Song Translation: *Challa*

Translation written in August ‘24

The original writer of this Punjabi folk song is unknown, but many attribute the lyrics to Baba Bulleh Shah (1680-1757).

Note: this is a translation of the song whose origin story is the focus of the short story, “Left to Count Memories.” The song is sung from the perspective of the boatman, Jhalla, whose son Challa never returned from his voyage across the river.

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Oh please, someone go bring him back.
He went today after arguing with me.
Oh God, please let it happen that he comes back by some miracle.
I will lay my life at your feet if he comes.
The tree at our door has started to flower,
A sign that winter is transforming into spring,
However, *Challa* is still somewhere far, far away.
If he doesn’t come before the pomegranates bloom,
then I must go looking for him.
Oh listen to me, *challeya*,*
why have you punished me with this pain?
What did I do to deserve this?
Oh, *Challa* keeps saying no,
Challa keeps saying no,
I know not what he means by this.

Sweet *Challa* of mine*,*
May God give everyone a *Challa* who does not run away.
Oh listen to me, *Challa,*
Oh listen to me, mothers are like trees who provide shade for their children,
your mother is watching you from the heavens in distress.

During the winter season, I shall die by drinking poison
if *Challa,* my beloved, does not return.
And you will be blamed for my death.
Oh listen to me *challeya**,
why have you burnt me by leaving, destroying my reputation in the village?

Challa let's meet at the well one last time,
Challa let's meet at the well one last time,
Talk to each other's faces directly,
Chant and remember the Lord's name,
Oh listen to me *Challa*,
Fear God, there is no hiding from God.

Oh, *Challa* never came back,
Oh, *Challa* never came back,
Oh, *Challa* never came back,

Due to my bad destiny, I will burn and cry for centuries,
Oh listen to me, *Challa,*
Why have you seared me in this painful, unrequited love?

My *Challa* has left me,
My *Challa* has left me,
He breaks hearts and goes,
The story of my pain,
Oh come listen to me retell this story to you,
Will someone ever listen,
Oh listen to me, *Challa,*
My story is your story, our stories are the same,
Challa left wearing his mother's gold chains,
Challa left wearing his mother's gold chains,
Challa left wearing his mother's gold chains,
I am not going to live much longer,
I will have to endure this suffering for the rest of my life,
for who can ever say they saw their loved one's face enough times?
Oh listen to me, *Challa,*
Where should I direct my crying?

**challeya*: this word has multiple meanings – it can reference *Challa*, refer to someone who is crazy, or be a term of endearment. I decided to keep this word in the translation because its ambiguity gives the song its characteristic mysterious quality.