



IN ETERNITY: THE MYSTICAL REUNION OF LAILA MAJNU

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Abstract

Drawing on Erich Fromm's philosophy, this paper contrasts modern transactional romance with love as an enduring, transformative art. By analyzing the 2018 film Laila Majnu, the study explores love as a metaphysical journey from earthly desire to spiritual surrender. The film utilizes Kashmir's natural landscapes and the profound stillness of waiting to mirror the protagonist's internal metamorphosis. Majnu's supposed madness is reframed as a higher state of awareness where the boundaries between self and other completely dissolve. Ultimately, the narrative subverts physical union, using symbols like the graveyard to signify a mystical, eternal reunion beyond death.

Keywords

Transcendental Love, Erich Fromm, Cinematic Symbolism, Sufi Mysticism, Metaphysical Reunion, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Love, in its most common understanding, is often associated with desire, attachment, and emotional fulfilment. However, cinematic works challenge this limited view and present love as a transformative force that transcends physical presence. The film *Laila Majnu* (2018), rooted in the classical legend of Layla and Majnu, offers a profound exploration of love as a journey from longing to spiritual presence. This representation resonates deeply with Erich Fromm's philosophical work 'The Art of Loving' (1956), where love is defined not as a passive emotion but as an active, enduring state of being. The film *Laila Majnu* depicts love as a transformative and transcendent experience, aligning with Fromm's concept of love as an art that requires practice, awareness, and inner growth.

The reflections on love expressed in "Why we fall and stay in love" by Alain de Botton and "Love is a necessary madness" by Mary Oliver provoke fundamental questions about the nature of love—why human beings fall in love and why they desire to remain in that state. Across cultures and historical periods, love has remained a universal and enduring experience, giving rise to remarkable narratives such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Heer Ranjha*, and *Layla and Majnu*. Beyond literature and cinema, love has also found expression in monumental architecture, including the Taj Mahal, Boldt Castle, Castello di Torrechiara, and Sweetheart Abbey,

In contrast, modern conceptions of love reveal a significant shift—from an ethic of "I have," associated with commitment and enduring attachment, to "I want," which emphasizes desire and personal fulfilment. This transformation reflects how contemporary society constructs romantic love through the lens of attractiveness and desirability. Both men and women are often evaluated according to socially defined parameters—such as wealth, power, and success for men, and beauty, physical maintenance, and modest charm for women. As Erich Fromm argues in 'The Art of Loving', such perceptions reduce love to an object of exchange rather than understanding it as an art that requires effort, discipline, and genuine human connection.

The cinematic representation of transcendental love in *Laila Majnu* (2018), directed by Sajid Ali, with a screenplay by Sajid Ali and Imtiaz Ali, starring Avinash Tiwary as Qais and



Triptii Dimri as Laila. Released in 2018, the film is an adaptation of the legendary tale of Laila and Majnun, and highlights how nature becomes an integral element in expressing the lovers' journey. The film uses nature as a central force that shapes and transforms love, elevating it from a personal emotion to a transcendental experience.

From Qais to Majnu: Love as Self-Transformation:

The cinematic portrayal of love in *Laila Majnu*, directed by Sajid Ali and written in collaboration with Imtiaz Ali, transcends the boundaries of conventional romance and enters the realm of the metaphysical. The film reimagines the legendary tale not merely as a story of lovers separated by circumstance, but as a profound journey of emotional and spiritual transformation. Through visual language, narrative structure, and character development, love is depicted as an evolving force—one that begins in desire and culminates in surrender.

One of the most striking cinematic techniques in the film is its use of nature as an expressive medium. The landscapes of Kashmir are not passive backdrops but active participants in the lovers' journey. The shifting seasons, barren terrains, flowing rivers, and vast skies mirror Majnu's internal transformation. As Qais transitions into Majnu, nature becomes a reflection of his psyche—his longing, madness, and eventual transcendence. The wilderness symbolizes both isolation and liberation, suggesting that true love requires detachment from the material world.

Another important aspect is the film's treatment of *intezaar* (waiting). Unlike typical romantic narratives where waiting is filled with anxiety or anticipation, Majnu's waiting is portrayed as stillness and devotion. The camera often lingers on his solitary presence, emphasizing silence, time, and endurance. This cinematic stillness allows the audience to experience waiting not as emptiness but as fullness—a space where love deepens and transforms into a state of being. The character arc of Qais/Majnu further reinforces this idea. Initially driven by passion and desire, Qais seeks Laila as an external object of love. However, as the narrative progresses, his love undergoes a radical shift. He no longer searches for Laila in the physical world; instead, he begins to experience her presence within and around him. Cinematically, this is represented through dissolving boundaries—between self and other, reality and imagination, presence and absence. His "madness" is not depicted as loss of reason but as a higher state of awareness, aligning with Sufi notions of divine love.

The film also challenges the conventional notion of union as the goal of love. Instead of focusing on physical togetherness, it emphasizes emotional and spiritual unity. Love, in this cinematic vision, is not fulfilled through possession but through dissolution of the self. This is powerfully conveyed through visual metaphors—open landscapes, fading identities, and the merging of the individual with nature.

Another subtle observation emerges in the moment when Qais speaks to Laila about the mountains, telling her that he will find peace there and encounter the other side of the world—a transformed, almost new reality. This vision can be further understood through the recurring setting of the graveyard, where both lovers meet in darkness and silence. While a graveyard conventionally symbolizes death, in this context it takes on a deeper meaning; it becomes a threshold rather than an end. It functions as a bridge that connects Laila and Majnu to another realm of existence, where their love transcends the physical world and moves toward unity beyond life and death.

Finally another significant element is the placement of the song "O Meri Laila" at the end of *Laila Majnu*. Its presence in the closing moments suggests a reunion beyond the physical realm, hinting that Laila and Majnu ultimately unite in another world. The song thus functions as more than just a musical conclusion—it serves as a lingering reminder of their eternal bond, reinforcing the idea that their love transcends separation and finds fulfilment beyond life itself.



References

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