Madan]

Tibetan brother, you are a god,  
your words are wonderful.  
I have been told,  
I am a man of lineage  
and noble caste.  
I hold your feet with respect, brother,  
I am holding your feet.  
A man's greatness  
is determined by his heart  
not by the caste  
and the lineage he brings.

[Narrator]

The Tibetan carries him to his house, rests him on wool,  
gives him water and kindness, searches for herbs, crushes  
them, and makes him drink. He gives Madan yak milk  
and makes him strong. At Madan's home tangerines are  
in flower, thoughts are soft and sad.

[Muna]

You have forgotten me.  
Tell me, how could you forget?  
Which hateful god took you?  
I cannot see, hills are covered by curtains.  
The image I see of you is empty.  
Your voice tells me stories of happiness  
in my sleep. I have no wings to fly with.  
I cannot search for my love.  
Why have you left our wealth

and stayed in that city.  
Are you ill? Do your eyes fill up with tears  
when you think of me?  
Dust don't touch, thorn don't hurt.

[Narrator]

Madan wants to thank the Tibetan by giving him some of  
his gold, but the Tibetan refuses material rewards.

[Tibetan]

What will I do with yellow gold?  
My children can neither eat this gold  
nor will it give them warmth.  
My wife is dead, she is in Heaven,  
the clouds are her decoration,  
her jewels and gold.

*Madan weeps.*

[Tibetan]

Chance blessed and I have helped.  
I will not barter goodness for wealth.  
Ask you mother, if you will,  
to pray for my children.

[Narrator]

Madan's mother sees a clear face  
and calls, the air responds,  
the breeze touches her.  
No tears in eyes, only a peace  
a softness of the evening  
reflected on that pond.  
She reaches out to Muna.

[Madan's mother]

My darling, it is time to leave,  
to cross the river, don't weep.  
Everyone walks this way,  
the rich and those who suffer poverty.  
Earth has to meet the earth.  
This flood of unhappiness,  
stand against it, do not fall.  
I saw the world flower,  
I saw it wilt,  
and I have known God.  
The seeds we plant here  
will grow in Heaven.  
What you have given, love,  
you will get back  
when you leave this place.  
Look at me, I take all  
I have done with me.  
The gold that you found in sleep,  
I will take with me.  
I want to leave now,  
but is Madan not coming?  
I want to see him before  
shutting my eyes to this world  
in case I die before I see him, tell him,  
the old woman asked him not to weep.

[Muna]

I will clean and shine  
the memories of you with tears,  
mother, don't worry,  
nothing has happened yet.

[Narrator]

Madan's mother begins to shake,  
her voice fades,  
she feels for Muna's hands at times  
and when she holds them,  
she asks in a faraway voice,  
"Where is my son?"  
A great wind shakes the branches,  
a crow screams, travelers stare at the peaks.

Madan's head is on his palms,  
his arms rest upon his knees,  
the crow screams.  
Madan looks at the crow.

[Madan]

Did you see my city?  
My house is clean in that valley.  
Go to my mother, she has white hair,  
go to Muna, she is bright.  
Tell them that I am well,  
tell them not to worry about me,  
trees on the lawn must be ripe with fruit,  
go, eat, and tell them my story.

[Narrator]

There is strange screaming in the city tonight.  
wet eyes, dimmed lamps, strong winds,  
dogs cry, no moon.  
Rumor of Madan's death  
has reached home.  
See tears drip from leaves  
and a young broken tree.  
The old woman's breath struggles.  
Muna has fallen.

[Madan]

Why did I come, mother?

What did I come to see?

My mother, you have torn my chest.

Look at my face, mother, look at me.

I have come. I have sinned. Look at me.

Why do you look afar when I am close,  
look at me. See me cry. Comfort me.

Don't leave, come back,  
don't you recognize me?

I could not even  
take care of you mother.

What is this peace  
that has spread across your face,  
speak to me. How could I hurt  
that gentle heart of yours  
I have brought bags of gold, mother,  
I put them at your feet,  
we will make the resthouse  
and the taps, mother,  
where you point.

Come back, don't look there,  
don't point towards the skies.

[Narrator]

Madan goes to his sister when he cannot find  
Muna.

[Madan]

Tell me, sister, tell me, where is my Muna?

My mother is dying, but I do not see her.

[Madan's sister]

Your Muna went to her parents in sorrow,  
when you left and did not come back.

[Madan]

She left my mother alone?

How could she leave her alone when I was gone?

[Madan's sister]

Muna went away from us

when she was ill herself.

She shone like a diamond

among the daughters,

she left because she was unwell.

[Madan]

How is Muna, who has been to see her?

She must ask for water,

who has given my Muna water to drink?

[Madan's sister]

She does not need water, she is cured and healed,  
she does not need your herbs.

And my love, I would have met her

but I could not find a road to take me

to her parents' home.

[Madan]

If she is healed why hasn't she returned,

why hasn't she come back?

[Madan's sister]

She searches for roads but there are no roads  
to lead her back from her parents' home.

[Madan]

This is strange, what do you mean?

[Madan's sister]

She is over the clouds,

in that city heavy with light.



[Madan]

My sister, tell me Muna is here.  
Tell me she is upon this earth.  
Tell me when she will be back.

[Madan's sister]

She lives across the river.  
On the other side.  
But she laughs with the flowers,  
dances with water,  
blinks with the stars,  
speaks with the blackbird,  
and her eyes, they shine.  
She weeps with the dew  
and when she is sad,  
you will see the mist sinking.  
My brother, Muna is not dead,  
the birds have made songs of her,  
hear them sing.

[Madan]

Muna isn't dead, tell me she lives.  
Tell me she is at her parents' home.  
The roots of my hopes,  
the wings of my mind,  
tell me Muna is here.  
Tell me when she will be back!

[Madan's sister]

She is not here, on this side of earth.  
She lives where sorrow does not stain.  
Across imagination  
she picks flowers of happiness  
in the gardens of Heavens.

[Madan]

Cruel sister. Your words are death.  
Letting the buds of hope open, bloom  
and sway before my eyes. Making ears  
swallow gulps of poison.  
Muna, O Muna, you were the temple of worship  
and the chains of life.  
Life, why did you leave?

My sister, let me look upon my Muna  
call her, sister, let me see her for a little while.  
O Muna, my Muna, come down to me,  
my queen, let me gaze upon you for a little time.

[Madan's sister]

My brother, my dear brother, take heart,  
this dirty life has to leave.  
In the end, the wind will take the fistful of ashes,  
this blossom of meat has to fall and wilt.

[Madan]

My sister, remember, "My chest wants to explode,"  
she said. "What will we do with gold?"  
"It is better to eat nettles and satisfy our souls," she said.  
God, how could you create her  
and then ruin what you have made.  
How could you make this flower  
and then drag her down like this?  
You gave me this flower,  
how could you destroy her like this?  
My sister, when I first saw her,  
when I first saw Muna's face  
I never thought that Muna could die,  
sister, I thought she would never die.  
How could the fire take her?

Where can I find her,  
hold her to my chest?  
Give me her ashes, sister,  
I want to rub her ashes on my chest.  
Mother, Muna, I will not stay here.  
I will not stay here sister,  
I will not stay.

Do not look upon this earth Muna  
I am also coming.  
With tokens of tears,  
with the jewels of love  
that you left behind.