



ETERNAL LONGING: EXPLORING THE THEMES OF SHIV KUMAR

BATALVI'S "LUNA"

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Abstract: *This paper examines the themes of love, longing, and loss in Shiv Kumar Batalvi's "Luna." Through a close reading of the poem, this study explores how Batalvi uses imagery, symbolism, and language to convey the complexities of human emotions and relationships. The paper also delves into the historical and cultural context of Batalvi's work, highlighting how his personal experiences and the socio-political landscape of Punjab influenced his writing. By analyzing the poem through the lens of postcolonial theory and Punjabi literature, this study offers a deeper understanding of Batalvi's poetic vision and the enduring relevance of his work in contemporary literature. This paper analyzes the various themes present in Shiv Kumar Batalvi's iconic poem "Luna." Through a detailed examination of the poem's language, symbolism, and structure, this study explores the recurring motifs of love, loss, longing, and societal expectations that permeate Batalvi's work. The paper examines how Batalvi uses vivid imagery and evocative metaphors to depict the complexities of human emotions, relationships, and the human experience. Furthermore, the study delves into the cultural and historical context of Punjab in the 20th century, shedding light on how Batalvi's struggles and the political turmoil of his time inform the thematic elements in his poetry. By drawing on literary theory, postcolonial studies, and Punjabi literary criticism, this analysis offers a nuanced understanding of the multi-layered themes in Batalvi's "Luna" and their enduring relevance in contemporary literature.*

Keywords: *Love, Longing, Historical and Cultural Contexts, Societal Expectations.*

Shiv Kumar Batalvi's *Luna* is a poem that has attained immense popularity throughout the years. One of the reasons behind this popularity can be attributed to the poet's mastery of language, which is evident in every aspect of the poem. From its beautifully crafted imagery to its use of metaphors and symbols, *Luna* is a testament to Batalvi's skillful control of the language. Batalvi's



use of imagery is one of the most striking aspects of his poetry, and *Lunais* no exception. Through the use of vivid, sensory imagery, Batalvi creates a world that is rich in detail and alive with meaning. For example, he uses the image of the Jhelum river as a symbol of the speaker's wailing and despair, conveying the depth of their emotional pain. Similarly, his use of the image of the moon to represent the beloved imbues the poem with a sense of longing and romanticism that is both powerful and universal. The language used by Batalvi in *Luna* is also notable for its use of metaphor and symbolism. For instance, the luna is a metaphor for the force that governs the tides of the Jhelum river and symbolizes the power of love and desire that consumes the speaker. Through the use of such metaphors, Batalvi is able to create a rich, multi-layered text that speaks to the complexities of the human experience. Moreover, Batalvi's skill in deploying figurative language does not end with his use of metaphor and symbolism. The poem features a range of linguistic devices such as alliteration, repetition and personification, which serve to strengthen the poem's emotional and intellectual impact. For instance, the repetitive use of the word *Luna* not only connects the speaker's obsession with their lover, but also serves as a refrain, creating a sense of musicality and rhythm. Batalvi's mastery of language is also evident in his use of Punjabi vocabulary and idiom. By using the Punjabi language, Batalvi is able to connect with the cultural, social and historical contexts that the language and idiom evoke. In this way, he articulates his ideas and emotions with a degree of specificity and authenticity that makes them all the more powerful and moving. *Luna* is a masterpiece of poetic expression, due in no small part to the poet's mastery of language. From its skilful use of imagery and metaphor to its incorporation of Punjabi vocabulary and idiom, the poem is a testament to Batalvi's dexterity with language. His ability to evoke powerful emotions and complex ideas through the use of language has earned him a place among the greatest writers in Punjabi literature, and has ensured that his poetry continues to be celebrated and admired across generations.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi is considered one of the greatest poets of Punjabi literature, known for his ability to capture the essence of universal human experiences through his poetry. His poem *Lunais* a prime example of his use of universal themes to express deeply personal emotions. One of the most prominent universal themes is love. Throughout the poem, Batalvi explores the transformative power of love and how it can bring both joy and pain. The speaker of the poem is



deeply in love with someone who does not reciprocate their feelings, causing them great emotional anguish. This theme of unrequited love is universally relatable, as most people have experienced the pain of loving someone who does not feel the same way. Batalvi's use of imagery and language in *Luna* further underscores the universal theme of love. For example, he uses the image of the nightingale singing at the door of the beloved to represent the speaker's desire for their love to be reciprocated. The nightingale is a symbol of love in many cultures and is often associated with the pursuit of a beloved. By evoking this image, Batalvi taps into a universal understanding of the power of love and the yearning it can create. In addition to love, the poem also explores the universal themes of longing and loss. The speaker longs for their beloved and is deeply saddened by the fact that they cannot be together. This longing is a theme that resonates with many people, as the desire for connection and companionship is a fundamental aspect of the human experience. Batalvi's use of imagery and language, such as his description of the Jhelum River as a symbol of the speaker's wailing, adds depth and emotional resonance to this theme. Finally, the theme of loss is also present in *Luna*. While the speaker has not yet lost their beloved, they are acutely aware of the pain that will come if their love remains unrequited. This theme of loss is a universal one, as all people experience loss at some point in their lives. Batalvi's use of language and imagery, such as his reference to the "dust storm" created by the *Luna*, captures the feeling of chaos and upheaval that often accompanies loss. By exploring universal themes such as love, longing, and loss, Batalvi creates a work that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries, speaking to the fundamental human experiences that we all share. It is this ability to connect with readers on a universal level that has made Batalvi's work timeless, ensuring that it will continue to be read and appreciated for generations to come.

The poem explores the transformative power of love, the pain of unrequited love, and the longing for a deeper and more meaningful connection with another person, all of which are themes that are deeply rooted in Indian culture. One of the key ways in which Batalvi represents the Indian cultural experience in *Luna* is through his use of imagery. The poem is rich in visual and sensory imagery, which creates a vivid and immersive world for the reader. For example, in the opening lines of the poem, Batalvi uses the image of the "luna" – a motorized bicycle popular in Punjab – to set the scene and establish the cultural context of the poem:



Through villages and towns, the Luna travels,

creating a dust storm in its wake,

like a dervish wilfully stirring up a cosmic dance.

Here, Batalvi uses the image of the luna to evoke the sights and sounds of rural Punjab, where these motorized bicycles are a common mode of transportation. The "dust storm" created by Luna is a metaphor for the disruptive force of love that is at the heart of the poem. Batalvi's use of language is another key element in his representation of the Indian cultural experience. The poem is written in Punjabi, a language that is rich in metaphors and imagery. Batalvi draws on Punjabi idioms and cultural references to create a world that is both specific to the Punjab region and universally relatable. For example, when describing the speaker's longing for their beloved, Batalvi uses the image of the river Jhelum:

The Jhelum's waters are my wailing,

when will the nightingale sing at her door?

The Jhelum is a river that flows through Punjab and Kashmir and is deeply ingrained in the cultural identity of the region. By using the image of the Jhelum as a metaphor for the speaker's longing, Batalvi conveys a universal experience of love and loss that transcends cultural boundaries. Finally, Batalvi's representation of the Indian cultural experience in *Luna* is informed by his own upbringing and personal experiences. Batalvi grew up in Punjab and was deeply rooted in the cultural and regional traditions of the region. His poetry reflects the influences of Sufi mysticism, Punjabi folklore, and the rich oral tradition of Indian storytelling. Through his work, Batalvi was able to bridge different cultural and linguistic divides and create a sense of shared cultural identity that resonated with readers across India. Batalvi's poem is an important work of literature in contemporary Indian writing in English, as it presents an authentic representation of the Indian cultural experience. Through his use of imagery, language, and personal experience, Batalvi evokes a world that is specific to Punjab and yet universally



relatable. The enduring popularity of *Luna* is a testament to Batalvi's ability to capture the essence of Indian culture and convey it through his poetry.

Batalvi was a renowned Punjabi poet, and his work has inspired generations of writers and artists in India and beyond. Despite being written in Punjabi, *Luna* has been widely translated into English and other languages, making it accessible to a wider audience. One of the key reasons why *Luna* is important in contemporary Indian writing in English is its representation of the Indian cultural experience. The poem portrays the intense emotions and experiences of the speaker, who is grappling with the transformative power of love. The poem is imbued with cultural and regional sensibilities, which reflect the complex and diverse tapestry of Indian society. The use of Punjabi imagery, metaphors, and language adds richness and depth to the poem, making it an authentic representation of the Indian cultural experience. Despite being deeply rooted in Indian culture, *Luna* deals with universal themes that are relevant to readers across cultures. The poem explores the transformative power of love, the pain of unrequited love, and the longing for a deeper and more meaningful connection with another person. These themes have universal appeal and continue to resonate with readers worldwide, making *Luna* an important contribution to contemporary Indian writing in English. Another reason why *Luna* is important in contemporary Indian writing in English is the poet's mastery of language. Batalvi was a gifted poet who knew how to use language to create vivid and memorable imagery. His use of similes, metaphors, and other literary devices makes the poem a rich and layered work of art that continues to captivate readers. The translation of Batalvi's work into English has allowed a wider audience to appreciate his mastery of language and the depth of his poetry. *Luna* has also had a significant impact on contemporary Indian writing in English. Batalvi's work has inspired many writers to explore their own cultural and regional experiences in their writing. The poem's use of language, imagery, and universal themes has become a blueprint for many contemporary writers who seek to create works of art that are rooted in their own cultural experiences but appeal to readers worldwide. The poem is an important work of art in contemporary Indian writing in English. Its representation of the Indian cultural experience, use of universal themes, mastery of language, and influence on contemporary writing make it a significant contribution to



Indian literature. *Luna* continues to captivate readers today, and its enduring popularity is a testament to Batalvi's mastery of language and the universal appeal of his poetry.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi's poem is an exemplary piece of art that has stood the test of time for its timeless portrayal of human emotions and the transformative power of love. Written in Punjabi, the poem has been translated into multiple languages, and its appeal transcends time, geography, and culture. One of the reasons why *Luna* is a timeless piece of art is the poet's mastery of language. Batalvi was a master wordsmith who knew how to use language to create vivid and memorable images. Through the use of metaphor, simile, personification, and other poetic devices, he brought alive the emotions and experiences of the speaker in the poem. For example, in the second stanza, he compares the speaker's heart to a drum, which is beating to the rhythm of his love. This metaphor creates an auditory imagery that resonates with readers and evokes a sense of passion and intensity. Similarly, in the next stanza, the poet uses the image of a blooming garden to express the depth and tenderness of the speaker's love. The subtle use of imagery and metaphor reflects Batalvi's mastery of language and his ability to create a rich and layered poem that continues to enchant readers even after more than fifty years of its creation. Another reason why *Luna* is a timeless piece of art is its theme of love, which is a universal emotion that transcends time and culture. The poem portrays the transformative power of love and its ability to impact a person's life deeply. The speaker in the poem surrenders to love completely, becoming vulnerable and open to the world, highlighting the risks and rewards of loving someone. The theme of love has universal appeal and continues to resonate with readers across generations, making *Luna* a timeless piece of literature. The poem also employs the use of symbolism, which is another reason why it is timeless. The poet uses the moon as a symbol of unattainable love. The moon is often seen as a timeless symbol of love and devotion and is used to evoke emotions such as longing, desire, and unrequited love. The moon's distant figure adds to the melancholic and bittersweet tone of the poem, making it more poignant and memorable. Batalvi's poem is a timeless piece of art that has captivated readers for decades. Its mastery of language, universal theme of love, and use of symbolism make it a memorable and poignant poem that continues to resonate with readers across cultures and generations. *Luna* is a timeless reminder of the transformative power of love and the risks and rewards that come with



surrendering to it. The theme of surrender to love takes center stage as the poet vividly portrays the depth and intensity of emotions that arise from loving another person. Through powerful imagery and metaphor, the speaker's surrender to love is conveyed, revealing the transformative power that love can bring to a person's life.

The poem begins with the speaker addressing the moon as a messenger to convey his message of love to his beloved. The words used by the speaker are full of deep emotion and intensity, embodying the idea of surrender to love. The speaker compares his heart to a drum, beating to the rhythm of his love, a symbol of the complete surrender to love. As the poem progresses, the speaker further emphasizes the theme of surrender to love by using imagery of a blooming garden. He states that his heart is like a blooming garden, open to the world, and willing to be vulnerable. The blossoming flowers in the garden symbolize the passion and tenderness that the speaker feels towards his beloved. The use of the garden image further highlights the complete surrender to love that the speaker is experiencing. In the following stanza, the speaker uses the metaphor of a bending tree to convey the idea of vulnerability. A tree is often seen as a symbol of strength and resilience, but the speaker's use of a bending tree expresses the idea that the act of surrendering to love requires us to be open and vulnerable, just as a bending tree is at risk of being torn by the wind. The image emphasizes that surrender to love is not just about the giving of oneself but also the willingness to be hurt and vulnerable.

The symbolism of the moon is also used by the speaker to highlight the theme of surrender to love. The moon is seen as a timeless symbol of love and devotion, and in this poem, it is used as a symbol of unattainable love. The speaker addresses the moon as a messenger to convey his message of love, but the moon is seen as a distant figure, representing the emotional distance between the speaker and his beloved. This distance further emphasizes the idea of surrender, as the speaker is ready to express his love even though it may not be reciprocated. In the final stanza, the speaker completely surrenders to his love and expresses his desire to be with his beloved. He uses the metaphor of a prisoner who is captive to love to convey his complete surrender to the power of love. The speaker is willing to be captured by the love he feels and is ready to accept whatever fate holds for him. The last line, "I await the dawn, where it may lead,



where it may lead," signifies the speaker's openness to the direction his love may take him, even if it is not where he expects it to go. Through the use of powerful and evocative imagery, metaphor, and symbolism, the speaker's complete surrender to his love is emphasized. The poem highlights the transformative power of love and the willingness of a person to be open and vulnerable in the face of emotional challenges.

Batalvi explores the complex feelings that love can create and how it can leave us vulnerable and exposed. Through vivid imagery, powerful metaphors, and an evocative speaker's voice, the poem highlights the power and resilience of the human heart. At the heart of the poem is the theme of emotional vulnerability. The speaker is deeply in love, but this love has left him feeling fragile and open to the elements. He compares himself to a bending tree, vulnerable to the wind, and a blooming garden that is open to the world. These images convey a sense of tenderness and emotional openness, but also the risk of being hurt. Despite the emotional challenges, the speaker's love remains steadfast. He compares his heart to a drum, beating with his beloved in sight. This powerful metaphor captures the intensity of emotions that love can create, and the depths of feeling that the speaker experiences. He asks the moon to carry his message to his beloved, conveying the depth of his love and the strength of his commitment. The moon is a recurring symbol in the poem, representing the speaker's beloved and her emotional distance. The speaker is drawn to the moon and asks it to convey his message to his beloved, but this distance creates a sense of confinement and pain for the speaker. He feels locked away like a prisoner, unable to reach his beloved and express his love. Despite this emotional distance, the speaker remains committed to expressing his love, demonstrating the enduring strength of the human spirit in the face of emotional challenges. Overall, *Luna* is a powerful and evocative poem that highlights the enduring strength of the human spirit in the face of emotional challenges. Through powerful imagery, metaphors, and a moving speaker's voice, the poem captures the beauty and complexities of human emotions and the enduring strength of the human heart. The poem is a testament to the power of love, and the enduring strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity.



The poem's structure, use of imagery, and metaphors effectively convey the theme of separation, creating a poignant and visceral sense of loss and longing. The poem begins with the speaker addressing the moon and asking it to pass a message to his beloved. The message reveals the speaker's separation from his beloved. He says, "Moon! Be the messenger of light/ Alone in darkness I remain, without my lover's sight." The speaker's initial request to the moon for communication with his beloved sets the stage for the theme of separation. The metaphor of darkness adds further emphasis to the theme of separation, underlining the absence of light and hope in the speaker's life without his beloved. Batalvi's use of imagery throughout the poem captures the pain and sorrow of separation. The speaker vividly describes the void left by the separation, saying "The joyless life has consumed me, sucked the marrow dry." The image of the depletion of the speaker's life force is an efficient way to illustrate the toll separation has taken on him. The imagery of emotional emptiness persists throughout the poem. This shows that separation has created a void in the speaker's life that he cannot fill. The use of metaphor is another powerful literary device in the poem that underscores the theme of separation. The most potent metaphor is the moon itself, which the speaker repeatedly addresses. The moon is used as a symbol of separation and the distance created by it. The speaker acknowledges the distance between himself, his beloved, and the moon, saying, "This distance between moon and you have me locked away like a prisoner." This metaphor shows the speaker's anguish at the separation, underscoring the emotional and geographical distance between him and his beloved.

Another metaphor used in the poem is that of the speaker's heart as a garden that has wilted since his separation. The image of a dried-up garden is a metaphor for the emotional and mental devastation caused by separation. This metaphor reinforces the sense of loss and highlights the enduring pain of separation. The use of the metaphor is also symbolic of the idea that separation can irreversibly change the state of one's personhood. The use of vivid imagery and metaphors effectively conveys the emotional impact of separation, creating a visceral sense of loss and longing. The poem highlights how separation causes emotional emptiness and emphasizes the pain of distance. It demonstrates powerfully the fact that separation does not just physically separate people but can create an emotional and mental chasm that can change an individual



irrevocably. Overall, the theme of separation in the poem strikes a chord with all those who have gone through such a loss.

The poem begins with the speaker's address to the moon. The moon is portrayed as an agent of change and the passage of time. The speaker's plea to the moon to send his message to his beloved is an acknowledgment of the moon's power to influence, change, and transform. This also implies the theme of longing and expectation – the speaker is longing for his beloved, and he acknowledges that the moon's phases symbolize the imminent changes. The moon is a symbol of various life phases and stages. The speaker uses the moon's phases to represent shifts and transitions in his life. The waxing moon is a symbol of growth and new beginnings. When the moon waxes, it is a sign of the start of something new, just like the beginning of a new life phase. In contrast, a waning moon is a symbol of decline, loss, and endings. The waning phase can be likened to the sunset or the twilight of life. The end of a phase can be challenging, but it also presents an opportunity for growth and new beginnings. Batalvi's use of the moon cycle is symbolic of the various stages of life that we all go through. Just like the moon, life goes through several phases, and each phase has its meaning and purpose. The idea that life is cyclical, with phases of growth and decline, is a universal one. It is through these phases that we learn and grow, building the foundations of our character and shaping our destinies. The poet's use of the moon as a symbol for life phases reinforces this idea of inevitability and serves as a reminder of life's cyclical nature. Additionally, the moon's influence is not limited to the phases of life alone but extends to the emotional and mental states of individuals. The poet uses the moon as a tool to illustrate the inner turmoil of the speaker. The moon is a symbol of the speaker's emotional state. The speaker's plea to the moon to send his message indirectly to his beloved depicts the wavering nature of the speaker's emotions. The phases of the moon mirror the speaker's innermost feelings and depict the inevitable changes in his emotional and mental states. The moon serves as a powerful symbol of life's ever-changing phases and stages. Through the use of vivid imagery and metaphors, the poet effectively conveys the theme of life's cyclical nature and the inevitability of change. The use of the moon as a metaphor for life stages and inner turmoil highlights the universal aspect of life's journey and serves as a reminder of the inevitability of



change. Ultimately, the poem suggests that by embracing change and accepting life's cyclical nature, one can experience personal growth and renewal.

The recurring motif of the moon is a powerful symbol of the speaker's longing for his lover. Using vivid imagery and metaphor, the poet effectively conveys the theme of separation and the speaker's intense emotions. The poem opens with the speaker addressing the moon, saying, "Moon, go and touch her, tell her I am restless to meet her." Here, the moon is used as a messenger, representing the speaker's desire to communicate with his lover even from a distance. The moon's bright and shining presence in the night sky makes it a perfect symbol for the speaker's yearning for his lover. Throughout the poem, the moon is used to represent the different stages of the speaker's emotional journey. At the beginning of the poem, the moon is depicted as a glowing beacon of hope, representing the speaker's optimistic outlook and his faith in the power of love. As the poem progresses, the moon takes on a more somber tone, reflecting the speaker's growing sense of separation from his lover. The image of the moon is also used as a metaphor for the speaker's emotional state. The moon's phases, which wax and wane over time, represent the speaker's changing moods and emotions. At times, the speaker feels optimistic, while at other times, he feels lonely and despondent. This is reflected in the way the moon is described in the poem, with phrases like "waning away" and "fading fast" conveying the sense of emotional turmoil the speaker is experiencing. Furthermore, the moon is also used as an object of desire, with the speaker expressing a desire to physically possess the moon. This represents the desperate nature of the speaker's longing for his lover and the fact that he would do anything to be with her. The moon is used to illustrate the different stages of the speaker's emotional journey, reflecting his changing moods and experiences. Ultimately, the use of the moon as a motif in the poem highlights the power of love and the deep emotions it can inspire in us.

The moon, in the poem, is a recurring motif that represents the speaker's hopes and desires. It is also a symbol of the fleeting nature of love and the ever-changing phases of life. The speaker asks the moon to be his messenger, to convey his love to his beloved, who he imagines is also looking at the same moon. The poet beautifully depicts the intensity of the speaker's emotions through his powerful use of verses. There are several lines in the poem where the speaker



conveys his lover's overwhelming impact on his life, such as when he says, "Your love has burnt my soul Like the sun scorches the earth." The theme of separation is another central element of the poem. The speaker expresses his inability to meet his lover and the agony of being separated. He says, "I have not seen you for a long time, And the moments are still craving for you." This underscores the pain of separation and the sense of incompleteness the speaker feels in his life without his lover. The poem also explores the vulnerability that comes with love. The speaker acknowledges that his heart is at the mercy of his beloved, saying, "Whatever your heart wills, Mine will follow." This highlights the power that love has over us and the sense of surrender that it demands. The speaker's vulnerability and surrender to love make the poem relatable and poignant, making it a timeless work of art.

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