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*Naveen Heer* composed and sung by Nilambri Ghai is written in the form of the traditional *baint*, a narrative verse form used by Waris Shah in his famous 18<sup>th</sup> century poem on *Heer*, a woman whose freedom to love is controlled by social norms. *Heer Sial* loved *Dheedo Ranjha* but was forced to marry into the family of the *Kheras*. Although centuries have passed since this poem was written, many young women in Punjab, like the symbolic *Heer*, are still controlled by parents, in-laws, religious directives, and patriarchal systems.

Also, although many women have found the resources to choose their own lives, there are many who still face violence and abuse. In July 2021, Rajinder Prabhneed Kaur was allegedly murdered by her husband in Montréal. She leaves behind two very young children. She is not alone. As an unacceptable reflection on our current social and justice systems, she makes up one of 14 femicides recorded this year in Québec.

In her poem, *Naveen Heer*, Nilambri has used an old verse form to look for a "new" *Heer* who rejects control of any kind, who does not belong to her parents (the *Sials*) or her in-laws (the *Kheras*). She belongs only to herself and is free as the wind and the skies. She sings in the distance, away from institutionalized systems that exclude her from their songs and services.

Please note that the *baint* as a form is meant to be sung rather than recited.

**A New *Heer***  
**(Creative Translation of *Naveen Heer* by Nilambri Ghai)**

Let's leave behind all Mandirs, Masjids, Gurdwaras  
to build ourselves a home  
away from the false hopes given by our parents  
and those who give us away  
laden with chains of gold and silver.  
Those who feel burdened by the birth of a daughter.

Let's light instead a small earthenware lamp.  
A flame of love  
that needs no more than a few drops of oil.  
Let's recreate a new birth,  
a daughter, a new *Heer*  
now free to grow into her boundless youth.

Free enough to tell her brothers, father, maulvi, priest,  
and keepers of all religions:

"You who write in the name of religion,

You have nothing to say to me.  
Your verses have no place for me.  
I do not see myself among your poets.

“You can keep your religion to yourself.  
I cannot relate to it.  
Your pen reeks of hatred!  
Clean it, then move forward and look in the distance,  
Look at the new *Heer* who sings, dances, and flies  
with the wind and the skies.

She belongs neither to her parents’ family,  
the *Sials* who brought her up.  
Nor to her husband’s family,  
the *Kheras* who took her away.  
She belongs only to herself.”