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PROF TEJ NATH DHAR

EDITORIAL

Tagore Hall is one of the leading state-of-the-art theatres in the country. The Theatre was inaugurated in 1961 in memory of Rabindranath Tagore as a part of the Tagore centenary celebrations celebrated throughout the country. Its exotic structure has assumed the status of an important cultural and geographical signpost in Kashmir.

Over the decades, the Hall has come to symbolize the cultural nerve centre of J&K and is thronged by artists, dignitaries, connoisseurs of various arts round the year. Since its establishment, it has been the centre of cultural, literary and theatrical activities in the Kashmir valley. The theatre is abuzz round the year with diverse activities like literary conferences, poetic symposia, theatre festival, theatre workshops, camps of sculpture, painting, etc., besides holding training workshops for students and amateurs.

Tagore Hall is a hot spot especially for youngsters as it provides a vibrant platform to budding artists and students to showcase their creative talent. It has the privilege of having hosted a number of national and international literary, cultural and theatre related events

besides hosting a number of dignitaries from diverse walks of life. Some legendary artists like Runa Laina, Mohammad Rafi, Talat Mehmood, Begum Akhter, etc., have performed in the Hall. Similarly several celebrated poets including Firaq Gorakhpuri, Bashir Bdr, Arsh Malsiani, have recited their poems from the stage of the hall. It has also seen some of the political stalwarts in the region carrying out their political activities from here.

Tagore Hall has played a pivotal role in protection, preservation and revival *Bhand Peathre*, one of the oldest extant theatrical traditions in the country. This tradition has survived the vicissitudes of time over the course of its evolution and has come to symbolize the antiquarian character of Kashmiri culture and its commitment to aesthetic values. It symbolises an aesthetic dramaturgy which is inclusivist, assimilative and celebrates diversity.

The hall has been undergoing constant renovation in its interior designing, seating and stage without compromising its magnificent architecture. The hall is equipped with all modern features like air conditioning, central heating system, mini-conference hall, VIP lounge and latest light and acoustic gadgetry. The hall is a tribute to the ancient and strong tradition of theatre in the country.

(Dr) Abid Ahmad

SOME COMMON TREES OF KASHMIR

Avtar Mota

In this paper, I give local (Kashmiri) names of some common trees found in the Kashmir valley.

Poplar

Although poplar varieties range in height and breadth, most share some traits that make them easy to recognize. For example, you can often distinguish a poplar by its leaves that are often heart-shaped and rimmed with tiny teeth. Brilliant green in summer, they glow gold in autumn

^{PI} Poplar roots can crumble house foundations. Poplar trees don't live long. A poplar tree can live up to a maximum of fifty years even under proper care. A poplar tree can rise to 150 feet in height with a trunk diameter of up to 6 feet. Poplars need fertile soil, acidic or neutral, as well as direct sun and sufficient water to

keep their roots moist. Poplar trees thrive in warm weather and need moist to wet soil. There are about 35 varieties of Poplar trees in the world.

Tree grooves outside the forest range in the Kashmir valley comprise more than ninety per cent of poplars and willows. In the Kashmiri language, Poplar (Safeda) is known as 'Fraes't'. "Yohuy chhukh fraes't hue " is a common satire used in the Kashmiri language which roughly means "you are simply tall without much utility". This tree has now found much utility in the cricket bat, fruit packaging and plyboard industry. Accordingly, it is now cultivated commercially. Before that, it was used by poor people for house building in the Kashmir valley.

Poplars are the fastest growing tree species of Kashmir. The commercial plantation of this tree is considered as a cash crop. Apart from revenue generation, this tree has also been found useful in cleaning the environment by carbon sequestration and phytoremediation. It is also useful in ecological wastewater treatment systems, streambank stabilisation, soil building, biofiltration, soil erosion control, etc.

In Kashmir, this tree grows along canals and ponds or wetlands and needs low water table for its growth. Poplar tree in Kashmir looks brilliant green in summer season. During the autumn season, its leaves turn yellow and start falling to the

ground. The tree looks like a naked Faquir during the winter season.

In Kashmir, Srinagar- Baramulla road had rows of tall poplar trees on both sides that added grace and grandeur to this highway. So are poplars seen along Srinagar-Anantnag road with a peak concentration near Bejbiara town. This peak concentration patch of poplars on the highway looks like a green tunnel. The soft cotton-like white fluff of poplar seed that floats in the air during late spring/early summer season in Kashmir, has been proving a health hazard lately. Some experts believe that the poplar tree 'pollen' has been aggravating respiratory illness in the Kashmir valley.

Willow

The Willow tree is believed to have existed in the Kashmir valley since ancient times. However, on the suggestion of Walter R. Lawrence (who was land bandobast in the state) and J.C. Macdonell (Head of the Forest Department), Maharaja Partap Singh ordered large scale plantation of the tree in the entire length and breadth of the Kashmir valley during the 19th century. The massive plantation of willow and poplar trees in and around the Wular lake by the J&K government during the twentieth century proved counterproductive. It dried up a major part of the lake

and reduced the lake surface considerably. Walter R. Lawrence, in his book, *The Valley of Kashmir* writes:

The Veer, or willow, grows in every village of Kashmir where there is water or moisture, and its reproduction is very simple. There is an enormous waste of withies every year, as the young wands are cut down for fodder and after being stripped of their leaves are burnt for fuel. I have suggested that a Kashmiri should be sent to England to learn the basket industry. There is ample material in the valley to supply the whole of India with excellent baskets and chairs.

The willow is known as Veer in the Kashmiri language. Veer is a common tree in Kashmir's countryside. A cluster of willows, known as Veer-vaar in Kashmiri is a common sight near streams and brooks, making a heavy demand on water. It grows along rivers, brooks and streams and lakes in the Kashmir valley. It is used as an ideal timber while the graded variety of the willow is used for making cricket bats. This Cricket bat industry is localized in Sangam-Halamulla village near Bejbihara town.

Apart from fuel, willow leaves are also used as animal fodder. Dried willow leaves are stored on trees and used as animal fodder during the winter season in the Kashmir valley. These dried willow leaves are known as Baatchhi in Kashmir.

In every marriage function, where cooks are engaged, willow stock would be purchased months before the actual marriage date. It was cut to the proper size so that it could be burnt easily by the Kashmiri cooks in the open hearth or furnace known as Wura in Kashmiri.

The willow twigs or shoots are also used for Kangris, baskets, chairs and other useful domestic items. Many artisans of Kashmir are engaged in the manufacture of these willow items that are marketed within and outside the state. Fresh willow twigs were also used as Miswaakh (teeth cleaning brush) in the Kashmir valley.

As timber, willow was also supplied through government depots to the public. It was much sought-after firewood at the government-run timber depots in the Kashmir valley.

Deodar

Deodar (*Cedrus Deodara*) or Kashmir Cedar is also known as Divdhor in Kashmiri. Though a high altitude tree, Deodars also grow in the low valleys. I have seen some Deodar trees near Harwan as well. Its wood is ideal for making furniture, boats, houseboats, bridges, railway tracks, doors and window frames, etc. This is perhaps the best of timber that is produced in Jammu and Kashmir in terms of utility and durability. Paddy husking mortars or muhul was also made from this wood. Deodar

wood is quite expensive and can withstand hot, moist and various other climatic conditions. It is a choice wood for building construction. Resin is also extracted from the roots of this tree that has much commercial utility. At some point of time, Deodars must have been available in every part of the Kashmir valley. I have found that every old building or shrine in the valley has plenty of Deodar wood used in its construction. Doda district, Jammu used to be a rich source of Deodar wood. Most of us must have seen Deodar wood sleepers being moved to Jammu (Akhnoor) from Doda, Bhaderwah and Kishtwar using Chenab river as the mode of transportation. I am told that before 1947, deodars from Jammu forests were transported to Wazirpur (now in Pakistani Punjab) through the waters of Chenab river.

Hindus believe that forests full of Deodar trees or Devadāru trees are the abodes of the ancient sages who were devoted to Lord Shiva.

Himalayan Blue Pine

The Himalayan blue pine is known as Kaayur or Yaari-Kul in Kashmiri. This is again a high altitude tree. It grows in the upper forests and this wood is used for making doors, windows and frames and furniture in the Kashmir valley. This evergreen

tree can grow up to a height of 150 feet. It has a thick grey-brown bark. Kaayur wood is a poor man's Deodar. A poor variety of this wood is also used as timber and its charcoal is also used in Kangris. This tree also gives a white resin and the portion with resin is known as Laesh (in Kashmiri) that burns instantly. As timber, Kaayur was also supplied through the government-run depots to consumers in the Kashmir valley. There is a popular Kashmiri saying 'Kaashur yaar guv kaayur naar' or 'The burning charcoal of the kaayur timber is a friend of the Kashmiri'. Another Kashmiri saying 'Vunn tchein yaarein daai sundh sugg' or 'The jungle pines are irrigated by god only' makes this tree closer to Kashmiri life.

This wood decays easily on contact with the soil. Himalayan pines are also a commercial source of the turpentine and tar.

Nettle Tree

Nettle Tree is known as Bremiji in Kashmiri. A tree that grew from a small shrub to a magnificent shady tree in graveyards and shrines of Kashmir is facing extinction.

Bremijj happens to be amongst some oldest trees world over. Known as Nettle tree outside Kashmir, it grows in many

areas of Asia, Europe and the US. It also grows in Australia and some African countries.

A cool shady tree that was seen near graveyards or Ziyarats of saints in Kashmir, where, as per local belief, it was planted by the Syeds from Central Asia followed by Sufi saints. They possibly believed in providing some cool shade to those who lay buried.

In 2010, I could locate a few Bremiji trees in Malla khah graveyard of the city near Rainawari and just one inside the Budshah's tomb in the downtown area of Srinagar city. May be more are still there in the villages that I could not check. I can only say about the city where it is almost extinct.

The fruit of Bremiji, reportedly sweet to taste, invited a variety of birds to this tree during summers. In Kashmir, the tree would flower in mid-April with seeds ripening in mid-October. The size of the Kashmiri nettle tree is comparatively small. Normally it grows to a height of maximum 10 to 12 feet from the ground and from top it spreads like an umbrella. The fruit is also smaller than the size of a cherry. The flowers are hermaphrodite(having both male and female features) and are pollinated by bees. Its leaves remain bright green in summer season and turn yellow in autumn before they fade away for winter. A very slow growth spread over many years changes a

small shrub into a tall shady Bremiji tree. The tree can also grow in dry soil.

Many poets from Kashmir have used this tree symbolically in their poems. I came across its mention in a Gazal of the noted Kashmiri poet Rafiq Raaz. I quote four lines as under:-

*Dhoo'r hu'thb Bremiji kullis aayii zabaan
Natcheini laeji la'sha hubba shab chbu siyaah
Paan gotchh la'bana yunaai gham chbu yutuaai
Taaf gotchh raah e khudaa shab chbu siyaah*

(Faraway, that nettle tree has started to converse now,
There, those dead bodies too are up and dancing.
Lord! help us to trace out our own self now,
Sunshine this way Lord, these nights are pitch dark now.)

Himalayan silver fir

The Himalayan Silver Fir is known as Budul in Kashmiri. This wood is preferred by carpenters as it is easier to work on. It has almost no knots. Budul trees are found in the higher altitude forests of Kashmir and as timber, Budul was also supplied through government-run depots in the Kashmir Valley.

This was an ideal wood to be used for beams in building construction in Kashmir.

Elm

Elm is known as Brenn in Kashmiri. It is a tall tree that grows in higher altitudes not less than 7000 feet. The tree could be massive to look at. There is a popular Kashmiri saying ‘Yohaai chhukh brenn mondd hue’ (You look like a log of Elm tree), referring to being hard and incapable of being cut or sliced for utility. It was used for making heavy doors of shrines and Ziyarats in the Kashmir valley. It was also used for making carts and window frames. Elm forests are to be seen in higher reaches around Lolab valley in Kashmir. Hindus in Kashmir revered this tree and identified it with Lord Ganesha.

Birch

Birch is known as Burza (Bojh Patra) in Kashmiri. It has been quite a familiar tree in Kashmir as its bark was extensively used for writing books, manuscripts and making roofs of shrines and buildings. A thick layer of birch bark was finally covered with thick mud to give the final finish to mud roofed buildings in Kashmir. Hindus also used this bark in various religious ceremonies and rituals. Burza was also close to Kashmiri culture

and life. Birch is a deciduous tree that has papery plates of bark. The wood is quite hard. In Kashmir, Silver Birch trees are found at a height of 9000 feet and above from sea level generally near meadows.

False Witch Hazel

False Witch Hazel is Hatab in Kashmiri. It used to be the most preferred and ideal timber in Kashmiri kitchen. It is heavy and was also known as Ironwood that came from shrubs and small trees. It was also supplied through the government-run timber depots in the Kashmir valley. The twigs of this tree were used in kangri making. The Muhul (Kashmiri) or pestle that was used in manual husking of rice in homes was made from Hatab while the husking mortar or the Kunz (Kashmiri) was made from Deodar wood. This wood was also used for making ladles in Kashmir. This timber gives a little hard variety of charcoal which was ideal for Kangris. This tree grows in coniferous forests of Poonch, Bani, Kupwara, Pahalghaam, Badherwah and Kishtwar. The tree appears to be extinct in the Kashmir valley at the moment.

Mesquite Tree (Babool)

Mesquite tree or Babool is known as Kikkar- kul in Kashmiri. Kashmiri Kikkar is also closer to the Acacia Nilotica

family of trees. The thorny Kikkar tree is seen in many areas of Kashmir. I saw so many kikkar trees in Bejbihara and Kulgam. Unlike the desert Babool, the wood of the Kashmiri Kikkar tree is soft and easy to work upon. It was known as a poor man's building material and would be mostly used for beams. The leaves of this tree are reported to be having medicinal uses.

Kashmir Cypress

The cypress is known as Sarva Kul in Kashmiri. It is a coniferous, graceful and ornamental tree that can grow to a height of 50 to 60 feet in the Kashmir valley. It is planted in gardens and parks and even in private lawns. The seed shedding of this tree is done by the dark brown cones that grow on this tree. Kashmir cypress holds its foliage year-round.

The Sweet Chestnut

The sweet chestnut is known as Punjeib Goar (Singada) in Kashmiri. I have seen these trees in Daara near Harwan, Srinagar and also near Dachhigaam wild sanctuary. The fruit of this tree has a dark brown shell and a soft sweet mass inside it. This fruit is known in Kashmir as Punjeib Gour or a chestnut from Punjab. The valley also has a wild variety of this fruit known as the horse

chestnut or Haan-doon. The outer shell of the horse chestnut fruit is light brown and is reported to be toxic and not fit for human consumption. From all accounts, it is presumed that the sweet chestnut was brought to Kashmir for plantation during the rule of Dogras may be in the late 19th century. The sweet chestnuts are available in Srinagar during the late October and early November and are consumed after roasting them on charcoal.

Mulberry Tree

The Mulberry tree is known as Tuel- Kul in Kashmiri. This tree is seen in every part of Kashmir up to an altitude of 7000 feet. The leaves of this tree are ideal food for silkworms and hence the tree is quite important in the silk industry. It is a protected tree. Mulberry tree twigs are also used by Kashmiri Pandits in some religious rituals and ceremonies. The mulberry wood is also used for the doors and agricultural implements like a plough. This wood is strong, elastic and comes up with a clean finish. After seasoning, it can be turned and carved that makes it ideal for making hockey sticks, badminton or tennis rackets.

As per a rough estimate, there are about 7 lakh mulberry trees in J&K out of which more than 3 lakhs are in the Kashmir

valley and the remaining in Jammu division. The tree has become pivotal and crucial for sericulture development in J&K.

Chinar Tree

Chinar tree is known as Booen in Kashmiri. The chinar is a majestic tree that grows to a height of 100 feet from the ground and its girth could go up to 40 feet. The Chinar is a cool, shady and friendly tree that is seen everywhere in the Kashmir valley up to an altitude of 8000 feet from the sea level. Its botanical name is *Platanus orientalis*. It is found everywhere in Kashmir and even inside lakes (Char Chinar and Sona Lenk near Hazrat Bal in Dal lake, in river Jhelum near Shadipora Sangam), outside shrines and inside all Mughal gardens of Kashmir.

A deciduous tree, Chinar traces its origin to Greece. The tree is at its most elegance and exuberance during autumn. In Autumn season, Chinars spread a golden hue all over in the Kashmir valley. The Autumn Chinar remains a great attraction for lovers of natural beauty of the Kashmir valley. During the summer season, this majestic tree wears green elegance and is home to many birds. The Kashmiris love to sleep under its cool shade during the hot summer days.

So close is this tree to the life and culture of Kashmir, that it finds symbolic mention in the Kashmiri poetry as well. Even

the 14th-century saint poetess Lal Ded has used it. I quote Lal Ded:

Kentchun roenni tcbheyi shibij booen

Neruw neibur ta shubul karuw

For some people, their wives prove like the grand
Chinar tree

Be near them and you feel the comfort of their cool shade.

The Sikh scriptures mention that Guru Nanak Dev Ji addressed Brahmins of Mattan under a tall and shady Chinar tree at Martand Teertha in Kashmir. Many references convey that Chinar, known as Booen in Kashmiri has been an ancient tree in the Kashmir valley that was widely revered as Goddess Bhawani. It was also called Bhawani. Some Sanskrit scholars are of the view that the ancient name of this tree has been Bhuvan Vahini. The Kashmiri Pandits planted this tree with reverence in many temples and Shakti-Peethas including Kheer Bhawani in Tulamula. Many elders have confirmed the presence of this majestic tree in Sharda Temple (now in POK) before 1947. The Chinar trees have also been planted in Devi Angan just below the Sharika Temple in Hari Parbat area of the Srinagar city. A Chinar tree has also been planted outside the Sharika Temple gate on the hillock. Devi shrines of Tekar (Kupwara), Kulwagishori

(Kulgam), Akingaam (Anantnag) , Zeashta Devi (Zeethyaar in Srinagar), Devibal-Nagbal (Anantnag) and many more have Chinar trees.

In his book Rajtaringani, Kalhana makes mention of the Vata tree. The description of the Vata tree mentioned by Kalhana matches a Booen. He again mentions some ancient trees on the edges of rivers and canals to which Nishadas (boatmen) were fastening their boats. The name Chinar is a late adaptation, maybe around late fourteenth century when the Muslims started coming to Kashmir from Central Asia or Iran where it was already known by this name. Some historians believe that when Mughals saw this tree in Kashmir, they named it Chinar as they had already seen this tree in Central Asia. Mughals made good efforts for the propagation of this tree planting saplings in gardens and parks of Kashmir.

The Muslim Sufi saints also planted saplings of this tree near Ziyarats and shrines. The Kashmiris credit Sultan Zain-ul Abidin for extending and encouraging plantation of Chinar trees in all the areas of the Kashmir valley during his rule. Researchers have found a Chinar tree, which could be the oldest in Asia, in Chittergam Chadura village in Budgam district of Central Kashmir. The tree is believed to have been planted by Hazrat Syed Qasim Sahib in 1374 A.D.

In Kashmir, many saints, Sufis, Sadhus have used the large hollow trunk (Booeni Goff) of the Chinar tree to perform meditation. This has added to the sacredness of the tree. At the confluence of rivers Sindh and Vitasta) near Shadipur in Kashmir known as `Prayag', a Chinar tree is growing for many centuries. It is surrounded by water on all sides. The Kashmiri Pandits call it 'Prayaagitch Booen '. Before 1990, they would come to this place for immersion of the ashes (remains) of the dead.

The Chinar tree can also grow in plains but does not acquire the height and girth that it has in Kashmir. Long back, Dr L S Negi, the then Director of Agriculture cum Horticulture (H.P.), planted two Chinar trees on the Ridge in Shimla. Both the trees have grown and look majestic now. I saw them on my visit to Shimla. These Chinars are five in number. The large one is inside the ridge park while the other is just outside it. Two more medium-sized are also inside the park while another small sapling is growing fast near the statue of Dr Y. S. Parmar. Dr M. S. Randhawa also planted some Chinar trees in Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana and Chandigarh. The Chinar trees are also found in Bhaderwah, Doda, Kishtawar, Banihal, Poonch and Rajouri areas of Jammu Province.

In Kashmir, this tree is home to many birds. Its grand leaves are dried and used as Kangri fuel. The tree gives a tough, hard, high quality and expensive wood for the furniture industry. Though Chinar is a protected tree in J&K, it is being continuously felled by greedy timber traders and smugglers illegally.

(The author is an eminent researcher and writer, presently based in Jammu.)

SHAIKH-UL AALAM AND ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Dr Fayaz Ahmad

Shaikh-ul Aalam, Shaikh Noor-ud Din Wali, is not only the founder of the Rishi Silsila, the foremost proponent of Kashmiri language, but also a very keen observer of society and his surroundings. Kashmir valley, located as it is deep inside the high Himalayan zone, constitutes a very fragile ecological zone. It would have been near to impossible that the great saint of Kashmir would not have commented on the ecological situation of Kashmir. It was a recognition of the ecological consciousness of Shaikh-ul Aalam that a former Prime Minister of India mentioned the oft-quoted environmental motto *An Poshe, wan poshe* , at an International Summit convened in connection with the theme of environmental protection. These four words roughly translated as 'Food will last untill forests last', of course could be applied at the universal level, but for the Kashmir valley

it assumes all the more importance considering the delicate balance that various ecological ingredients maintain with each other in this eco-zone. However, Shaikh-ul Aalam does not stop here. There are several of his sayings, the *Shuek*, that give a peep into the thought process of the saint with regard to environment and the importance he attached to it. Shaikh-ul Aalam does not spare the high and mighty even when it comes to taking a stand against those destroying the ecological balance. The origins of Kashmir valley in fact begin with the geo-climatic changes resulting in its emergence out of a huge water body. The historical accounts coming out of Kashmir are replete with the mention of drastic environmental situations in Kashmir like floods, snow storms and even earthquakes. In such a situation it is no puzzle to find Shaikh-ul Aalam expressing his thoughts on the situation of environment and ecology around him. The Rishi order inherited a tradition of being very close to dense forests, caves and water bodies. It can be safely argued that many eco-friendly traditions prevalent in the contemporary Kashmiri society are a legacy of the teachings of the revered Rishi Sufis. In fact, as Prof Mohammad Ishaq Khan emphatically argued in his acclaimed work *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis*, the deep association and emphasis of the Muslim Rishi saints with the earth and soil through means of undertaking agricultural activities.

In his famous poem *Goongalnama*, Shaikh-ul Aalam beautifully connects the various agricultural activities associated with cultivation of land with that of Namaz and many other practices and moral virtues as ordained by the Islamic faith.

At the level of the academic discipline, Environmental and Ecological History have become very significant areas of research and activism both at the South Asian as well as the global level. Be it the acclaim for books like Dipesh Chakravarty's *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* , or the recent award and recognition to Prof Mahesh Rangarajan,¹ one of India's foremost scholar historians working in the field of environmental history, human engagement with nature and environment in the past as well as current times are matters of significant importance. This of course builds on the foundational work done in the field by trendsetting scholars like Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil. At another level historians like Yual Noah Harari have brought the theme of Climate Change to the global concern through his international bestselling works like *Sapiens*.

¹ Prof Rangarajan was made the 'Honorary Foreign Member' of the society by American Historical Association for 2021, in recognition to his exhaustive academic work in the field of Environmental History.

Now coming specifically to the context of Kashmir of the contemporary times of Shaikh-ul Aalam, the Rishi order stood at a threshold and witness to a gradual transition of socio-religious and cultural transformation. Though the Rishi order emerged from an already existing religious order, the sages that preceded Shaikh Noor-ud Din and the Rishi Silsila are reverentially mentioned by him. Shaikh-ul Aalam utilized his poetic genius to express his reverence to the Kashmiri Rishi tradition for being ecologically sensitive. He declares in one of his famous couplets,

*Khudai chu akh, naav ches Lacha,
Zikreh ros akh Kacha Mov,
Umar wenden akoi pacha,
Rizkeh ros akh machea mov.*

God is One, His attributes manifest in millions of forms,
There is not one blade of grass not singing His praises;
Consider your whole lifespan as a fortnight,
Not a single fly goes without food.

This is a layered *Shuek* of Shaikhul Aalam wherein he foregrounds the point o observe the divine in every element of creation. He says that not a single herb lives without *ziker* or remembrance of God. Shaikh-ul Aalam strongly emphasizes the

need to see the interconnectedness of the nature wherein humans are not the only living beings but a part of the whole where other beings also do exist and it is humans that need to treat them on terms that nature has given us indications to observe. This has not been without its impact on the psyche of the people of Kashmir. Several examples could be given to bring the influence of his teachings on the Kashmir populace to the fore. Thus one finds the tradition in many areas of Kashmir of not eating fish and the fowl (and some migratory birds that make Kashmir as their home during certain part of the year) in certain part of the year when they would be breeding and their young ones would need parental care.

With regard to the popular phrase of *An Posbe, Wan posbe*, an expert on Shaikh-ul Alam opines that 'I doubt that even today we have any such powerful expression which can compete the brevity and compactness of the Shaikh's phrase'. In total of four words of the Kashmiri language, said by a fifteenth century Saint-Poet, the whole of Eco-awareness slogan is captured. Food and forests are so intricately connected, especially in the Himalayan ecological zones that one cannot think of the one without the other. In an environmentally fragile place like the valley of Kashmir, such sayings assume added importance. This couplet of the Shaikh-ul Aalam could be located/placed both in a local

Kashmiri context as well as for similar ecological contexts. Now with the hindsight advantage of modern scientific studies on food production, photosynthesis, evaporation, rainfall and afforestation, we can claim with confidence that this 15th century quote has stood the test of the time in its relevance and meaning, and as such could be propagated for within the global environmental awareness campaigns.

There are scores of sayings of Shaikh-ul Aalam that point to his being acutely aware of the environs that he inhabited.

*He, who would cut the branches from the forests
What fruit he expects from the timber
Why you were tempted to balconies and extensions of your houses
Wasn't it better to spend life under rages!
The devil minded considering himself wakeful by receiving the cost
Soon he will have to provide a full account of his deeds and pay for
sins.*

*They axe the pine and fence the land for cultivation
Will sow the seed for green leafy vegetables like virids, mallow and
knol kbol
Mashed barley cakes and pots filled with butter
They would sit to eat like the dragons of death*

*No different from monkeys and apes
Such are the rustic people living like that in upper reaches.*

Shaikh-ul Aalam's anguish and rebuke is very stern against the people who cut down the forest trees.

*What purpose can a forest serve if there are no pine.
Instead, it is better to have no windows.*

Shaikh-ul Aalam in his sayings and teachings gives clues of what may nowadays be termed as Sustainable Development:

*Man He made out of Earth
And his organs cast in clay
Out of the earth grow all bounties
In earth ware, do we cook
Body is consigned to earth, when soul is left.*

The holy Quran says 'All that is on Earth will perish' (55:26). Shaikh-ul Aalam's below quoted saying seems in tune with the basic philosophy of the Quranic. He says:

*Man was created with nice qualities
With watery air and firing clay
And when he sprouted from his young mother's (womb)*

*Infatuated got he with the world
With harsh winds when his body decays
As he sprung, so shall get reduced*

Rebuking the extravagance in the construction of large buildings and mansions, which would have been mostly constructed of wood as the records of the time show, Shaikh-ul Aalam invokes the ephemeral nature of the world and life. To quote him

*You are to be buried down the ground, why to be excited?
To what end these lofty buildings you constructed?*

It can be well imagined that Shaikh-ul Aalam has not spared the high and the mighty of the times from his critique. It is clear from the historical records available that the lofty buildings he mentions could not have been built by the poor and the destitute. Only the powerful and the royal class would have afforded it. His contemporary Sultan Zain-ul Abidin Budshah constructed the royal palace *The Razdaan* probably all out of wood. The reference could possibly be to this lofty building. In that sense, Shaikh-ul Aalam would not spare the powers that be.

Shaikh-ul Aalam seems acutely conscious of the value that other forms of life deserve. This is more so with regard to animals - pet, domestic or wild that he came across during his spiritual sojourns or his roaming around different parts of the valley.

*I slaughtered the dumb and poor cattle
And relished the sweet morsels there of
Enjoyed, but for a moment and harmed my own life
Great God! Absolve me from sins.*

And the next stanza of the poem:

*Birds of air and water I did not hunt
A greedy butcher they would call me else
I did not talk of the reality with an undivided mind
Great God! Absolve me from sins.*

Several other verses point out towards the intimate relation that Shaikh-ul Aalam shared towards other forms of life. This is more pronounced especially with regard to the versified anecdotes mentioned in various *Noornama* records.

I have adorned the cave, mother

*Jackals and lions are in my family
Life is too short, say a fortnight
Giants and demons are in my service
The cave is like a castle
And the rage like a silken robe
I shall play with rats as the princes play with peacocks
For me life is not more than two and a half moment.*

Now coming to his famous poem, Shaikh Noor-ud Din extensively invoked imagery of agricultural practices to demonstrate the importance of these practices and the rituals associated with them.

Nur-ud Din incorporated a number of Quranic themes, ideas and rituals in their original Arabic form into his Kashmiri-language verses along with a number of personalities and events. These include Arabic terms which point to certain themes such as religious obligations, references to discourses on this life and the here-after and moral discourses, all discussed with reference to Quranic events and ideas retained in their Arabic form. These include a mention of the five fundamental obligations known as the five pillars of the Muslim faith including *namaz*, *roza*, *zakat* and *hajj*. The verses demonstrate their importance in terms of local exemplars taken from the Kashmiri language. Thus for

instance, obligatory prayers are described in terms of their importance of their corresponding examples from the local agricultural calendar. *Gongol-nama* thus seeks to demonstrate the importance of ritual practices and other ideas in terms of the local agricultural imagery. A detailed comparison between these rituals and their components on the one hand and a corresponding agricultural imagery on the other is a prominent feature of this poem. For instance, the *nafs*, that is the ego, is compared with the *bakbur*, that is the bullock, which needs to be controlled by the *mur*, that is the stick, of the *faqa*, the fasting. Components of the Islamic prayer ritual, the *salaat* such as *ghusl*, the ritual bath and *taharat*, the ablution, *niyyahh*, the intention to starting the prayer, and *qira'ah*, the recitation of Quran are described in terms of different agricultural equipments and practices. For instance, *alafal*, the ploughshare is equated with *ghusl* and *taharat*, that is the bath and ablution, the *Ipat*, that is the yoke, is equated with the *niyyah*, while as *vaan* that is the tilling or turning up the soil, is termed as the *Qira'at*, recitation.

Similarly, the ritual practice of bending in a prayer for the *ruk'u* is equated with bending for plucking the *ham* that is the weed out from the field. The practice of *dhiker*, remembrance after the prayers is equated with the *henl*, the grain with *jahar*, full bloom.

*Al pbaal ghusl tabarat kartai, ipat chai niyat kal kol traaw
Waen chai qirat sabi partai, yus kareh gongol su kareh kraaw.*

As was recently referred to regarding Moulana Rumi that the Iranians took upon themselves to make him a world-wide celebrity through their efforts by making his poetry available in the English language, the effort has to be in that direction with regard to the best available in our culture in the form of Shaikh-ul Aalam and his teachings.

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KASHMIRI LITERATURE AND CULTURE IN TRANSITION

Dr Abid Ahmad

Kashmir is an ancient culture. From pre-historic times to its recent history, Kashmir has been a meeting ground of varied cultural and religious traditions. Over the centuries, Kashmir has absorbed and adopted these traditions and has evolved a culture of its own. Kashmir's cultural identity is marked by its mystic essence, celebration of cultural and religious diversity, tolerance and moderation in all affairs of life.

Persistent striving of the soul towards an ever-elusive Reality has always been the essence of Kashmir's cultural ethos, and this ethos is best represented in an unparalleled way by its two iconic figures – Lal Ded and Sheikh al-Alam. Their enduring popularity across its communities vindicates their unequalled status of being Kashmir's flag-bearers. Both exist through their

verses which reflect a shared vision, mutual influence and diction that have led the commoners to adore them. Their verses have got mixed up because of their being contemporaries and the similarity of their message, giving rise to a high degree of inter-textual complexity. So much do they share in terms of language, thought and message that the one cannot be separated from the other. Setting aside the historical approach of differentiating them, the two saint-poets speak together through verses which have become constants in Kashmiri identity.

Lal Ded, a creative genius of fourteenth century Kashmir, is considered to be the fountainhead of Kashmir's spiritual and cultural identity. Lal is the archetypal seer who lives within Kashmir and Kashmiris. She forces language to hammer out her spiritual experiences and conveys her linguistic understanding of the Divine. Her verse is an attempt to convey the ineffable. Though she wrote within a religio-philosophical tradition (Trika Shaivism), she had risen far above its formal denominations. She suffered for being a woman in a patriarchal set up. She suffered for what she said and did. Her sayings are pregnant with universal principles of humanism. Lal's verses have entered into Kashmir's popular consciousness. The enduring appeal of her verse has turned them into proverbs which Kashmiris quote most of the time in their day to day

conversation. Her verse is the key to solve the puzzle of the self and the divine, and the relationship between the two. Her vakhs are said to be her spiritual biography.

An arrow of reed for a wooden bow,
An unskilled workman and a palace to build
A shop without a lock in the market place
A body uncleansed by a pilgrimage –
That's my state and few would know.

Close on the heels of Lal Ded came Sheikh Noor-ud Din Noorani, popularly known as Nund Reshi, the patron saint of Kashmir. He shared Lal's spiritual vision and was her spiritual and cultural successor. Both believed in the spiritual essence of life. Nund Reshi founded his own indigenous spiritual order, known as Reshism, that became the hallmark of Kashmir's cultural personality. This order did not indulge in any kind of theological theorisation, but aimed at how to imbibe Reality spiritually.

The Reshi order believes in universal values of peace and compassion and celebrates the diversity of cultural and religious traditions, upholding the syncretic values of social harmony and peaceful co-existence.

I am no one with no name.
Amid the rocks the found was lost
Among the thieves was lost the saint

Among the ignorant the wise teacher was lost
The swan was lost among the crows.
Count life as a fleeting fortnight.
Only he who sows shall reap.

Both Lal Ded and Sheikh al-Alam through their teachings gave birth to a worldview which is essentially spiritual. It is an outlook that is quintessentially human and equally accommodative of divergent lifestyles. This is something that not only defines Kashmir but also differentiates it from other cultural landscapes. It was not so much the form as the essence of religions to which both Lal Ded and Shaikh al-Alam were wedded. Their religious vision is, therefore, essentially similar despite that one of them was a Trika Shaivist Yogini and the other a Muslim by faith.

Both the poets not just influenced, as is commonly believed, but led to the formation of Kashmir's religious and spiritual ideals, thereby giving birth to Kashmir's unique consciousness. Both adopted somewhat similar, but not altogether same, routes to the Ultimate Reality and both arrived at somewhat similar conclusions with their distinct and individual tones. Their conclusions are cosmic and essentially human, free from any dogmaticism. This spiritual-cum-poetic vision is what shaped the mind and personality of the Kashmiri identity.

Together they give cadence as well as credibility to the cultural, spiritual and linguistic personality of Kashmir. In that sense they are not just any historical reality, but a reality that exists in perpetuation, an archetype that pervades Kashmir's mores.

Both the poets offer a poetic narrative of the indigenous Kashmiri identity. Their poetic compositions are a treasure trove of unique cultural expressions, folk customs and the folklore of Kashmir. They give expression to a history that is not available in conventional historical chronicles. Besides, their poetry could be classified as the first attempt at preserving the popular history of Kashmir as against the royal history which was the convention. They adopted Kashmiri language as the medium of their expression, unlike their predecessors who wrote in Sanskrit. Through their diction, idiom, and expressions, common life of their times comes live in our minds. In this attempt of theirs, the Kashmiri language emerges as an important cultural landmark that strikes an instant chord with the commoners of the times.

Kashmiri is one of the languages recognized in the eighth schedule of the Constitution of India. Kashmiri is a rich language reflecting a vibrant culture. Its vocabulary shows stark influence of multiple languages like Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. Its semantic space too exhibits plural values born of the creative

encounters it faced with multiple religious, cultural and linguistic traditions like those of China, the Middle East, Iran, and the Central Asia, apart from the Indian sub-continent.

The verses of these two poets too bear witness to the plural character of Kashmiri culture that had been open like a thoroughfare to the influences of creative sources from all sides. The verses of the two poets abound in Sanskrit terms and phrases drawn from the Hindu-Buddhist tradition and are equally embellished with Arabic and Persian expressions imbibed from the cultural flux that set in with the advent of Islam. Collectively, all these religious and cultural factors led to a synthesis of sorts that generated a cultural milieu that is unique and is still in existence. These spiritual mores and ideals still dominate the collective Kashmiri psyche and have worked as a sort of bulwark against the irresistibly strong winds of materialism and extremism. The cultural identity as envisaged and upheld by the two is based on human dignity, sanctity of human life and shared destiny of the human race. It is founded on an egalitarian outlook insofar as human beings are concerned and holds that the human condition is essentially spiritual which should not be treated as a commodity by sinking it into material and mundane pursuits.

This spiritual vision was kept alive by the immediate disciples of the Nund Reshi. They included Nasr-ud Din, Baam-

ud Din, Zain-ud Din, Payaam-ud Din and Qayaam-ud Din. The teachings of the Reshi order are preserved in a number of *Reshi Naama*, found across Kashmir, many of which have been published. A long chain of Sufi and mystic poets succeeded the Reshis. This chain represented the unique Kashmiri Sufi ethos that was a blend of Islamic and Hindu philosophy and thought.

The Sufi poets of Kashmir mostly followed the long Masnavi pattern, adopting Persian mystical metaphors to express their spiritual ideals. They wrote in other forms too like *vatsun*, *lole*, etc. They were the best representatives of the philosophy of *wahdat-ul wajood* (pantheism) as theorised in Sufi circles of the times elsewhere. However, Kashmiri Sufis indigenised the philosophy as per their cultural imperatives to celebrate the religious diversity in their immediate surroundings.

Some of the celebrated Sufi poets from Kashmir are Moomin Seab, Shah Qalander, Khwaja Habeebullah Nowshehri, Karam Buland, Mehmood Gami, Nema Seab, Wahab Khar, Ahmad Batweare, Samad Mir and Ahad Zargar. A tradition of mystic poetry among Kashmiri Pandits ran parallel to this Sufi tradition although at times both the traditions intersected. Some of the prominent poets in this mystic tradition were Rupa Bhawani, Lakshman Joo Bulbul, Parmanand and Krishen Joo Razdan.

The Sufi/mystic tradition of Kashmir is known for upholding universal human values and celebrating multiple religious traditions, social harmony and cultural diversity. It is deeply informed with Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic mystical traditions. The Sufis always preached love of mankind and never believed in any institutionalised tradition and educational set-up. They were visionaries in that they stressed values and attitudes which were extremely liberal and generous, values which came to be recognized as cardinal principles of modern societies. They added the elements of self-discipline through asceticism, abstinence and mortification of self. They liberally borrowed from the existing systems of mysticism as those of Hindu ascetics, especially of Saivites of Kashmir, emphasizing individual salvation and tolerance of alternative worldviews.

Such teachings went a long way in laying the formation of the Kashmiri imaginary, recognised for its identification with peace and harmony. Kashmir's cultural imaginary is based on its indigenous ethno-cultural identity. Though this imaginary is located in a particular geographical region, it is far greater in vision. Kashmir is not a region in an ordinary sense of the term. There are complex dynamics of indigeneity, ethnicity, religion and identity concurrently involved. Spiritual consciousness defines the Kashmiri imaginary as nothing else does. A profound spiritual

vision, deeply informed by a benign understanding of Nature and the universe is a hallmark of this imaginary.

The corpus of mystical teachings available in the shape of verses and sayings of Sufi and mystic poets of Kashmir is entirely based on Kashmir's ethnic framework while having been open to diverse sources. The composite culture of modern Kashmir is Buddhist, Saivite and Islamic at the same time.

In the seventeenth century, Habba Khatoon formally initiated the tradition of lyricism in Kashmiri poetry which was later taken forward by Arnimaal, another poet of the same tradition. The love poetry added a strong note of physical passion to the corpus of Kashmiri literature while being nestled in the bedrock of the traditional value system.

Folk stories from far and wide and folk theatre with its antiquarian tradition in Kashmir continued to influence, entertain and shape the Kashmiri culture during this historical evolution. Morals from the classical epics and mythology from ancient times played a crucial role in sustaining and nourishing the cultural values of Kashmir. They served as mass entertainers as well. A strong tradition of folk music and Sufiana Music, Kashmir's own classical music, enriched the cultural matrix of Kashmir in an unprecedented way.

Nineteenth century witnessed an unease of sorts in the aesthetic tradition of Kashmir. While classical sensibility continued to hold the sway over the Kashmiri mind and heart, new realities made themselves felt on the scene, causing the literati to accommodate the changing milieu. This blend of the old and the new is best represented by Rasul Mir, celebrated romantic poet.

Gulam Ahmad Mehjoor and Abdul Ahad Azad were the pioneers of modern Kashmiri literature. The duo freed the Kashmiri language from the clutches of the classicism and added fresh imagination and diction to it. Neither of them was a mystic or a hermit, rather they foregrounded life to celebrate its vibrancy. They hammered out the commensurate idiom to appeal to the new-age audience. Both served as a link between tradition and modernity, broadening the Kashmiri consciousness in an unprecedented manner. Mehjoor and Azad were votaries of classical humanism and scientific humanism, respectively. While Mehjoor was a classicist in certain respects, Azad was a rebel. Credit goes to Azad only for initiating the note of intellectual conviction in Kashmiri literature which went a long way in strengthening the Marxist tradition in Kashmiri literature and academia in subsequent times.

Most of the twentieth century was dominated by legends like Dina Nath Nadim, Ghulam Nabi Firaq, Amin Kamil, Mirza Arif, Rehman Rahi, Ghulam Nabi Khayal, Muzaffar Azim and GR Santosh. Notwithstanding their knack for experimentation and innovation in terms of both form and content, all of them enriched the Kashmiri literary imagination in an unparalleled way. The last decade of the previous century disturbed the cultural scene in Kashmir. Cultural and literary activities came to a grinding halt. Sources of creativity seemed to have desiccated. Writing ceased to flourish. Theatre was abandoned. Music turned mute. Basic impulses of life were dumped. Like other fields of life, the tumult took a heavy toll on cultural life of Kashmir.

However, things have started to improve. Threads are being pulled up where they were left. A new dawn of celebration of indigenous cultural ethos is expected to break soon.

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PERSIAN LITERATURE: CONTRIBUTION OF KASHMIRI PANDITS

Iqbal Ahmad

Recently a Hindi poetry collection titled, 'Khoje Hue Prissht' by Dr Satish Vimal, famous poet, critic and broadcaster of Kashmir, was translated into Persian. Titled as *Barg-haa-e-gum-shudeh*, Dr Mohammad Ibrahim Wani, a reputed Persian scholar has wonderfully translated it. The book was released in an impressive function at Persian Cultural Centre in the Iranian embassy at New Delhi. It was perhaps the first time that a Kashmiri Pandit's literary work was appreciated by Iranians so much.

The event reminds us about the ancient literary link between Kashmiri Pandits and the Persian language. In fact I have seen Persian works by Kashmiri Pandits in

several archival repositories and manuscript collections. Today's translation of any Kashmiri Pandit's literary composition into Persian shall be seen through the lens of our Persian literary history, where we find the wonderful contribution of Kashmiri Pandits in promotion of Persian literature.

Kashmir, in terms of its Sanskrit and Persian literary heritage, has been preserving wonderful literary treasures in its official and non-official archival repositories and libraries. These two languages have been the oldest, official as well as literary languages, of this land and most of the history and literature is available in these two major languages.

In fact when we define Persian in simple terms we can say that it is an Iranian dialect which is still prevalent there. But for Persian scholars and historians, its significance in context of Kashmiri culture and history is very much important. Since the decline of Sanskrit, it was Persian which filled the official and literary gap of this land. Thousands of books were written in this

language which covered almost all the fields of education and literature.

Historically speaking, Persian evolved here in late 14th century AD when Shahmiri Sultans founded Muslim Sultanate in Kashmir. The Shahmiri sultans provided first space to Persian word, but it were Chak sultans who made it their official language and inscribed their respective names, titles and mint name and date in decorative Persian characters on their respective coinages. The Mughal and Durrani governors added a new flavor to this language and added more decorative Persian legends on their respective coinages. The Sikh and Dogra period Governors didn't remain far behind; they also promoted its official status and placed Persian legends as well on most of their coinages. The Durrani and Sikh governors wrote a variety of compositions in Persian couplets on their respective coinages.

Since its introduction in the 14th Century to 20th Century, Persian word found a strong base in the whole Jammu and Kashmir. It served as the official language

and language of its elite class, besides being taught in local Pathshalas and Madrasas.

The past of this language has been very bright. Patronized by Muslim, Hindu and Sikh rulers, it has been cultivated by Pandit scholars as well. In fact an interesting fact is that it was also promoted by Kashmiri Pandits. Since they had also learned this language and their contribution to its promotion has been extraordinary. Pandits set up Sharda and Sanskrit patshalas, wherein they taught Sharda and Sanskrit. When Persian made its entry into Kashmir they also introduced it in their patshalas.

Of its religious significance, it was necessary for Muslim preachers to learn this language as most of the religious scripts for Muslims were available in this script. It was also the language of the Muslim missionaries who introduced it in Kashmiri Khanqahs and Madrasas, and just like Arabic, it was important for a Muslim teacher to learn this language. In this context the contribution of Muslim teachers towards the promotion of this Iranian

dialect is well understood, as they required it to learn and to understand their religious teachings. What was more significant and surprising was the role which Pandits played in development of this language and its literature.

Among the Kashmiri Pandits, the name of Munshi Bhawanidas Kachru stands pre-eminent as one among Persian writers and poets. The original style of his *Babritavil* (Persian composition) is held in high esteem in international Persian literature.

The term *babri taveel* is Persian term which comprises two words *Babr* and *Taveel*. *Babr* means a verse and *Taveel* means long. As such, *Babri Taveel* signifies a long lyric comprising thousands of verses. The other most famous Pandit Persian poets whose compositions are known are Pandit Taba Ram Turki, Satram Baqaya, Daya Kachru, Aftab Bhan, Gobind Koul and Kailash Dhar. Besides, there are a number of other Persian knowing Pandits who contributed towards the development of Persian word and literature. Their

Persian compositions are also well mentioned in several historical accounts of this land. There were several such other Pandit teachers of Persian who are not mentioned anywhere, but they have been teaching this script to Kashmiri students.

Those were the glorious times for Persian language and literature. However, things changed, Persian could not withstand the new cultural and literary changes. A time reached when this script became outdated. Consequently, it was dropped from the school curriculum. The Urdu and English languages filled the official language vacuum. Notwithstanding the fact that Persian is still taught in few government universities and colleges, but it has also been dropped from the local Pathshallas, madrasas and Darasgahs.

Like Sanskrit manuscripts, the Persian manuscripts are scattered in a number of collections, which are still to be translated into the modern languages. Its translating aspect has not been taken up so seriously. At most of these places, the manuscripts are neither documented

nor catalogued. Although we know that we cannot revive and restore back its pristine glory, still we could have made an effort to accord it a better treatment.

We need to bring scattered manuscripts and documents in Persian under one umbrella and preserve them for future generations. To understand philosophy, history, culture and moral values hidden in these Persian manuscripts, we could have encouraged its systematic translation into new and prevalent languages of this land.

Since most of history, cultural, religious, chemical, physical, astronomical, mystic, philosophic, and local traditions and rituals are preserved in the Sanskrit and Persian works, they require to be explored by translating those varied treasures.

Let us not wait for another Stein to come to undertake the translation of such works. The Persian and Sanskrit departments of Jammu and Kashmir universities, Archives Department, Libraries and Research Dept and Cultural Academy like official institutions can jointly

initiate translation of Persian and Sanskrit literary treasures. The local Darasghas and Madrasas should also re-introduce the Persian religious works produced by Sufi saints of this land. Besides, the contributions made by Kashmiri Pandits should also be explored and brought before the literature lovers of this land.

Indeed the recent translation of one of the famous compositions of Dr Satish Vimal into Persian is really a great tribute to entire Kashmir literary community, for their contributions which their ancestors have made towards the promotion of Persian literature in Kashmir.

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LOCATING ABDUL AHAD AZAD'S INDIVIDUAL GENIUS IN THE POETIC TRADITION OF KASHMIR

Basharat Shamim

This paper aims to contextualize Abdul Ahad Azad's poetry within the larger Kashmiri Poetic Tradition. It is an attempt at locating his place in this great tradition? It also tries to explore how Azad's Poetry redefines, reorients and diversifies the Kashmiri Literary Tradition.

For centuries, Kashmiri literary tradition, as critics have outlined, was said to be characterized by its peculiar quintessence of mysticism in which the idea of Kashmiriyat was nourished and propagated. In its essence, Kashmiriyat was characterized by an emphasis on the syncretic values of pluralism and tolerance.

In the 20th century, one can see the greater commitment, engagement and sensitivity in Kashmiri poetry to the immediate reality and conditions. During the first half of the 20th century, in the mainstream Kashmiri literary tradition, one can see eminent poets like Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor and Abdul Ahad Azad giving

a fresh impetus to Kashmiri poetry which, in the words of Jawahar Lal Handoo, “freed Kashmiri literature from heavy Persio-Arabic influence to take it out from literary stagnation.” (Handoo 145). Many of their poems have achieved the status of revolutionary anthems.

Abdul Ahad Azad (1903 – 1948) was born as Abdul Ahad Dar in Ranger, Chadoora, Budgam, in 1903. Before his untimely death in 1948, he produced a fine volume of poetry. *Kuliyat-i-Azad* and *Haraam e Saba* are two of his books. He has also written a work on literary history in Urdu called *Kashmiri Zabaan aur Shaeri*.

Critics like GN Gauhar regard Azad as one of the pioneers of modernist movement in Kashmiri literature. The new kind of poetry written by poets like Abdul Ahad Azad and Ghulam Ahmad Mehjoor, which had greater commitment and topicality, heralded the beginning of the Progressive influences in Kashmiri literature. It also coupled with the emergence of a new political awakening in the form of a plural nationalist movement against the autocratic-feudal regime in the Kashmir of 1940s. Azad shared this political awakening; he was very much part of the new Progressive tradition.

Abdul Ahad Azad played a significant role in synchronizing the Kashmiri poetic tradition with the contemporary times. The seemingly ahistoricity of Kashmiriyat as

a purely abstract construct can be seen turning into a modern Secular-Progressive ideal through Azad's poetry. The revolutionary zeal combined with excellent creative skills is a hallmark of Azad's poetry which transformed and reoriented the Kashmiri poetic tradition. As Azad writes in his poem "The River":

Life is nothing but the gospel
Of change and revolution.
I feel the pleasure in confronting with
The hardships and difficulties of Life

Continuing with his zest for social emancipation and giving voice to the voiceless and suffering people, Azad writes in his poem "Peasant":

Look at our innocent children and their plight
See to our bodies, they are feasts for the rich
You neither heard nor did you see
What you gained of your labour?

Azad was highly influenced by Marxist outlook. His poetry demonstrates a commitment towards the dawn of a new, progressive society where all the edifices of exploitation, inequality and injustice shall break as Marx had envisaged in his philosophy. He had great praise for Karl Marx and the

October/Red Revolution which led to the formation of the then Soviet Union.

While praising Karl Marx and his ideology, Azad writes:

His creed: a mirror reflecting Nature;
Gold purified in fire;
The blooming spring of all springs,
Essence of reason and flush of affection,
The revealing sun facing the obscurities of life.

He also wrote an eulogy to the Bolsheviks for overthrowing the Czars in Russia during the October Revolution. He sees it as a great victory of the proletariats over the bourgeoisie/feudal lords:

This important aspect can be found in many of Azad's poems like 'Revolution' (Inquilab), 'River' (Daryaav), 'Nalaye Badshah' (the lament of Budshah), 'Shikwah-e-Kashmir' (The complaint of Kashmir), 'Myoun Wattan' (My Motherland), etc. The profound concern towards the suffering masses percolates his poetry throughout.

Azad's vision of the suffering humanity is historical in sense, not abstract, existential or ahistorical. He wants to be a conscious keeper by being an agent of change, and change for a better life and tomorrow. His poems like Taqdeer (Destiny), Be-

Khudi and Khudi express his philosophy of praxis and positive action rather than mere abstraction.

Panunpaanaaytan chum thowmutsaerisjahanuskyet
Panun zoo peshkashthovumzaminustizamanuskyuet
Walaypraruntethehrunchuinamyänenmashgalanandar
Yiwan chum zindgihuendsozsafranmanzilanandar
I have kept my life at the disposal of the whole world
My life is for the earth and the sky
One need not stop for my activities
I enjoy life in tours and the destinies

(Translated by Shafi Ahmad)

The ardent yearning for a better tomorrow; an egalitarian society based on equality and justice is overtly present in his poetry, for which exploitative order would have to be overthrown for a new beginning.

More such themes can be intensely found in his *tour de force* poems like “Revolution” and “River”. In his poem ‘Taranai Wattan’ (Songs of the country) he exhorts upon the youth to be the agents of change and progress:

‘TuloKadamBahaduroo, karohameshajustajoo;

Jawanjawandilawaroo, karohameshajustajoo

(O, young brave youth, Bravo Advance Ahead; Struggle perpetually ahead, Then alone hope and desire; Gather thee and Desire).

In his poem, “The Stars Speak To Man”, Abdul Ahad Azad addresses all the humans and their historically constituted corrupt and repressive institutions. Through the image of a star, the mirror is shown to the humans and their institutions. It reminds one of the philosophy of great French philosopher JJ Rousseau.

Azad also outlines this pluralistic appeal in his poetry as he seeks to reorient the concept of Kashmiriyat into a more progressive, secular-modern ideal or way of life. It is something that can hold mirror to us in the contemporary times. Azad firmly stands up for pluralism and secular progressive outlook while condemning using religious based politics, division and hatred on the lines of religion or any other denomination:

Dogniarchuyelimatlabpoozayinimazanheund
Sozusboyibakhshaishbeyitooriladithdaalay
If prayers cultivate a barrier in between
I will return this gift pack back

(Translated by Shafi Ahmad)

The feature of Abdul Ahad Azad just doesn't lie only in its “message” or “topicality”, so to say; rather, one can say that it stands apart in its brilliant combination of the aesthetic and political. Or one can say, it seeks to redefine the Aristotlean aesthetic. On analysing Azad's poetry, one is inevitably reminded

of Prem Chand's famous remarks, "We have to change the standards of beauty" [Hamein husn ka mayaar badalna hoga], made at the opening of Progressive Writers Conference in Lucknow in 1936. The tension between the personal and the historical generates new literary paradigms in Azad's poetry. It is here that Abdul Ahad Azad takes the Kashmiri literary tradition to a new pedestal where his poetry can be studied, in the words of famous American author and critic, Barbara Harlow, as "actively engaging in the historical process of struggle ... and assert thereby [its] own polemical historicity" (Harlow 37). Azad then comes across as a poet whose poetry offers a rather "historicized" witness of the human condition and existence rather than abstract. The poetry of Azad, for the most part, seems to be in sync with its immediate situatedness or circumstances; it is, by no means, an ahistorical or an existential cry articulated in perennial agony of human depravity. [Such poetry] engages in a radical critique of what eminent Chilean author, Ariel Dorfman, has called the "standard , uniform patterns" of culture, patterns, disseminated by the ideological domination of the powers (qtd. in Harlow 36).

TS Eliot writes in his famous essay, "Tradition and Individual Talent":

[Sometimes] we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed...the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.

What Eliot wants to convey here is the importance of one's individual talent and the awareness and sense of contemporaries in relation to the Tradition which makes a poet great; in other words this awareness/sense of contemporaneity is what makes individual poetics and artists the true bearers of what is called Tradition.

While being part of a historical process, Azad's poetry seems to be "taking sides" against the forces of exploitation. But in no way, does the aesthetics in such poetry take a backseat. Such poetry upholds its own aesthetic standard as charged reality or "topicality" gets polished and reflected through the poet's literary craft and imagination. In this perspective, renowned West Indian (Jamaican) poet and critic, Olive Senior argues: "Storytellers,

poets, writers, have always found ways of confronting tyranny, especially in spaces where such actions are dangerous and deadly. Throughout the ages, writers have developed and employed myriad literary devices and explored the fullest limits of language through satire, magical realism, fantasy, fable and so on. Writers over the ages have found ways of talking about issues ... without seeming to talk about them. The function is not to present the world as it is, but to present it in a new light through the narrative power of art” (Senior 2013).

One can see that Abdul Ahad Azad’s poetry in terms of aesthetics, diction and theme seems to redefine or reorient the Kashmiri literary tradition in a new way. And his individual talent just diversifies and enriches our tradition further.

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POETRY

KASS GUMMAN

Ashok Kumar

Translated from Hindi by Suman K Sharma

Lights were off:
Little Mannu asked -
“Granny, it’s been dark so long,
there’s just no light,
even TV’s not on,
I can’t see anything;
when shall this darkness end?”
Granny took a deep sigh,
and said –
“Darkness is bad luck indeed!”
The little one asked again –
“Why is darkness bad luck?”

“Because,” Granny said,
“inside and out, in nooks and crannies,
in holes and cracks,
it pervades all.
And once it strikes banefully,
then not a million lights
can curb its ills;
it then steals
into the insides of man,
even in glaring light.
Ever since forty-seven
it’s been affecting us here and there.”
Mannu was not yet old enough
to grasp what Granny had said.
“Granny,” he asked,
“What next is going to happen
in the TV serial we watched?”
Granny was mum.
Mannu persisted, the prevailing gloom
bothered him;
he wanted Granny to tell
the story of the serial,
or, else, narrate what came to her mind,

till there was light again.
In the darkness that prevailed,
Granny recalled in detail
her childhood, her youth, her aging years.

Is it just one story, or countless stories
strung together in a series -
some in entirety, some broken,
yet some other serpentine like a mountain road,
and the rest running straight
like a thoroughfare on the plains?
Now, if it's the first one, or the second -
intertwined in utter confusion -
Granny could never understand
whether the sad song of her life was an epic
of which every canto told a different tale by itself;
or her life is
but a small portion
of the life-stories of others,
Or she herself is an index of a vast narrative
which has inscribed on every bit of it
the captions of disparate stories.

Granny thinks of light, of home,
of the kinship of walls within the home;
the home that had had its walls earlier as well,
yet, before her wide-open eyes,
new walls sprang up within the home,
new homes stood inside the home -
that's how the home kept getting smaller,
its dwellers too getting smaller in the process.
Which of the homes could they call their own?
Walls don't make kinship,
neither do they cement bonding;
nor the belongingness to a city, to a neighbourhood,
or to an alleyway.
They only stand witness to events,
and events knit together to make history.
Walls laugh,
walls say -
"Whatever you might say,
we don't come to be by ourselves,
it's you who are in need
of a house;
By way of our standing,
parts of different names -

bedroom, kitchen, bathroom
take shape
much like divided countries and provinces.
The land remains as it was,
it's you who give it a separate roof.
What stands below us,
the plot that you call 'home',
is of your own making."

A wall intruding into its neighbourhood
was thwarted at last at a point
below which lay a substratum of surging avidity and hatred.
From the union of brick and brick
was born primal lust
for loot, pillage and rape –
It was the Politics of Wall.
At a raja's house
bricks came flying,
those bricks turned into fighters,
and hired *Kabailis* –
marauders bearing the ensign of religion.
The Politics of Wall had enfeebled the raja.
Nescient and devoid of power,

incapable was he of protecting his populace.

A script of horror was being written elsewhere.

When cities get demarcated
with the emotions of the pious and righteous,
then those cities remain ordinary no more;
their lanes and pathways turn dulcet,
suns peep through their lampposts,
winds leave gold-dust on leaves there,
fragrant pollen rubs off the avian wings –
such indeed was that town, Mirpur,
founded by Gazi Mirshah and Gosain Bodh Puri.
They were the saints who sanctified the land
with their pious hands,
Mirpur it was.
In there dwelt the souls of Mirshah and Bodh Puri.

Loot, arson, murder and rape
were let loose on the town,
oblivious was the raja, as were his subjects;
trampling the surrounds,
the enemy advanced, the Kabailis pushed on.

Nursing as they are
the desire to live life like a celebration
the masses are not warlike at all.
Karamat Ali had forewarned them though,
Abdul Majid too had warned:
“Go! Run away, flee this land,
the saints can protect you no longer!”
Mirpur was presently bloated with refugees.
The Mirpuris said,
“You may take refuge here.”
Refuge they did take,
but not the piety of the saintly town, alas!
In them blazed the fire of vengeance
A small volcano was live in each of them,
the ominous clouds now and again
took shape of fierce boars, carnivores
and evil spirits,
giving the locals constant worry.
“Run away! Stop the surge of refugees!”
He had screamed, he had run,
he had tried to stop them,
they would have heeded if they were human,
but can anyone stop a maddened mob?

Stop a storm?

A murder got committed, yes it did,
Granny witnessed it.
He was Wahabuddin,
who daily lit up the lamp-posts.
He had grovelled before them,
“I am the raja’s man, don’t hurt me, please!”
But no one listened to his pleas,
he was squashed with stones -
that sun of the lampposts -
on his body were spread
blots blue and red.
The sky had wept that day.
A big stone was marked with blood,
the stone that had fallen aside
after splitting the skull.
Whitish-red brains had spattered out
of the bowl of the shattered skull.
Wahabuddin’s hand was on his forehead,
as if he were mulling over a revolt
against such erosion of the social order.
The night was dark and long,

the red colour of his blood
got mixed up with the dusty soil
and disappeared altogether.

The Pakistanis entered,
the Kabailis came up,
the predators descended on the sacred soil;
There was firing, arson there was.
“Run, run away from where you are!
Escape through the side-lane!
Take the thoroughfare,
avoid the corner and flee!
The roofs over the houses
are joined,
climb to the rooftops and escape!
But they knew not
that the roofs that looked solid
under the layer of loose dirt
had been burnt in the fire
that raged under them;
as the roofs caved in one by one,
With them went those
who ran over them.

Who'd have heard their screams
in the crackling fire down-under?
Who'd have heard their cries of self-pity?
A fearsome Rakshasa was performing fiery oblations,
human offerings were falling into the burning pit,
in the cacophony of incantations,
mother, son, brothers and the rest of kin
were left behind with as little care
as one leaves behind the worn footwear.
The houses were discarded
as also were the belongings burning in them.
The culture was being discarded
discarded with it were the human values.
Directions were lost,
conventions were lost;
when civilization is abandoned,
directions go in deep slumber;
wherever there was dark,
there lay a way to escape,
The crowd thronged this way and that,
oblivious of direction, devoid of thought.

Mannu asked –

“Granny, when it will be light again?”
“As of now, it is getting darker,” she replied.

Granny walked on with the crowd,
the path led the folks to Kass Gumman,
Noise there was, yet more noise.
Hedge yourselves! Hedge yourselves!
Guns, axes, swords, toothed quoits,
Weapons seem to have sprung out of the soil.
Several invasive hands
Open up packages, bundles,
They grope body-bulges;
a mountain-like surge rises upwards,
a mountain-like surge rises on the left,
a mountain-like surge rises on the right,
a mountain-like surge advances forward,
a mountain-like surge retreats backwards;
a gigantic man-like beast
extends hands as big as trees,
cave-like mouths open up again and again,
bushes and brambles prick bodies,
fear permeates spots of darkness
To seep into the fugitives’ inner selves

With every heartbeat.
Legs tingle, bodies tingle,
pupils petrify,
hiccups get stuck in throat,
people feel dizzy, they are dazed,
in the gloom no one could see
others getting pale,
Blood turns blue in veins.
A wrinkled hand
Catches firm hold of the daughter's shivering hand
lest it should slip away,
goose bumps pass from one body to the other,
veins burst.
With his second hand,
the man gives support to his tumbling wife,
from where can he bring
A third hand
to save his son's head
which is about to be cut off?
Even his feet become a shield!
In that horrendous moment,
Would he have a sword!

There were spots of khaki and green,
Brick and stone constructs could be seen,
but that wasn't
the onset of the dawn.
Those mornings were blood-red
a mother had said -
"My son has hardly gone to school
he doesn't know the alphabet yet;
he has not even been tonsured;
he has to grow up, please!
Take my head and spare his!"
Fighters know only brutality,
they don't go by emotions
red are their eyes, red their faces,
and harsh their tongue;
unhinged fall directions
when their roars let loose an attack -
right on the hair-parting fell the sword,
it got stuck in the forehead,
Sprung out from it in three directions
a gushing stream of blood,
it splattered here and there.
Someone else made

a forceful thrust on the neck
and said –
“Take away his head!”
The mother put forth her hand,
It was a plaything in mother’s hand -
she touched it over and over again,
such a charming visage it was -
the sword remained stuck in the head
and stuck on the sword was the scream,
that tenuous stream of fear.
Another mother pleaded -
“I brought him up doing menial jobs,
now he has begun to earn a bit on his own,
I am looking for a bride for him,
who else would take care of my house
and be my crutches in my dotage?”
At first they axed both his hands,
tears ran from the mother’s eyes,
she recalled those tiny hands
on which she had tied a black band of white mustard seeds,
that might save him from a thousand evil spirits-
the black band couldn’t withstand the trying times -
what of the dead-turned-evil-spirits,

the live ones proved deadlier.
Poor mother didn't know -
between the severance of the first tiny vein,
and the last one of the body
were interspersed many more screams.
The hovering vultures
had flown to the sky in fear
and now fluttered there in circles!

He was the only one
who went about registering
the pain inscribed on swords,
the fall of severed hands,
the lazy tremble of the severed legs
and the tiny bouncing of headless torsos.
He was the only one
who was registering the beastly pulling
of the hardened hands
and that thread-by-thread unravelling
of the waist-clasping bands,
or the blots of running blood
on the clothes,
or the myriad wounds on the wrists

left by bangles broken in attempt to save virtue.
Registering also he was -
the sight of mothers' bosoms
that lay around scattered
like the parted halves of red-coloured balls,
and the terrible strife
of saving daughters,
that had turned
into fistfuls of reddened Kass Gumman soil.
There was no milk, only blood was
which oozed off slowly,
forming crazy lines on bare bodies,
and hands rising towards severed breasts,
no, not out of shyness,
but a vain attempt to live a little more.
For him seeing meant
internalising the sights,
to hear was to him
melting within
the steely sharp sounds of pain,
the furnace was emitting
red-hot embers,
a violent explosion there was,

in the furnace.
Then, like the crackling of lightening,
he had snatched away the sword
that a fighter was plunging
indiscriminately into bellies,
like a grain merchant
might thrust steel *parkhi* into sacks.
The slayer with his flared nostrils
and hot breath
glared like a raging bull!
There was a tumult in their midst,
the Kabailis wouldn't have thought
that a fallen head could also rise
like a grass blade lying under a heavy stone
rises again when the stone is lifted.
Many shots were fired in dismay,
they were fighters first and last,
driven by their calling,
anyone who rose against brutality
had to be dealt with like a rebel
"Shoot him!" was the command.
One who had registered all the sights
was himself a sight now.

He had registered
the strife of mothers,
the struggle of daughters;
registered he had
the struggle of husbands too,
and the struggle of wailing wives.
On the slabs and stones of Kass Gumman,
on the soil and water of Kass Gumman,
he had scripted with his blood-drenched finger,
inscribed he had a text of protest,
a protest against inhumanity!

The revolution was yet far away.
Granny had seen the splitting of India,
and she had seen the butchering of populace,
witness she had been to countless scenes
that shook her to the core;
Granny knew
Kass Gumman was not the only one -
Alibegh, Thatthal, Akaalgarh
were different places,
there people were different,
only the scenes were the same.

Amid that gory dreadfulness
ran the images of innocent,
endearing visages before her eyes.
How many among them
were of her own –
father, mother, sisters, brothers -
her sight might be failing,
yet, she still sees those faces
as clearly as if they were before her,
with their pristine glow in Mirpur town,
or as she had seen them in Kass Gumman,
barely a girl was Granny then.
Before those sights and numerous stories
which were nearly the same as her own,
the stories appearing on the TV
appear as unreal
as a landscape covered in mist.

Where are the messengers of the world peace?
Or the proponents of the sham of Human Rights?
No one asks today
who were they,
Those perpetrators of Kass Gumman.

Arraign them before the Court
So the world might see their deformed face!
No one has wanted to know
who were those
that forever have been snatched from their families!
Who were the women
that were sold in the bazaars of Afghanistan
to become part of harems of Pakistani chiefs?
Their fate!
The history of India
is the history of all that came its way,
Granny won't tell her grandson
the stories of torment,
nor would she allow
the raising of a dividing wall yet again;
she would herself stand up
to the oppressors like a wall,
she won't narrate to the child
the story told in the TV serial;
she would rather make her grandson
a protagonist of fruitful opposition
In every tale of cruelty and mayhem.

Author's Note:

Mirpur today is a part of Jammu Kashmir, which Pakistan has been occupying illegally since 1947. The old part of the town is submerged now under the water reservoir of the Mangla Dam. Kass Gummanis is located about fifteen miles from Mirpur. In the Mirpuri dialect, the word 'Kass' means a ravine. The names mentioned in the poem are of real people, rather than imagined. The poem describes the incidents in the way they happened to the former residents of Mirpur.

Readings

songs of Light by Ayaz Rasool Nazki

Kolkata: Writers Workshop

pp. 101

Price: Rs 200; HB

Prof Tej Nath Dhar

Though a scientist by training, Nazki, probably because of his strong literary lineage, has been writing poetry and prose in Urdu and Kashmiri for decades, and has now published his first collection of poems in English. In his short Preface to the volume, he writes that we all have “something of God” in us, for we have the urge to create, and having created something, we crave to be read. But as mortals, we have to inhabit some space, which, in his case is Kashmir, and being what it is at present, a land of violence, despair and hopelessness, it “has become an obsession and sometimes a limitation for most Kashmiri poets.” So he writes poems with the hope that things will improve and create the possibilities of a new dawn.

The volume consists of nearly seventy poems. Except for some rare few, they are quite short. “The doctor said” is the

shortest and the most enigmatic: “The doctor said:/You are fit for your age.” Another one, slightly longer than this, “K Is Poetry,” states that Kashmir is not a congenial place for writing poetry:

I am not writing
any poem today
I am in the
valley of Kashmir

In “I Am Walking Alone,” the “poets have disappeared,” and “no songs will now ever/reverberate in the valleys.”

In spite of this dismal scenario, Nazki keeps on writing, and the creative impulse acquires a kind of mystical aura about it. In “My Poems” he writes that “My poems are not mine/they come to me from the void/I am a greedy old man.” The same void permeates the “Sea of Darkness,” “A Poem for My Wife,” “When I Turn,” and “unblemished darkness” inhabits his inner being in the “Enlightenment.” In “I am” the same “dark luminescence” comes down hurtling into the “chaste pure womb/of nothingness” right into his soul, making him feel “I am when/I am not.” In “It Doesn’t Care,” the creative impulse moves like a force “of its own accord,” around spaces and objects, “till it descends through/my pen.” And in “Flood Gates,” his bosom is unlocked and he is tossed away. When he tells the words in

“Words Won’t Listen” to leave him alone, they don’t; instead, they move around his eyes, scratch his scalp, and have their way with him.

Being a poet, Nazki does not hesitate to see himself in the company of other poets of the past and of his own times. This explains a set of poems for Agha Shahid Ali who wrote in English and Shamas Faqir who wrote in Kashmiri. About the latter he feels “I have been united with you/ since the time I heard your word.” Shaped by him, he writes the “Shunyah” in a mystical vein and then “The most special among specials” in which Shamas Faqir drinks “the elixir of eternity/that is the life of perfect ones/may you then be with the pure/”The most special among specials.” In “My place is behind the veil of pain,” “Shamas Faqir traversed the whole universe/praying to the Lord for eternal life/sitting at home and repeating the word: My place is behind the veil of pain.”And in “When shall that simpleton see the light?” the poet learns the mantra for enlightenment from him:

The one who jumps into the ocean of love,
to cleanse his self shall realize
alif, laam and meem.

Nazki considers Agha Shahid Ali his “bosom friend,” because both belong to the same place and share the same experiences. In “All Day Long,” Shahid emerges a master

craftsman, who “slid himself between the threads/ and drifted into a deep slumber.” In “I do not know” he sees nature in its normal course and has a feeling that although nobody takes his name “Yet I know you are around/ but where? I do not know.” Nazki feels one also with Fareed Parbati, another fellow poet. Since he has left behind his pen, the poem is titled “Fareed Parbati’s Pen.” He is sure that he will return to tell him about the mystery of his artistic creations and learn from him about his “unsaid word/ the unsung song.”

When he is not with his fellow beings, Nazki writes neat little poems about disappearances in “The Man with the lantern,” the troublemakers, who “put the landscape on fire” in “They Came,” the birds of peace in “Birds were told,” and about his bold wish to sing light in the dark night, even if that means to “bear the consequences/ of my dreams” in “I will sing light.”

Nazki has the skill to paint dainty little pictures: of birds moving along with him in “On my morning walk today,” waiting for his promised visit in “And he came,” “descending like the rain,” or bidding good bye to a small group in “Adieu.” And also to weave dreams, as in “She looks the same,” “I know,” “It Was Her.”

Nazki does not write explicitly about the troubles in Kashmir, but two poems “Uptown Kashmir” and “Downtown

Kashmir” do suggest the changes that the place has witnessed over time. Though the titles of the poems suggest a spatial division, they also focus on the changes in the people who inhabit these spaces. Now they live in big mansions, with glass windows and high ceilings and open roads, but they have become small and close minded, dwarfed and blinded. Earlier they lived in houses with small windows and narrow roads, but they had a vision, a big heart and an open mind.

Nazki’s optimism is embodied in his poem “New Year.” Though conscious of the short-lived existence of human beings, for “the decay is in/our genes,” the poet wants to celebrate and to sing about all the good things of life. That is the note of hope that he wants to emphasize and that is what art makes possible.

Nazki is a sensitive poet and a talented craftsman, subtle and thoughtful, and deceptively simple. The Foreword by Maharaj Krishan Santoshi is an acute piece of literary criticism, which adds to the value of the volume.