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Editorial

While Kashmir is known for its scenic beauty, majestic mountains and moderate climate, not much has been written on how much Kashmir's constantly changing seasons regulate the life of its inhabitants. Unlike the four seasons marked globally, Kashmir's climate is distinct insofar as it is known for having six seasons, each having its distinct hues and blues.

Kashmir's antiquarian character has led its residents to evolve a calendar of their own which regulates their life in all spheres of activities. Classical calendars like those of Hindu, Islamic and Gregorian traditions are recent entrants into the cultural landscape of Kashmir and are mostly restricted to modern educated and scholarly households. Common life is still regulated by the calendar of seasons, panning out in accordance with the local ecological rhythms and the resultant changes in landscape, colours and the consequent activities – commercial, economic and otherwise.

Different aspects of Kashmir's pastoral, agricultural, urban and economic life are directly associated with the changing patterns of its seasons. Historically, *Chillai Kalan*, the harshest spell of forty days in winter, leads to general immobility. Mostly cloudy weather leads to a mood of gloom across the board which forces people to stay indoors. This immobility has traditionally been channeled through creative pursuits like engagement with various arts and handicrafts which have turned Kashmir into a trademark. Another creative manifestation of this period is the prevalence of the literary and performative art of *dastan goi*. Both are associated with urban centres, enabling relatively more and easier interaction among people in view of immobility and the snowfall which leads to blockage of roads, lanes and by-lanes.

The end of *Chillai Kalan* ushers in *Sonth*, the early spring when days start getting longer and nights shorter. Chill in the wind is warmed a bit by the visible sunshine. People begin to come out and stretch their limbs. Foliage starts to sprout. *Nowroze*, a traditional festival primarily associated with Iran but equally popular in Kashmir, announces the season of loosening of the soil for seeding.

Sonth, which is marked by planting the seedlings of varieties of crops, vegetables and fruits at regular intervals, finally heralds the summer season when Kashmiris feel the heat of the sun on their skin. The hottest spell of forty days, called *Wabradh* is the time to prepare for erratic, irregular and localized rainfall. The spell does not involve much physical activity – agricultural or otherwise - as it is assumed to lead to exhaustion or dehydration. The only thing to ensure during this season is the constant supply of water to the cultivated fields.

The conclusion of *Wabradh* is moderately dry, leading to the ripening of fruits, vegetables and crops. This is the period the agriculturists set out for the harvest. Once the bite is felt in, the agriculturists start harvesting their crops, the fruition of their toil. Fruits are plucked and supplied to markets, vegetables are cheap and in abundance and fresh crops are supplied to bazaars. As the *Harudh* season progresses, leaves on the trees turn red and start falling which labourers and villagers collect, burn and preserve to be used as coal in winter. As trees turn leafless, winter announces its arrival and the cycle goes on.

Kashmir's daily life, by and large, continues to be regulated by its everyday calendar which, in a way, mediates between the nature and the ordinary life on ground.

A bouquet of articles on Kashmir's multi-hued seasons in this issue of *Transcreation* is expected to introduce Kashmir's less-explored dimension.

(Dr) Abid Ahmad

HARWAN RUINS: REVISITING THE LEGACY

Dr Abdul Rashid Lone

Introduction

The archaeological site of Harwan, a symbol of the region's rich historical and cultural history, is tucked away among Kashmir's gorgeous landscape. The archaeological treasure trove of Harwan, which is just 18 kilometres from Srinagar, the capital city of Jammu and Kashmir, has revealed amazing tales from antiquity. This essay explores Harwan's archaeology and highlights its importance for comprehending Kashmir's ancient past. The *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana is a crucial source that sheds light on the historical events that have shaped Kashmir's landscape since pre-historical times. This important book not only recounts historical occurrences but also illuminates socio-economic and politico-religious advancements that embellished the lovely valley. Among the numerous historical events, the entrance and expansion of Buddhism, a profound

religious ideology, stands out as a noteworthy development.

Kashmir's reputation as the *Paradise on Earth*, *Abode of Saints*, and *Land of Sages* is well-deserved, especially in the context of its ancient past. After the waning of the Naga traditions, the rise of Buddhism brought about a significant transformation that left an enduring imprint on the region's history and diverse facets.

In piecing together the history of Kashmir during its early historical era, written records offer valuable glimpses. However, it is the realm of archaeology that assumes a paramount role, furnishing us with priceless revelations about the daily affairs of bygone times. By unearthing artefacts and unravelling ancient structures, archaeology becomes the torchbearer, illuminating the intricate historical fabric of Kashmir and shedding light on the existence of its people.

In Kashmir, the relics and ruins of the Buddhist civilization have been explored and excavated, bringing up a plethora of historical artefacts from various parts of the territory. This article focuses on a fascinating spot in Kashmir that is famous for a lush green garden but also draws attention for its amazing Buddhist archaeological

material culture. Over the years, these ancient ruins have drawn a steady stream of visitors, demonstrating their distinctively Buddhist character and resoundingly advocating for heritage tourism in the area. My particular favourite among the numerous stunning locations is the Harwan.

Settlement Morphology

Harwan's historical narrative spans numerous centuries, its origins intricately entwined with the ebb and flow of multiple civilizations that have graced the Kashmir Valley. Across epochs, this site has hosted a medley of cultures, encompassing the likes of the Kushana Empire and the Hunas, among others. As a living embodiment of persistent human habitation, the site stands resolute, bearing witness to the ongoing evolution of Kashmiri society through the annals of time.

In 1895, while constructing a water conduit, an unexpected discovery emerged, which gained significance when Hiranand Shastri of the Archaeological Survey of India identified it as Harwan's Buddhist site. In 1919, he found imprinted brick tiles, and in 1920-21, R.C. Kak conducted the first systematic excavations. L.K. Srinivasan later resumed work in 1973. From a

chance find, Harwan transformed into a meticulously explored archaeological site, shedding light on its historical legacy and the lives of its ancient inhabitants.

Through meticulous excavations, the site unveiled the remains of a Buddhist structural complex that thrived during the 3rd/4th to 7th centuries CE (see Fig.1). At present, the settlement is relatively compact, encompassing around 10 ruins dispersed across terraced platforms carved into the steep hillside. The earliest constructions unearthed at the site were crafted in a distinctive pebble style. These structures featured mud walls carefully embedded with pebbles, typically measuring one to two inches in diameter. These pebbles were readily available from nearby streams, showcasing the resourcefulness of the builders.

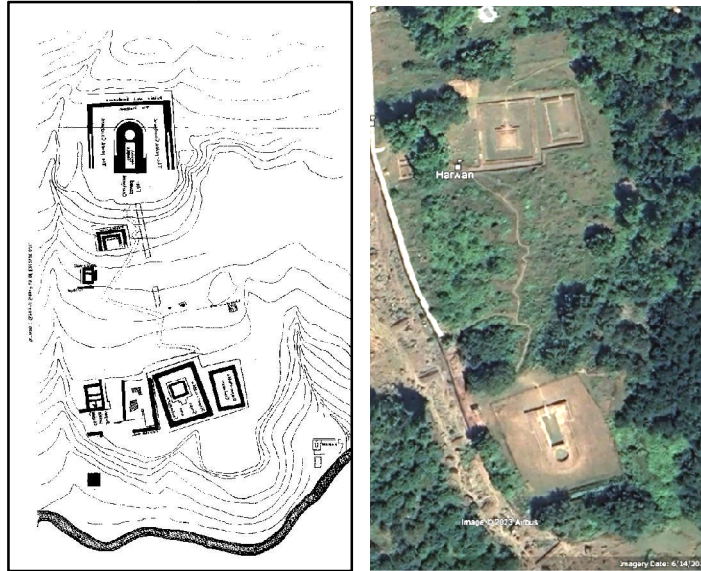


Fig.1. Site Plan of Excavation at Harwan

(Source: Kak, 1933) Google Earth View of ruins at Harwan

Among the architectural variations at the site, the pebble-style constructions occupied a lower position compared to the two other masonry types: diaper pebble and diaper rubble. The pebble-style structures, intriguingly, were present on two separate terraces. On the middle terrace, elevated from the lower level, an isolated fragment of a monastery in pure pebble style emerged. This section, detailed by R.C. Kak in his work

Ancient Monuments of Kashmir, showcased a northern entrance. Additionally, on the same terrace but positioned lower, Kak's depictions unveiled a rectangular building oriented in a north-south axis. Crafted entirely in pebble style, this structure featured a set of steps oriented toward the northwest.

On the settlements lower terrace, two neighboring walls came to light, meticulously constructed using pebble masonry. These walls appear to have formed an enclosure encircling a courtyard that likely belonged to a structure, although remnants of this edifice are presently absent.

Around 300 CE, the pebble construction method gave way to the diaper pebble style (Fig. 2), characterized by intermixing pebbles with larger, irregular stones at consistent intervals to fortify the walls. On the settlement's uppermost terrace, the foundations of an apsidal temple, constructed using the diaper pebble technique, endure. Enclosed by a courtyard embellished with terracotta tiles portraying elaborate patterns of humans, animals, birds, plants, and abstract designs, this temple stands as a testament to the intricate craftsmanship of its time.

Crucially, this specific structure commands the settlement's highest altitude, making it the prominent focal point. It notably distinguishes itself as the most exceptional and ornamentally adorned architectural ensemble within Harwan. This elevated status underscores the considerable emphasis invested by its constructors both in its construction and embellishment. Notably, the shrine's courtyard stands as an exemplar of this dedicated craftsmanship. None of the other structures within the site match the intricate treatment and meticulous attention to detail found in its decoration.



Fig.2. Diaper-pebble style of construction at Harwan (Source: Original)

The temple boasts an exterior design with an apsidal shape, while its internal layout takes on a circular form. This architectural wonder begins with a rectangular hall at its forefront. As for the terracotta tiles found near this structure, Robert E Fisher suggests that the elevated apsidal temple's walls, filled with rubble, possibly had a layer of sleek plaster. The entrance, oriented toward the valley, presents this feature. Furthermore, the lower portions of the walls were embellished with terracotta plaques illustrating ascetic figures. These plaques formed a low enclosure along three sides of the temple, delineating its boundaries and creating a separation from the hillside backdrop.

In earlier explorations of the site, no indications of a surrounding circumambulatory passage encircling the temple were discovered. However, during the excavations conducted in 1979-80, evidence of such a passage was unveiled. This pathway is believed to have taken the form of a courtyard, its surface adorned with terracotta tiles. On the lowest terrace, multiple cells or rooms, crafted using the diaper pebble technique, were also brought to light. These chambers might have served as chapels or been part of a residential complex. Additionally, another structure, termed the 'prayer hall',

was exposed on this same lowest terrace. Displaying a rectangular layout, this edifice was also constructed using the diaper pebble style.

On the site's lowest terrace, south of the prayer hall, the substructure of the stupa, likely safeguarding Buddhist relics, was unveiled. This structure seems to be a later addition, fashioned from uncut stones with smaller stones fitted in between. This building technique, termed diaper rubble, marks the third and most contemporary architectural style identified on the site. Encircling the stupa, an enclosure wall, similarly crafted in diaper rubble style, safeguards it. Positioned within a rectangular courtyard oriented northwards, the stupa commands the central position.

The construction approach employed for the stupa and its immediate vicinity is noticeably rough and unrefined, devoid of any binding material. This suggests a later construction phase. Surrounding the stupa, the area was adorned with terracotta tiles decorated with ornate designs. According to Kak's observations, these tiles were discovered broken, with certain pieces featuring incomplete figures. While some tiles seemed flat, indicating a possible pavement function, others exhibited raised reliefs, suggesting their placement on

walls. This hints at the possibility that these tiles were originally not from the courtyard where they were found during excavation. Instead, they were likely transferred from another structure, possibly with an earlier origin.

The unearthing of a coin linked to Toramana, a Huna ruler mentioned in Kalhana's accounts, beneath the stupa's stairs, is a pivotal milestone in dating the stupa's construction. This discovery implies an association of the stupa and its architectural style with the 5th or 6th century CE, or even a later era. Alongside this momentous finding, several other artefacts came to light, including fragments of terracotta figurines and three plaques embellished with images of stupas (see Fig.3). These plaques provide invaluable insights into the stupa's design and structure during the 5th century in Kashmir. The description of the stupa depictions on these plaques is given by Pratapaditya Pal as:

[A]ll three (stupas on plaques) have a triple basement with three flight of steps, the drum with a line of beading and plain moldings with plain dome. A row of projecting brackets makes up the harmika, above which is a succession of eleven umbrellas of diminishing size, with fluttering

ribbons tied at the very top. At both corners of the top terrace is a tall column with seated lion.



Fig.3. Terracotta plaque depicting stupa, at Harwan
(Source: Pal)

During the excavation season of 1973, a noteworthy revelation surfaced. It was observed that a preceding structure, constructed using diaper pebble walls, had been covered by a distinct form of dry rubble construction. This finding suggests the intervention of a

separate group, likely non-local, deliberately altering the existing diaper pebble structures and constructing their own buildings in a different architectural approach known as diaper rubble masonry.

Significantly, a stratum of ash and charcoal was discovered amidst these two foundation walls erected using different building techniques. This serves as evidence of potential intruders—potentially the Hunas—who, towards the late 6th century CE, may have set ablaze the earlier Kushana settlement. These invaders, accountable for the obliteration of Buddhist monuments not only in Kashmir but also across the Indian subcontinent, may have entered the valley. Consequently, Harwan's Buddhist settlement endured neglect for many centuries before gradually fading into obliteration during later centuries.

As a result of these excavations, substantial proof of construction methods, lingering artistic traces, and cultural artefacts intertwined with Buddhist connections were brought to light. This illumination casts a spotlight on the site's enriching heritage.

Artistic Evolution

Amid the opulent rule of the Kushana monarchs, the Kashmir valley bore witness to the dawn of an

indigenous artistic legacy recognized as the Kashmir Terracotta School of Art. Diverging from the artisans of the broader Indian subcontinent during the Kushana era, who primarily engaged with stone and aligned with the Gandhara School of art, the artisans in Kashmir during the initial centuries of the Christian era exhibited a distinct inclination towards clay as their favored medium to manifest their artistic ingenuity. Terracotta art, gaining prominence within the Kushana epoch, specifically earned acclaim in the realm of Kashmir.

Significantly, the coexistence of diaper-pebble style structures and the utilization of ornate terracotta tiles (illustrated in Fig.4) to adorn the courtyards of Buddhist stupas represents a unique trait in the settlement arrangements witnessed in the Kashmir valley, tracing back to the Kushana era. This observation gains reinforcement from the substantial volume of uncovered terracotta artefacts. These encompass imprinted tiles, figurines capturing both human and animal forms, beads, skin rubbers, seals, and an array of diverse objects. These discoveries collectively affirm the extensive adoption of terracotta as well as mirror the artistic opulence that flourished during this period.



Fig.4. Terracotta tiles, Harwan (Source: SPS Museum)

A multitude of archaeological sites, encompassing nearly a dozen in total, have unveiled the distinctive settlement pattern throughout the expansive Kashmir valley. In certain instances, only terracotta tile pavements

have been discovered, exemplified by locations like Kutbal and Hoinar-Lidroo in the Anantnag district. In other scenarios, these terracotta tile pavements intermingle with pebble and diaper-pebble style constructions. Noteworthy sites include Harwan in the Srinagar district, Huthmura and Semthan in Anantnag, Ushkar and Kanisapur in Baramulla, and Kralchak in the Pulwama district. This tradition of embellishing floors with terracotta tile pavements is also documented at Takiya Bala in Pulwama, various closely situated sites at Doen Pather (Pahalgam), Ahan (Sumbal), and the Bhamud-din Sahib mosque near Matan in Anantnag. Furthermore, such pavements have been reported at Gurwait-Yarikhan in Budgam.

The art forms found within the region, particularly the terracotta figurines, notably reflect Hellenistic influence. Given that Kashmir, as both a geographical and political entity, was intricately connected to the Gandhara kingdom during that era, which was profoundly shaped by Hellenistic artistic and intellectual concepts, this influence probably extended to Kashmir as well. The Gandhara School of art thrived from the 1st to the 5th century CE, its legacy extending

even further into the 7th century CE in certain regions of both Kashmir and Afghanistan.

While the prevalent trend during the Kushana period across the Indian subcontinent leaned towards stone sculptures, the artistic landscape of Kashmir deviates remarkably. Rather than embracing stone as the primary medium, artists in Kashmir during the Kushana era displayed a striking preference for terracotta. This material was employed to craft diverse art forms including figurines and tiles. This distinctive material choice prompts inquiries into its underlying reasons. It is plausible that Kashmir had cultivated an indigenous school of art preceding the Kushana reign, wherein terracotta or clay had been extensively employed as a medium for artistic expression.

The available evidence lends substantial credence to this hypothesis. Even prior to becoming a part of the Kushana Empire, the early historical phase of Kashmir was marked by the presence of urban hubs, underscoring the existence of a local artistic tradition primarily centered around terracotta. The incorporation of Hellenistic elements into these figurines by artists from Gandhara can be attributed to shifts in political power and patronage dynamics. Additionally, the evidence

indicates a developmental trajectory in terracotta tile design, progressing from modest and plain patterns to intricate ornamentation as seen in Harwan, Huthmura, and Semthan.

These findings propose that the relationship between Kashmir and Gandhara grew notably potent after the conquest of Kashmir. A rudimentary form of exchange, akin to commerce, had already been established, facilitating the exchange of ideas both from Kashmir to the western regions and vice versa. The intermingling of these two cultural currents in Kashmir birthed artistic expressions that embodied local distinctiveness while also displaying the imprint of external influences.

Meaning and Context

The archaeological discoveries at Harwan bear profound import in unravelling the socio-cultural intricacies of ancient Kashmir. They furnish evidence of the area's absorption of diverse religious and cultural currents across time. The existence of Buddhist edifices mirrors the sway of Buddhism in the region during the Kushana epoch, whereas the varied artefacts signify the interplay among distinct communities and civilizations.

Moreover, the existence of terracotta tiles, pottery fragments, and coins underscores the vitality of an economy and intricate trade networks that facilitated the fluid exchange of both commodities and concepts. The Harwan excavation further illuminates the craftsmanship and artistic acumen of the ancient dwellers, vividly demonstrated through the elaborately adorned tiles and other artefacts.

Conservation and Obstacles

The task of preserving and conserving the invaluable archaeological treasures held within the precincts of Harwan is not only of immediate concern but also of profound significance for the enlightenment and appreciation of Kashmir's ancient history by generations to come. The site, with its rich layers of history, holds the key to unravelling the narratives of bygone eras, offering insights into the lives, cultures and civilizations that have thrived on this land.

However, the cherished site grapples with a multitude of challenges that threaten its integrity. Environmental degradation, arising from factors such as weathering, erosion and natural processes, poses a continuous threat to the delicate structures and artefacts that bear witness to the passage of time. Encroachment, driven by modern

development and urbanization, encircles the site with pressures that extend beyond its historical boundaries. Inadequate or insufficient conservation efforts further compound these concerns, as they might fall short in effectively addressing the complex demands of preservation.

To ensure the endurance of Harwan's legacy, it is incumbent upon the relevant authorities to adopt proactive and multifaceted approach. A comprehensive conservation plan, rooted in expert knowledge and supported by cutting-edge techniques, should be formulated and implemented. This would encompass strategies to shield the site from environmental aggressors, employing methods such as controlled access, protective barriers and erosion control mechanisms. Moreover, a collaborative approach involving local communities, academic institutions and heritage organizations can foster a sense of responsibility towards and vigilance over the site.

In the face of these challenges, the responsibility to preserve Harwan's legacy is not merely a duty to the past, but a commitment to the future. By steadfastly safeguarding this archaeological marvel, we lay the groundwork for generations to connect with their roots,

fostering a deep understanding and respect for the intricate tapestry of history that unfolds within Harwan's sacred grounds.

Final Thoughts

The archaeological landscape of Harwan stands as a gateway to the opulent heritage enshrined within the folds of the Kashmir Valley. Through the meticulous process of excavation, this ancient site offers us a profound window into the historical, cultural and spiritual currents that have shaped the region across epochs. The narrative woven by the findings at Harwan transcends the realms of mere objects; it unravels the intricate layers of past civilizations and the intricate dance of diverse cultural influences.

From the grandeur of the Buddhist monastic complex to the intricate artistry seen in the technique of embellishing courtyards with ornate terracotta tiles, Harwan's trove of archaeological treasures reads like a chronicle of the past. It chronicles the rise and fall of societies, the convergence of beliefs, and the exchanges of ideas that have colored the landscape over the ages. It is within these remnants that we discover not only artefacts, but voices echoing the aspirations, achievements and dynamics of civilizations long gone.

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CULTURAL LEGACY OF JAMMU & KASHMIR

Dr Abid Ahmad

Introduction

Jammu & Kashmir is one of the most beautiful regions of our country. The Union Territory is especially known for its natural beauty, rich cultural legacy, antiquarian spiritual traditions and the varieties of living traditions. Jammu & Kashmir - comprising the two distinct regions of Jammu & Kashmir - exemplifies a mini India of sorts in itself, in terms of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity while being bound together by more ways than one. Both the regions share common roots and legacy and at the same time have seen almost identical historical and cultural evolution over the centuries, bequeathing a rich cultural legacy to their progeny. This trans-regional culture of Jammu & Kashmir is one of the oldest and most vibrant cultures in India, recognised for its syncretic cultural ethos,

inclusivist social vision and a worldview based on peace, harmony and celebration of varieties of religious and cultural experiences.

Land and people

Inhabited by races of diverse ethnic stocks, the residents mostly belong to the Aryan race. The people are known for their sharp features, sturdy physique and handsome looks, exhibiting a fair share of the Aryan traits. The feminine beauty of J&K is proverbially known. People are known for their intellectual qualities with extraordinary acumen for artistic pursuits. Dogras inhabit the Jammu belt while Kashmiris live in the Kashmir valley. Other regions of the area are inhabited by other mixed breeds, tribals and other ethnic and linguistic identities, speaking a diverse set of languages. Dogras are known as a marshall race, known for their chivalry. Kashmiris are acknowledged for their intellectual rigour, artistic skills and hard work. All these races and ethnicities inhabiting the distinct regions within J&K present a unique picture of unity in diversity where different religious, cultural and linguistic traditions have flourished side by side, having contributed in their own way towards the collective good of the region as a whole.

History and Culture

Jammu & Kashmir is an ancient civilisation whose roots go as far as thousands of years. Its historical evolution and cultural fruition is deeply tied together, based on multiple religious and cultural sources. All religious, spiritual and cultural traditions found in Jammu & Kashmir's past and present have had a profound influence on the development of its rich cultural traditions. Spirituality reigns supreme across the length and breadth of the UT as mystic signposts dot the whole landscape here. Revered Sufi shrines, temples, Gurdwaras and other mystic places are found all across J&K.

The culture of its Kashmir region is a unique blend of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh traditions, and has assumed its own distinct identity. The genesis of Kashmiri culture can be traced back to ancient times when the region was known as "Kashyap Mar" or the land of Kashyap Rishi. The valley was believed to be the abode of gods and goddesses, and the people of Kashmir were deeply religious and spiritual. The early Kashmiri culture was greatly influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, and the region was an important center of learning and was revered for its scholarship. The

Nilamata Purana (6th-7th century CE) is the earliest source of information about the early Kashmir and its creation myths. Other earliest references to the valley of Kashmir are found in the Greek and Chinese classics, followed by some sources in Arabic language.

Excavations at Burzhoma in northern Srinagar indicate that the earliest inhabitants of Kashmir were cave dwellers or pit dwellers. The earliest residents of Kashmir are said to have been the Nagas, Pishachas, the Sakas, the Yavanas, etc. It is said about them that they were the sun and the serpent worshippers. During the reigns of Kushana kings (2nd century BC – 3rd century AD), the people of Kashmir adopted Buddhism as their religion. It was during their rule that the fourth Buddhist Council took place here whose decisions were engraved on copper plates and buried at an unknown location in Kashmir. The location of that cultural treasure trove is still to be identified. The valley became the centre of Mahayana Buddhism during that period.

In the seventh century AD, Buddhism was superseded by Hinduism as the dominant identity of the people of Kashmir. It was during this period that Kashmir developed a humanistic philosophy of its own known as Kashmir Saivism. The then Kashmiri scholars

like Somananda, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta worked out a monistic philosophy which is different from Advaita Vedanta. This philosophy affirmed the spirit of physical existence, though transitory in nature. It believed in saying yes to life in totality.

Hindu kings are said to have ruled over Kashmir for over four thousand years. “Around twenty one dynasties are said to have successively occupied the throne.” (Kaumudi 18). Ashoka is said to have conquered Kashmir about the year 250 BC. He laid the foundation of the Srinagar city near Padrethan around three kilometres from the present Srinagar. The city continues to be the nerve centre of Kashmir.

Jaluka followed Ashoka and to him is attributed the stone temple over the Shankeracharya temple. The most celebrated of the rulers of Kashmir was Lalitaditya (699-736 AD), also known as Muktapida who is said to have extended the frontiers of his kingdom to the northern India and to the whole Afghanistan and some Central Asian territories.

Jammu on the other hand is an ancient city and has a history and culture quite different from that of Kashmir. One legend associates its name with the king Jamboo Lochan who had found the lion and the lamb

drinking water together from the same source here. The king was fascinated by the spectacle and chose it as his capital. The place finds mention in many ancient texts and is like Kashmir associated with Naga legends. Its history unfolded in somewhat different way until Maharaja Gulab Singh, a Dogra Rajput king united the two regions in mid-nineteenth century. The Dogra rulers were great patrons of art and scholarship and gifted most temples, forts, palaces to this beautiful region. Besides the graceful architecture and decorative paintings, a wealth of murals in palaces at Jammu, Udhampur and Ramnagar and the old *havelis* and *serais* built by the Dogra nobility offer a rich glimpse into the cultural heritage of Jammu. Innumerable temples spread all across the region lend credence to its claim of being the city of temples. Arthur Neve rightly remarks that “Ancient India has nothing more worthy of its early civilisation than the grand remains of Kashmir.”

Architecture

Jammu & Kashmir exhibits excellent standards in architecture as represented by the remains at Awantipura, Martand, Tapar, Mattan, Parihaspora as well as the more recent Amar Mahal, Mubarak Mandi, the palaces at Ramnagar in Jammu, etc. Huge temples of

majesty and beauty carved out of stones stand testimony to the artistic excellence of that epoch. The trefoil arches adorning the temples across Jammu & Kashmir add to the patterns of temple architecture in the country.

The architecture of Jammu & Kashmir built on stone, wood and lately on bricks is based on indigenous ecological standards comprising modesty, spirituality and humility. This ecological vision was the bedrock of J&K's ethnic architecture that best symbolised its cultural ethos and divine living. The medieval architecture of Kashmir in particular was purely based on wood with its spiritual majesty. Only three specimen of this architecture are extant now – the khanqah of Mullah Mohsin Fani, the tomb of Syed Mohammad Madni and the Khankah-e Mualla of Shahi Hamdan.

Mysticism

Such a long historical journey and philosophical legacy gave birth to a unique tradition of mysticism in Jammu & Kashmir that was based on Buddhist and Hindu religious conventions. This mystic tradition was indigenous and was inspired by local spiritual sources.

The cultural evolution of Kashmir was best symbolised by Lal Ded, a creative genius who lived in fourteenth century. She is considered to be the

fountainhead of Kashmir's spiritual and cultural identity and is referred to as "the heroine of ancient popular religious culture in Kashmir." Her verses are still very popular among the people of all faiths in Kashmir. Her poetry celebrates divine love and deep love for mankind.

By 13th-14th century, as Islam made a formal entry into Kashmir, Reshism, Kashmir's indigenous Sufi order, founded and patronised by the great patron saint of Kashmir, Hazrat Shaikh Noor-ud Din, popularly known as Nund Reshi, was born.

Nund Reshi was the spiritual and cultural successor of Lal Ded. His Reshi order of Sufism has its exclusive spiritual practices and social vision. It believes in universal values of peace and compassion and celebrates the diversity of cultural and religious traditions while upholding the syncretic values of social harmony and peaceful co-existence. These Rishis, belonging to diverse faiths, were the harbingers of universal brotherhood and peace.

Handicrafts

Handicrafts of J&K are a global brand, famous for intricate designs and vibrant colors as brilliantly exhibited in woodcarving, papier-mâché, embroidery, carpets, shawls, etc. Over the centuries J&K has regained

the famed status of being the heaven on earth, showcasing unprecedented excellence in various arts and handicrafts that have conferred a global recognition to its arts and crafts. In fact, UNESCO has recently designated Srinagar, one of the twin capital cities of J&K, as a creative city in the field of crafts and folk arts, only second city in India in this category after Jaipur.

Art

The music of Jammu & Kashmir is characterized by its mesmerising melodies and soulful lyrics. The region abounds with its rich and imaginative folk music, folk literature, folk theatre and folk art. A rich culture of folk music became the bases of Kashmir's tradition of classical music, known as Sufyana Mouseeqee. This music enriched the Sufi legacy of Kashmir and introduced Kashmir as one of the important habitats of Sufi worldview in modern history. This music is sung in accompaniment with Sufi practices like mystic and meditation sessions. It is considered as one of the ways to connect with the divine. The Sufiana Music is the most noticeable manifestation of Kashmir's Sufi culture. Kashmir's Sufi heritage is deeply rooted in Kashmir's indigenous cultural tradition while imbibing influences from far and near. Besides the music of Indian sub-

continent, it is equally influenced by Iranian and Central Asian musical traditions. It has its own character, notations and instruments. Both Jammu and Kashmir boast of having inherited some of the oldest art forms in the world including the Bhand peather, a folk theatre of J&K, various dances like roff, banghra, kud, baghtian, etc. Bhaderwah and Kishtwar areas of Jammu division are known for their ethnic dance forms like *dhaku* and *Ghurai*, the former performed by men and the latter by women. All these indigenous art forms are performed in accompaniment of various ethnic musical instruments. The traditional instruments of Jammu & Kashmir include santoor, rabab, Narsinghas, dhol, tumbakhnear, nott, etc. On parallel lines, ethnic art forms like Basohli school of miniature paintings attained artistic excellence. Some of its celebrated and world class series like *rasa manjri*, *Raga-Ragini*, etc., corresponded to the musical compositions in Indian classical music, thereby integrating diverse art forms. Various genres of folk art like folk music, folk dance, folk songs for different occasions of joy and festivities, folk instruments and the like add to the cultural panorama, lending it the character and aura the region is known for.

Literature

The rich cultural heritage of Kashmir is evident in its literature too. The literature of Jammu & Kashmir is one of the most important aspects of its culture. It reflects the ethos, values, and aspirations of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. The region has made a huge contribution to the Sanskrit scholarship. Be it grammar, aesthetics, poetics, philosophy and spiritualism, scholars from Jammu & Kashmir have made substantial contribution to these fields of learning. One of the most notable figures in J&K's literary tradition is the philosopher and polymath, Abhinavagupta. He was a scholar of Shaivism, Tantra, and aesthetics, and is known for his contributions to the fields of philosophy, poetry, and drama.

Cuisine

The cuisine of J&K is a blend of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh traditions, and is known for its rich flavors and use of aromatic spices. Various dainty dishes including the savory dishes of *wazwan* and a huge collection of relishing vegetarian foods caters to the taste buds of connoisseurs of food across the board.

The Kashmiri cuisine reflects a rich influence of Persian, Central Asian and Afghan food with a lot of

spices like cardamom, cinnamon, fennel, cloves., etc., making the food delectable and aromatic. The highlight of the Kashmiri cuisine is Wazwan, a collection of scores of veg and non-veg dishes.

Jammu is famous for rajma chawal, Ambal, Khatta Meat, Kulthein Dal, Dal Patt, Maa da Madra, Auriya, etc. The other traditional dishes popular in Jammu are Morel (Gushi) Palov, Madra (lintel cooked in curd), Oriya (Potato/Pumpkin in mustard sauce), Maani, Khameera, Katha Meat (Sour Mutton), Shasha (raw mango chatni), Kasrod and Timru-di-Chatni, Shiri Pulav, and Mitha Bhat (Sweet Rice).

Conclusion

From pre-historic times to its contemporary phase, history of Jammu & Kashmir has been a meeting ground of varied cultural and religious traditions. Over the centuries, the place has absorbed and adopted these religious and mystical traditions and has evolved a culture of its own which is composite, tolerant and accommodative in its outlook. This long historical evolution has bestowed a unique mystic character to its cultural identity. This identity is marked for its mystic essence, celebration of cultural and religious diversity, tolerance and accommodativeness and moderation in all

affairs of life. This cultural vision was kept alive by a long chain of saints, scholars, Sufi/mystic poets, litterateurs.

This successful blending of diverse cultures has proved to be one of the greatest successes in the history of the country which is also known for its cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic diversities.

(The author works as Editor in J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages.)

Journey

FINDING MY GURU

Sushant Dhar

I would like to begin my essay quoting Bhagavan's first written teaching; The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent. As I start writing about the journey I undertook in the year 2018, I first of all offer my heartfelt prayers at the feet of the Bhagavan. It took me some time to write how I discovered Bhagavan and the experiences I gathered while journeying towards the holy capital of the world Thiruvanamalai, some 1800 miles from my place. A few years ago, I had somewhere heard about Bhagavan during a conversation and the name stayed with me. As I reached home, I searched about it on the internet and the first thing I saw was Ramana Maharishi's picture

which at the very instant transported me to a realm of infinite compassion. It filled my heart with love and reverence. The first book I read about him was 'The Teachings of Ramana Maharishi' by Arthur Osborne. It was October, 2016. Thereafter I browsed many video clips of Bhagavan; I watched the hour-long documentary describing all the major events of his life. While going through his teachings, I cultivated a fervent desire to visit Ramanasramam and Holy Arunachala, the embodiment of Lord Shiva. I worked out many plans in the months to come and nothing worked. I waited for the correct time and after two years, one fine day in the month of October, I booked my tickets and flew from Srinagar, Kashmir to Bangalore. I stayed at Bangalore for a day in the guest room at the Indian Institute of Statistics where my friend is pursuing his doctoral studies. I had my breakfast the following morning and thereafter in the noon boarded a local bus from Bangalore to Thiruvananthapuram. The scenic landscape studded with mountains and the coconut trees alongside the highway filled me with hope and life. I was looking for Chengam Road, Thamarai Nagar on Google Maps all the time. I had repeatedly conveyed the bus conductor to inform me when I'm near my destination. It took me more than

5 hours to reach the Ashram. It had started raining heavily when the bus entered the holy town of Thiruvanamalai. The bus conductor called me and said you have reached. I came down and was happy to find the ashram premises adjacent to the road itself. I first saw the board of the ashram at the gate and felt elated. I was drenched in rain and was asked to remove my shoes near the gate. I found my way quickly into the ashram and enquired regarding my reserved accommodation. I filled out my details in the register and was given a key of my room along with a pamphlet listing the daily timings regarding the morning and evening prayer ceremony at the Samadhi hall and the timing of meals at the Ashram Dining hall. I was allotted A. Devaraja Mudaliar Cottage at the far end of the ashram near the woods. As I opened the door, I found my way into a small room with a bed, chair and a table. I saw Bhagavan's portrait resting on the shelf of the room. I informed my parents about my travel after I reached the ashram. They were surprised and started enquiring about the place. As the evening approached, I went to the dining hall for the meals. The small room leading to the dining hall has pictures of Bhagavan and the devotees. The sattvic meals at the ashram purified my body and soul. I didn't talk much

during my entire stay in the Ashram. I never felt like talking. One of the dogs that roamed around the ashram premises became my friend; I named him Jacky. He followed me everywhere and used to sit with me at the entrance of the Samadhi hall. I have the picture of two of us. I followed the daily routine of the ashram religiously and spent most of my time in the library and meditation room. I used to wake up at 5 AM and started my morning listening to Akshramanamalai, followed by participation in the morning prayers at the Samadhi hall, silently circumambulating and praying to the Bhagavan. The silence in the meditation hall filled me with love and serenity; meditating at the Bhagavan's picture for hours filled my heart with harmony and compassion.

My days in Ashram were spent in earnest prayers addressed to the Bhagavan. The books in the ashram library introduced me to Nisargadatta Maharaj. His book 'I Am That' was revelatory. I read many books in the library including Wandering in the Himalayas by Sri Swami Tapovanam, Zen Experience by Thomas Hoover, Sri Ramanaparavidyopanishad, Seeds of Consciousness, Sri Ramana Leela, Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism. I met a wonderful young man draped in white dhoti at the library. He introduced himself as Swami Avadhoot.

He was a software engineer and had left his corporate job. He was away from home wandering in the ashrams across the country. One fine morning after having our breakfast, we both decided to trek the sacred mountain Arunachala. It had started drizzling as we walked past the back gate of the ashram leading to the mountain. Our first stop was Skanda ashram where my eyes fell on a small board outside describing the holy room where Sri Bhagavan's mother Alagammal attained liberation through his touch. Thereafter, we walked a little and found ourselves at Virupaksha cave where Bhagavan had stayed for 17 years in deep meditation. I entered the small cave and found some devotees sitting in silence, not moving an inch, praying to the Bhagavan. I felt very happy and full of gratitude that I could be around these places where Bhagavan had spent so many years of his life. My holy journey culminated with the visit to Arunachalesvara temple, some two kilometers from the ashram. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and rests at the base of the holy mountain. I had read about the legend around the holy mountain in Raja Rao's novel *The Chessmaster and his moves*; describing in detail how Lord Shiva appeared as a large column of fire to Vishnu and Brahma.

When Brahma and Vishnu fought, claiming, 'No one is the equal of me!' it appeared before them in a form whose head and foot could not be known. It is the great Mountain of Fire, which stands alone without a peer, instantly conferring liberation upon all who think of it. (Kanta Puranam) The temple worships Shiva as Annamalaiyar and the idol presiding inside is referred to as Agni Lingam. The temple has four mighty gateway towers known as gopurams. I visited Bhagavan's shrine called Sri Pathala Lingam, the place where Bhagavan sat for many days absorbed in bliss, performing severe tapas and remaining oblivious to the wretched conditions inside the cellar.

Bhagavan arrived at the age of sixteen years at Arunachala on 1st September, 1896. The day of parting had come. Swami Avadhoot gifted me a book. He was to leave a day after me. He had requested the ashram authorities to extend his stay. I prayed at the feet of the Bhagavan in the Samadhi hall. I left the ashram teary-eyed after having my lunch and reached Bangalore in the evening, spending the entire night at the airport, thinking about the ashram and the days spent in silence and beautiful quietude. Bhagavan's picture repeatedly flashed in my mind. Swami Avadhoot called me a day after. He

was permitted to stay a week more and was allotted my room. He was happy about it. I tried calling him many times. The number isn't working. Since my visit to the Ashram, not a single day has passed when Bhagavan's thought hasn't come to my mind. Bhagavan's Arunachala Aksharamanamalai is my refuge. Listening every morning to the well-known song on surrender 'Sarnagati' composed by Manavasi Ramaswamy takes me close to the Bhagavan. I hope to visit the Ashram soon again. We take shelter under you and you are our sole refuge. Who else is there to whom we can turn? If you delay to come to our rescue, we can bear it no longer. So, come at once, end my misery, and give me happiness!

(The author is a noted writer and short story writer, presently based in Jammu.)

Tribute

PROF VIDYA BHUSHAN GUPTA: A TEACHER WORTHY OF HIS NAME

Suman K Sharma

His parents had named him 'Vidya Bhushan'. I saw him for the first time sixty years ago, in 1962, to be precise. I was then a student of Class 8 in the 'Ranbir High School' (it was then called Shri Ranbir Multi-lateral Higher Secondary School), and Vidya Bhushan ji took our classes as a 'casual' teacher. We boys grew fond of him from the day one. He was a welcome change from our thundering teachers who had their heads full of scraps of learning, and hands ready with punishing *dandas*. This teacher instead talked in his mellow voice of what was happening in the country, narrating to us stories of the daring and venturesome men and women. When he went away after a month or so, we missed him sorely. It was much later that we learnt that he was himself a student at a university outside the state and had come home on vacation. That he chose to make use of his leisure to earn a few extra rupees to add to the family kitty. I also found that his family lived in Bakshinagar,

not far from my home. My receding nature prevented me, however, to get close to him.

Ten years later we met again on a clean, rain-washed afternoon in August, 1972. It happened on the road that connects Bakshi Nagar and the Canal. Apparently, he was riding home after his classes at the university (the campus of the newly formed Jammu University was then next to the GGM Science College) and I was walking home from my day at the college. Vidya Bhushan ji had now become a university teacher. I had, in poor comparison, barely passed 'pre-medical' - a euphemism for Class 12 with Botany and Zoology courses - and mulishly sought admission in the science college yet again to complete my B. Sc. with 'medical' subjects.

Noticing my lonesome figure, Prof Vidya Bhushan stopped his Lambretta a couple of feet ahead and invited me to a pillion-ride home. Dropping me at my doorstep, he asked me to see him at his home the same evening. I still treasure the memories of how friendly he had been as an odd-job teacher years ago. So I went to him without any reserve. He proved as friendly as I had expected. "Sit down," he said to me warmly, pointing to a chair opposite him.

“Tell me what you are doing these days,” he enquired.

“I am in the second year TDC in the science college,” I said, adding the salutation *‘Virji’* to my reply to claim fraternal privilege as a neighbouring youngster.

He seemed concerned.

“I thought you had finished your studies in these ten years that we met. There must be some reason why you have lagged behind,” he said after a long pause.

“*Virji*, I have been failing repeatedly in the higher classes.”

“That surprises me. You were fairly good in your studies as I can recall.” *Virji* looked searchingly at my expression for an answer.

“It is the Science subjects, mainly Physics that have been my undoing. I hate Sciences,” I replied at last.

“Then what is it that you like?”

“I like English. In my last exam, I scored distinction in that subject,” I said, not without a tinge of pride.

“If that be so, why then have you taken admission in the science college to study the sciences all over again?” He asked, looking me in the eye.

Now that was something that I too had been asking myself several times in a day. Perhaps it was

because of some sort of mental inertia on my part. I had seen my elder brothers taking science subjects and being good at that. The eldest had secured admission in an engineering college and was now serving in Delhi. The younger to him had become a doctor. I too wanted to follow suit. Though my mind egged me on, my heart was not in it; that was the problem.

“Sir, I have been a science student...” I began to reason out with him in a vain attempt to hide my feelings.

“Nonsense!” Prof Vidya Bhushan uttered with some force. “You have been wasting your time, my friend. I know about your brothers and feel happy about them. Yet the fact remains that we all have our pluses and minuses. Your brothers proved good at sciences. You too have shown your talent in English and your perseverance in continuing your studies in spite of your failures. Why don’t you build on your strengths? Not all of us are meant to be doctors and engineers. Look at me. I chose the humanities stream after matriculation. Do you think I am bad off being a university lecturer?”

“But, sir, I have already taken admission in the science college.”

“That won’t be a problem, I assure you. The real issue is whether you want to come out of rut that you are struck in. Go home and think seriously about it. If you decide to change to the ‘arts’ stream, come to me. I will help you. I have only one word of caution for you. Please don’t linger on. You have already wasted all these years.”

His voice was mild, yet what he said jolted me. I came home in deep thought. My older brothers scolded me roundly off and on for the lack of attention to my studies. But, perhaps because of their misplaced brotherly love, they had never come to tell me what a wastrel I was. My peers had gone far ahead of me in their lives and I shied away from them.

Prof. Vidya Bhushan had shown me the mirror. At age twenty-three I was a failure academically and a social misfit. Did I want to remain like that for the rest of my life? There was nothing for me in pursuing the degree course at the science college, except remaining a parasite on my family indefinitely. That wrong could be righted. The good professor had hinted at my potential. I made up my mind to change over to the ‘arts’ stream.

The rest was easy. Prof Vidya Bhushan not only used his good offices to ensure my ‘migration’ to the

Maulana Azad Memorial College, but he also became my local guardian. To give me a sense of financial independence, he went on to secure for me several tuitions in the city. At the new college I studied the subjects I liked – English literature being the major one. The rest of the day I spent in giving tuitions and cultivating new friends. I lived alone in the Bakshi Nagar quarter which had been allotted to my mother as a displaced person from Mirpur. Soon enough, I and my new-found friends like late Shiv Dutt and late Rana Harish Chander ‘Hafiz’ formed a cultural forum by the name of Yuvak Kala Sangam. My house became the venue for the weekly meetings of the Sangam. I found my life as fulfilling as of any other young man of my age.

The two years passed in a jiffy, it seemed. During the months April – July 1973, I had creditably cleared three examinations in succession: BA (General), BA (Honours) in English Literature and, significantly, a UPSC-conducted all-India level competitive examination which got me a job with the Central Government. By that time, Prof Vidya Bhushan had receded to the background. I did visit his home frequently (his youngest brother, Subhash, was a friend and one time my classmate) and our interaction seldom went beyond

normal courtesies. Sometime after that, my job brought me to Delhi, where I eventually settled. I don't remember having personally seen him during my frequent visits to Jammu after that.

Yet the impression that he left on me proved indelible. He never taught me anything. Instead, what he imparted to me was much more precious than any bookish knowledge. In the brief meeting of ours on that fateful day of August 1972, he made me think about myself and do something about it. He might well said with Socrates, "I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think."

Prof Vidya Bhushan Gupta passed away this year on 21 October. He was indeed a teacher worthy of his name – 'a gem of edification'.

(The author is a writer of renown, presently based in Delhi.)

Special feature on seasons of Kashmir

REFLECTIONS ON SEASONS

Dr Syeda Afshana

As the earth spins around the sun, we experience the ebb and flow of life, marked by the shifting patterns of nature. From the fiery hues of autumn to the icy stillness of winter, the seasons embody the paradoxical beauty of impermanence. While summer fades into autumn, we witness the gradual makeover of the natural world. The leaves on the trees turn golden and red, and the air grows crisp and cool. The landscape becomes a canvas of shifting colors and textures; a fleeting masterpiece that reminds us of the beauty of ephemeral. Autumn—time of letting go—teaches the liberating of the past and making space for the present. It is a time of shedding the layers of the bygone and preparing for the unknown future. In this way, the changing seasons can be seen as a metaphor for the cycles of life and death, reminding us that everything is in a state of constant flux. Winter, with its icy winds and frosted landscapes, can seem harsh and unforgiving. Yet it too has a quiet splendor, a stillness that invites introspection and reflection.

As the world around us retreats into hibernation, we too turn inward; examine the deeper recesses of our own minds and hearts. In the midst of the darkness, we find moments of stillness and peace, a refuge from the chaos of the world. Spring, with its vibrant colors and new life, represents the promise of renewal and rebirth. The flowers that bloom after the long winter remind us that even in the darkest moments, there is always the leeway of growth and transformation. Spring is a time of awakening, of shaking off the frosty doldrums and embracing the realities of life. In this way, the changing seasons serve as a metaphor for the cycles of progression and acceptance that we experience throughout our lives. Presently, the harsh winter winds have begun to give way to the gentle warmth of spring here. For months, people here are huddled together, bracing against the cold and waiting for the arrival of a new season. And at this time, as the world around them begins to thaw, they feel a sense of replenishment. The dramatically changing seasons have made them adaptive. As the mighty Himalayas stand guard and the river Jhelum flows; the arrival of early spring is a long-awaited episode.

While the landscape slowly awakens from its winter slumber, the trees, which were barren just a few

weeks ago, are now bursting with buds and new verve. The air is filled with the sweet scent of blooming flowers, and the sound of chirping birds fills the place. But the arrival of early spring here is more than just a time of replacement and restoration. It is a time of spiritual renewal, a time to reconnect with the natural world and with one's own inner self. The people here still carry a deep connection to their land and their traditions, and the changing seasons are an essential part of their cultural identity.

From Shankaracharya temple to Makhdoom Sahab shrine, the hills that surround them seem to echo their prayers, their peaks stretching upwards towards the sky in silent witness. The city in the midst is a patchwork of greens and browns, with scrap of snow still clinging to the highest points. It is a sign that even in the midst of change, there is always something constant and enduring. As the days start growing longer and the air grows warmer, the craving to venture out and perk up the brilliance around becomes compelling. Searching for joy in the small things, like the sound of birds twittering in the trees or the placid feel of the sun turns rewarding. Yet still, the changing seasons are a reminder that nothing lasts forever, and the bleak times too pass

eventually. It is a time to embrace the impermanence of life, to find majesty and meaning in the fleeting moments of our existence.

It is a time to celebrate the pliability of the human spirit, to appreciate the gifts of nature, and to remember that even in the darkest moments, there is always hope for reawakening. As the early spring sun shines down on us, let us feel a renewed sense of purpose. The road ahead in life is always difficult; we all can strive to move forward, one step at a time, with the changing seasons as the guide. They are a testament to the glory and fragility of life. They remind us that everything is in a constant state of flux, and that the toughest times eventually fade away. Importantly, they also remind us of the promise of recovery, and of the verve that emerges from even the darkest moments. By embracing the changing seasons, we can learn to embrace any change in our own lives and discover magnificence and meaning in the mismatched ways of the world around us. And then ironically, if seasons don't change, humans start getting fed up and estranged....*Agar Mausam Na Badley, Aadmi Ukta Bhi Jatey Hain!!!*

(The author teaches in the Media Education Research Centre, the University of Kashmir, Srinagar.)

SON'TH, THE SPRING

M J Aslam

Son'th is the first of the four seasons of a year in Kashmiri calendar, spreading over three months of *Hamal, Soor & Jawza* of Persian calendar corresponding to months of *Caitra* [*Chi'thir* in Kashmir], *Vaishakha* [*Bai'sakh* in Kashmiri] & *Jyaistha* [*Jyeth* in Kashmiri] according to the Hindu Bikrami calendar. Persian *Hamal* corresponding to *Chi'thir* in Kashmiri begins on 21st March, while under Bikrami calendar the first day of the *Son'th* is 22nd March. *Son'th* means spring which is *Babar* in Persian, and in Arabic it is *Rabia* & in Punjabi it is *Basant*. *Son'th* commences when the sun is in Aries [March-April] under zodiac signs of astrology.

It is *Babar* which has been adopted by Kashmiris from Persian language as a loanword practically replacing *Son'th* in Kashmiri language. *Babar* is what Kashmiris mostly & virtually know as & identify with spring season of year. *Babar* is the household name of spring in Kashmir.

Babar or *Son'th* is the new beginning, marked by wide range of colours of nature. It is splendid & beautiful. After long winter of cloudy days, the blue sky

is once again on the horizon, alternating between showers & sunshine. The blossoms on almond, peach, apricot, apple, pears & other fruit-growing trees are out in gardens, & the valley once again looks fresh, pretty and young. The flowering plants of spring in gardens, public parks & home lawns blossom in *Son'th*. The chirping birds once again sweeten the ears & fill the atmosphere with melody of hope. The snow on mountain peaks begins to melt in descending runoff giving new life to the meandering streams, brooks & rivulets of the vale. The pastures, meadows, gardens and lawns come back to life with increased temperatures of the soil and the green carpet of grass comes out of dormancy after a long hibernation of winter. *Son'th* is the symbol of life, youth & beauty. The duration of days starts increasing in *Son'th*.

Immediately after winter, on historical record, there has been a centuries old tradition among Kashmiris to visit gardens to check if the blossoms & buds had appeared on trees. It was a signal of pleasing-spring & end of harsh winter. Kashmiris were delighted to see early blossoms of the *Babar*. Fascinated crowds would go on foot place to place in a “crazy manner” in their villages & around to have glimpses of the spring

blossoms on trees. They spent hours in visiting & enjoying at Dal Lake, Telbal stream & Mughal gardens, relishing the taste of water melon & melon around Dal lake. The lotus, lilac & colourful flowers used to be a great attraction for the Kashmiris in Dal Lake & Mughal Gardens around it during *So'inth*. It was all “luxury” the natives could afford those days, sitting & relaxing in the shade of the trees in flower & fruit gardens.

Badamwari & Waris Khanun Chah

Before Bakhshi's time, the word “Badamwari” did not exist anywhere in Kashmir chronicles & travelogues; albeit, iterating, Kashmiris in history had been great admirers of visiting Mughal gardens & other beauty spots of the valley including salubrious Dal, Mansbal & Wular Lakes, particularly in spring & summer seasons. Excursions to pleasure gardens & beauty points of the vale by locals is well-recorded in Persian chronicles.

It must be noticed here that the groves of almond trees were planted in the foot of *Hari Parbat* from Sangeen Darwaza to Kathi Darwaza of *Kalai* [ramparts], skirting Khojeyarbal of Nigeen Lake, known as *Lokut Dal* or *Sodra Khon*, by none other than Waris Khan who was in service of Sher Singh, son of Maharaja Ranbir

Singh & who was appointed commandant of the forte of Hari Parbat by Sikh Nazim, Sheikh Mohi-ud Din[1842-1846] .

The deep ditch, known as *Waris Khanun Chah*, was built by him for draining away water from the garden which remained soggy & wet during winter & spring. As the word for “well” in Kashmiri is “*keruil*”, a pit, the word “*Chah*” does not fit with that. “Badamwari” was not confined to few hundred acres of land as it exists at present. It extended from Kathi Darwaza to Sangeen Darwaza from the Dal-side.

Spring in Kashmiri proverbs

So'ntb has found a mention in local folklores & poetry also. Some proverbs that relate to *So'ntb* are: *So'ntb Chu Tsali, Te Harud Chu Bali* which means spring is just a temptation, which one could avoid, while *harud* (autumn) could not be as it was a liability. *So'ntb Kiuth Zav Yuth Athe Av* which means one was born in spring as one was delivered in the hands (of midwife, *Warin*, those days).

Some phrasal-nouns & verbs or idioms of *so'ntb* are: *So'ntb e Dob* (spring days), *Sont e Posb* (spring flower), *So'ntb e Phal* (like mustard & wheat), *So'ntb e Pot* (born in spring), *So'ntb e Phuli* (spring

blossoms), *So'ntb e Hawa* (spring breeze), *So'ntb e Sul* (predawn time of spring) *So'ntb Yun* (coming of youth), *So'ntb Cha'wun* (enjoyments of youthful days), *So'ntb e Kal* (time of spring) & *So'ntb e Mawas* (festival of spring).

So'ntb e Mawas

So'ntb e Mawas is *Nau Reh* (new year) festival of Kashmiri Pandits which they celebrate day before the start of *So'ntb* with much religious fervour & gaity, according to their traditions. A platter (*Thal*) full of rice on top of which are placed flowers, curd, rice-cakes (*tomli Choyt*) , currency notes, walnuts, almond, candy, lights, mirror, gold or silver coins & many other articles, is placed on the Eastside of the bed of the head of the household & in the morning of the festival day, that is the next day, when family members wake up each member takes a flower & a walnut from it and then bathes & casts it into the river. The rice is cooked into "Tehr". The morning is celebrated with traditional hymns & joy in the household. The arranging of platter is called "Thal Barun". Previously, a basket was used for platter & paddy for rice. With the passage of time, new variety of articles are placed on the platter the day before *So'ntb e Mawas*.

Gon'gul

Once upon a time in Kashmir, the peasantry class celebrated a festival of *So'nth*, that marked the beginning of the preparations for the fresh peasantry life in old rural Kashmir.

It was called *Gon'gul*. It meant the commencement of peasantry activities for sowing the *Kharief* crop like rice & maize. The peasant would drive his pair of bullocks to his cultivable land with a wooden plough on his shoulders, and yoke them together with wooden plough.

It was the traditional method of ploughing the agricultural land. At the end of *Wandeh* (winter season), the farmers geared up for ploughing their farmlands, cleaning, mending & sharpening the peasantry tools of shovels, spades, sickles, scythes, hoes, trowels, etc, for the purpose.

The wooden plough & a pair of oxen were given a look of hope & care for starting the tilling of the farm fields & sowing of seeds for growing paddy- crop, the most dominant part of staple food of vale's masses from times immemorial. To mention, it was the time when machines & tractors for tilling had not appeared in the farmlands of the vale's peasants.

Gon'gul was a cultural festival of spring season among Kashmiri peasants in which peasants of a village or two villages owning the farmlands (*khet*, *zamin*) in the same "*kbata*" or adjoining "*Kbata*", revenue specified areas of "*Kheti Badi*", jointly participated & celebrated the festivity of *Gon'gul*. Kashmir peasant with bullocks & plough moving towards his *zamin* or *khet* (farm field) was often followed by little joyous children of the village upto the site where the cultivation procedure was to be followed. Women distributed rice cooked with ingredients of turmeric, oil & shallot, locally known as "*Tehr*" among children & elders. I have been informed that sugar too was added to it for a sweet taste.

Womenfolk were as much a part of the festival as men. They would prepare "*Tabri*", distribute it among all present at the cultivable field. They would distribute uncooked rice which was called "*Chirmi Tomul*" or "*Be'yil Tomul*".

They prepared lunch & tea at home & carried it in baskets on their heads & shoulders for the men working in the fields. The lunch was eaten in the shade of some big tree standing on the field or the edge of a water canal flowing nearby like "*Kul*" or "*Nabir*" or "*Nale*" or "*Arab*". Generally, the peasants choice for

lunch in *Gon'gul* festival was “*Gade Te Zag Bate*” (cooked spicy fish & cooked yellow-rice).

On the day of start of *Gon'gul* in the cultivating field, walnuts were distributed among elders & children. They were called “*Gon'gal Do'oin*” (*Gon'gul* walnut). *Gon'gul* is also used in folklore as, for example, any person who is a rollypolly figure is nicknamed as “*Gon'gul Do'oin Hue*” (looking like a *Gongal* Walnut).

But, times changed. *Gon'gul* became just a hunting memory of the past like many more age-old but rich traditions of Kashmiri people. It was an age old cultural tradition prevalent among peasantry class of the valley, both Muslim & non-Muslim, like Nav-Roz of Iran & Basant of Punjab.

Mystic aspect of *Gon'gul*

The word “*Gon'gul*” finds earliest mention in unambiguous terms in a *shruikh*, a four-liner poem, of the mystic Sheikh Noor Ud Din of Kashmir, which is laden with deep interplay of sowing & harvesting, doing in present & getting in future; avoiding delay for avoiding regrets in future. The *shruikh* goes like this:

Adan So'nth Chui, Zchi' an Awal Ti,

Boz̄it Ghari Rut Ma Panun Thav,

Path Yuth Ni Gaz̄chikh So'nth Chui Chal Ti,

Yuss Kari Gon”Gul Su Kari Krav.

O, peasant, O man, So’nth is the call of time, feel it earliest,
Good news has come to you, don’t confine it to your home only,
Don’t be left behind, So’nth is a call, a temptation to do, to act at
present,
One who acts in Gon’gul will reap harvest of fruit of one’s labour
in autumn!!

(The author is a historian.)

TO CHILLAI KALAAAN, WITH GRATITUDE

Shafat Rasool Shah

First I apologize for the contempt we Kashmiris usually demonstrate on your advent which is, to say the least, uncalled for. The catchphrase *Wandi czhali sheen gali bae yi bahaar* symbolizes our traditional refrain as winter arrives, erroneously perceived as a harsh period to be just survived.

We all deem our land is God's chosen one and a sliver of paradise. The sanctity can't be seasonal. It's we on whom lies the onus to appreciate the bliss in the Chillai Kalaan and Sheen, the same way we take pride in our meadows and forests, our streams and gardens. It's the winter that sustains our summer. It's when layers and layers of snow are deposited in our glaciers that in turn nourish our rivers and streams. Kashmir wouldn't be KASHMIR without you? Without you, our Gulmarg and Pahalgam, Dal and Wullar wouldn't be what they are.

Life in winter is unquestionably taxing and, in contemporary parlance, energy-intensive. Coupled with temperature-related troubles where we need intense heating arrangements, there are issues related to mobility and time-budget given the highway closure, transport

disruptions and reduced daylight. All this means high consumption and lesser productivity.

I apologize for winter being made synonymous with a low in our life, when we just stop to live and hang around waiting for the spring, oblivious of the fact that one-third of our life is too much to just idle away with.

Winter of course means adversities, but given the rewards, although hidden, you bring in, the chill is worth it.

Even we are not at fault in entirety for this lack of appreciation. Centuries of distress have rendered us cynical, and pessimistic.

But two changes, one attitudinal and other practical, can transform how we perceive you: energy at collective level and outlook at individual level. J&K needs to achieve self-sufficiency in hydro-power generation.

At individual level, we must appreciate your sheer indispensability for our survival. This would also help us sense the little aesthetics of winter to keep us going. If summer has Coke and ice-cream, you offer us *Harissa* and *Anchaar*. If we adore a T-shirt and *Khan Dress* in June, we equally cherish *Pheran*, *Kangri* and *Hammam*.

For those who don't concur with this piece of appreciation for you, I have a suggestion: When it snows the next time; unbolt yourself, get out of your insulated closets and come out in the open. Look up to the heavens, the falling petals appear a blessing and revelation coming down directly from the Creator, provided we have the vision in our eyes and gratitude in our hearts.

Thank you for everything you mean to us.

Gratefully Yours

(The author is a writer of note, based in Srinagar.)

BETWEEN WINTER AND SPRING IN KASHMIR

Zahoor Ahmad Mir

Kashmir, located in the northernmost part of India, is often referred to as "Paradise on Earth" due to its natural beauty and breathtaking landscape. It is a region of great geographical diversity, with snow-capped mountains, pristine lakes, lush green forests and rolling hills. The people of Kashmir are known for their warmth, hospitality and resilience. Despite facing numerous challenges and hardships, they have managed to maintain their cultural ethos. Kashmir is also home to some of the most beautiful and picturesque locations in India, such as the Dal Lake, Nishat Bagh, Shalimar Bagh and the famous Mughal Gardens. The region is also famous for its handicrafts, particularly shawls, carpets and embroidery. Kashmiri cuisine is also known for its rich flavour and variety such as Rogan Josh, Yakhni, and Gushtaba.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Kashmir is the diversity of its seasons, each with its unique charm and beauty. Winter in Kashmir is a time of immense beauty, with snow-capped mountains, frozen lakes and pristine forests. It is also a time of hardship and struggle,

as the people of Kashmir endure the harsh conditions and look forward to the arrival of spring.

Winter and spring are two distinct seasons in Kashmir that hold a lot of cultural significance. These seasons represent the cyclical nature of life, where hardship and struggle in winter are followed by renewal and rejuvenation in spring.

Winter in Kashmir is a time of cold, harsh weather and barren landscapes. It is a season that represents the stage of hardship and struggle in the cycle of life. Winter in Kashmir is a test of endurance, patience and perseverance. The snow-covered mountains and frozen lakes remind us of the temporary nature of life and the importance of embracing the present moment. It is widely believed that winter is a time of inward reflection and contemplation. Winter is a spiritual retreat, where individuals can examine their inner selves and their relationship with God.

Winter in Kashmir also teaches us the importance of gratitude. Despite the hardships of winter, Kashmiris are grateful to winter for the snow, which is a crucial source of water for the region. The snowmelt from the mountains in spring nourishes the soil and supports the growth of crops, flowers, and trees.

As winter gives way to spring, the landscape in Kashmir transforms and new life emerges from the ground. The arrival of spring represents the stage of renewal and rejuvenation in the cycle of life. It is a time of growth and abundance, where the earth comes back to life after a long period of dormancy.

Spring in Kashmir is also a time of new beginnings and fresh starts. It is a season that represents the promise of growth and transformation. As the flowers bloom and the trees regain their leaves, the beauty of the region is once again on full display. Spring is a time of spiritual awakening, where individuals can reconnect with their inner selves and experience a sense of spiritual renewal. Spring in Kashmir teaches us the importance of hope and optimism. It is also believed that hope is the key to unlocking our spiritual potential.

To conclude, winter and spring in Kashmir hold great philosophical significance. Winter represents the stage of hardship and struggle in the cycle of life, while spring represents the stage of renewal and rejuvenation. Winter teaches us the importance of endurance, patience and gratitude, while spring teaches us the importance of hope, optimism and growth. Both seasons remind us of the cyclical nature of life and the importance of

embracing the present moment. As we move from darkness to light, we are reminded that life is a journey, and it is the experiences we encounter along the way that shape us into the people we are meant to be.

(The author is a research scholar at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.)

HARUD: THE MYSTIC SEASON OF KASHMIR

Professor Upendra Kaul

Harud in Kashmiri means autumn, a period between end of September and November.

The season has its mystic charm of changing colours of leaves on trees. When green turns to golden and then reddish-orange before turning brown and finally falling on the ground.

The parks and gardens and espe and inly the countryside with Chinar trees, known as “buen” in Kashmiri shedding leaves during this period creates a magical golden aura that lasts till the winter sets in. The weather is fabulous with misty mornings and evenings having a nip, reminding of the coming winter. But days are sunny and warm.

Going to the countryside one can see paddy being cut and then stacked in huge piles to dry. This stacked paddy is then thrashed for segregating the grain.

This is a typical site of Kashmiri autumn. If you move out of Srinagar and go towards South Kashmir during this period and reach Pampore, a part of Pulwama district, an amazing purple-colour over large areas will greet you. These are the saffron fields in full

bloom with flowers. Similar fields can be seen in parts of districts of Budgam, and also Kishtwar regions of Jammu area.

Saffron

It is golden coloured part of the flower called stigma (pollen bearing structures) of the autumn crocus (Crocus Sativus) which is dried and has a strong aroma but bitter taste, used to colour and flavour many Mediterranean and Asian special dishes like Kashmiri kahwa, biryani, mutton kaliya (a distinct preparation without red chilies or yogurt, also called Kaung Kailya) and desserts like phirni and kheer. It is called Kong posh in Kashmiri and Kungumapoo in Tamil and Kumkum or Kesar in Sanskrit.

It is also a part of Vermilion/Sindhoor used by married Hindu ladies in the parting of the hairline. It is also applied to the forehead of deities as a part of Pooja.

There is a debate regarding the origin of the word saffron. It seems to be a modification from the Persian word zarparan (gold strung) after the golden colour it imparts when used as a flavour. The Arabic word za'faran and the Latin word safranum and the French word safran seem to be modifications since Persia (Iran) is associated with this plant historically.

Although Persia (Iran) is the highest producer of saffron but it is believed to be a native to the Mediterranean area, in areas close to present day Turkey and also Persia where its presence can be traced back to the Achaemenid period (550-330 BC), the ancient first empire of Persia empire led by Cyrus the great. It reached Kashmir like many other things from Iran much later. As per a legend, in 11th or 12th century AD, two wandering selfless Sufis Khwaja Masood and Hazrat Sharifuddin wandered into Kashmir. They presented a local tribal chief with a bulb of saffron after he cured them of an illness. But according to Rajatarangini written by Kalhana in the 12th century saffron was present in the valley even before the reign of King Lalitaditya in 750AD.

It reached North China in around 1555 through Mongol invasion and it is mentioned in the Chinese literature.

Saffron Production in Kashmir

Its cultivation is done in more than 5500 hectares of land in Kashmir. Most of it is in Pampore tehsil in Pulwama district of South Kashmir while the rest is in districts of Budgam and Srinagar districts. Kishtwar in Jammu Province also produces the most premium and high quality saffron. According to experts it is superior

to other varieties grown in the world, owing to its long and dark red hues. It is often mixed with the Iranian variety by the local whole sale dealers to reduce the cost of selling but compromising its quality. An expert can however always recognize it by the unique aroma and the features of the long stigma it contains. It is also described as the “Crop of Gold”, being the most expensive spice in the world. Poetess Habba Khatoon the nightingale of Kashmir who belonged to Pampore area had many lyrics about Kong posh (Saffron).

The planting of the bulbs of saffron (stamens etc are sterile and there are no seeds) is preceded by preparing the soil which should be having more sand than clay (Loamy) and should be well drained without water logging. While growing the Saffron crocuses need bright sunlight which is usually available in plenty in the months of July to September. The harvesting is done in the periods between end of October and November. The red saffron threads of this flower are carefully handpicked by harvesters after picking the saffron threads from the flowers by the delicate fingers of women and girls. They separate the delicate saffron threads from the flowers. These threads are then dried in Sunlight after spreading evenly at a certain thickness on

white sheets. These are then preserved in a cotton cloth so that air can continuously pass through to avoid its decomposition. These are then marketed by the traders. Traditionally on the first day of the harvest, farmers go to the shrine of Hazrat Sheikh Sharifudin at Nambalbal and offer some fresh Saffron as a token of respect.

Challenges Facing the Saffron Cultivation

The escalating prices of the land is prompting the growers to sell their land for construction of buildings despite the law banning it. They try to find some loop holes and take advantage of the less stringent vigilance by the authorities. In addition, the global warming leading to prolonged dry and very hot weather is deleterious for a good crop. Competition from other bulk producing countries especially Iran is another factor. The increasing pollution due to traffic and dust from the highways surrounding these fields also results in lower yields.

Tailpiece

Kashmiri Saffron is one of the best Saffrons produced anywhere in the world. It has become a part of our civilization over the years and also has been providing a living to thousands of cultivators. Its wonderful aroma, colour and medicinal properties in the

form of a spice has made it a part of well-known Kashmiri delicacies from Kahwa to Wazwan. We need to make all the efforts to preserve it and improve its cultivation.

(Prof Upendra Kaul, awarded Padmashri and Dr B C Roy Award, Chairman Cardiology and Dean Academics and Research Batra Hospital and Medical Research Center. He is Founder Director, Gauri Kaul Foundation.)

Poetry

KEWAL KUMAR KEWAL

Translated from Dogri by Heena Mahajan

Yashpaul Nirmal often forgets!

Yashpaul Nirmal often forgets!

Umbrella in the bus,

Tiffin at home,

Medicine on time,

His bag at tea stall.

He finds it hard to remember ironing his clothes,

shaving his beard,

and necessary things for household work.

He forgets to buy

kids' favourite toys,

vegetables

and groceries

He also forgets failures,
disappointments
and humiliation.
He often forgets to eat and sleep too.
However,
he never forgets literature,
His poems in creation,
articles,
stories,
novels
and creative ideation.

He never forgets to mention
begging monks,
kids raised up on lies,
Innocence of kids fading and dying.

He never stops writing about
parents living in old-age homes
sick on beds,
finding their kids morally dead.
Never ending corruption,
Through his pen his words bleed.
Gap between the rich and the poor.

Children are dying of malnutrition and the food they cannot get.

He writes about tales of woes,
How mother Tongue is losing charm.
Voters violate their duty,
Deforestation destroys beauty.
Farmers ploughing on barren beds,
Floods and drought brought them
To shed tears.

He writes about martyred soldiers
born to die,
His words bids them honourable goodbye.

It's hard for him to forget
the constant killings,
bombings,
and bloodshed.
Humanity is lost and
trees are paying every cost.
Buds wither before they bloom,
killing girls in the womb.
Looting of nations by politicians,

cows left roaming helplessly,
short of feed.

Yashpaul Nirmal has promises to keep.

SHIKHA MAGOTRA

Vicious Ripples

I threw into the sea a pebble,
As small as it could be
Thinking it would sink
As deep as it could
Though it formed ripples,
moving over the sea
Pebble sank down, ripples remained
Never going from the sea
And it came back over
As ripples moved towards me
A deep scar of the hurt
Pebble had caused to the sea.

Life moves on

With a tick and a tock,
Life moves on.
Through all ups and downs,
Life moves on.
You did this, you did that,

You should have done just like that.
It does not matter because
Life goes on.
You tried to do a lot,
Things came up but still they are not.
You stumbled and fell,
You cried, stood up again.
You failed once and again,
until you learned from that phase.
Still life moves on.
Finally, what you became
Is consistent tries that you gave.
Success or otherwise
But you learned a lot.
Sing the song of life,
With hopeful heart that stays light.

Hope

One dark ugly stone
Hid behind many fore-frontiers
Some were beautifully rounded
Some were oval in shape
Some textured ones shone so bright
Some remained grey and light

They covered the surface with much pride
Showing nature's versatile face
Darker one couldn't find its space
And went deeper and deeper,
Buried from all happy-faced.
Tremendous heat, stress lay beneath,
All of it, did it take.
Living under extreme fire,
The stone left forever.
Leaving diamond at its place.

Peerzada Burhan

Lost photograph

Someone was shouting
loudly of a lost photograph---
someone turned around quietly
and gazed at me from top to toe.

I never accepted that
it was me---
I just nodded my head
until my eyes fell down.

Such intensity of pain
shattered me within -
why was it so
I don't know.

Was it a dripping roof
falling on my wound
or
it was the chilling cold
hitting my leg out of quilt.

My eyes were blind Milton
and my hands trembling

when candle wax kissed
me like a lover
and I smiled
with broken canines.

Now the tie hanged me
and my court broke my ribs
I remembered myself.

The Old Monk

The old monk was wearing a cotton robe
His hands were in embers and feet in a pale of water

Curiously a lad passing by asked him, " you aren't from
here for I know everyone here?
'Where do you come from, don't you die of heat or
cold?'

The monk closed his eyes and mumbled,
'If love exists, hate is alive
If hate dies, love dies

Don't wander around, son
Go home, go home!

He saw into the water, admiring his reflection,
"I'm still alive, I'll live till water lives, and water never dies."
He said to himself and smiled.

The young lad again asked, 'who you are, where are you
from?'
A wind of heat blew from his hands, he bowed to him
and touched his feet silently.
He scared him like the December clouds,
A virtual rope of many knots tied his mind, he fumbled
and swooned.

Then the monk resumed meditation
'Son, I die, I live everyday, but I don't remember taste,
I'm nothing,

You fell down,
Men can never know the truth!

Call Me Mad

Love freezes where it is born
And stabs its source.

Call me mad
But I bow to my love.

For one I call my heart
I froze my self
In devotion to each trauma
Born of love
While waiting for another trauma.

I still carry a heart
I still count on beads.
Call me mad
But I call it divine.