

CONTEMPORARY SHORT FICTION FROM KASHMIR: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THREE WOMEN WRITERS

*A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad
in partial fulfillment for the award of Doctoral Degree in Comparative Literature*

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CERTIFICATE

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Contemporary Short Fiction From Kashmir: A Comparative Study of Three Women Writers” submitted by Ms. Salma Ashraf, bearing Reg. No. 09HCPH06, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

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I, Ms. Salma Ashraf, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “Contemporary Short Fiction from Kashmir: A Comparative Study of Three Women Writers” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Prof. Tutun Mukherjee is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a comparative study of three contemporary women writers from Kashmir: Mehfooza Jan (b. 1964), Tarannum Reyaz (b. 1963) and Khema Koul (b. 1956)¹ who write short stories in Kashmiri, Urdu and Hindi, respectively. I have selected these three women writers for study for the reason that I consider them as very important as they discuss a variety of issues but have hardly been translated. Therefore, I have undertaken the task of translating some of their short stories into English and have also endeavoured to place their work in the context of 'Indian Literatures.' It is hoped that a comparative study of these largely marginalized writers would mark the beginnings of understanding the various contexts in which Kashmiri women write (about) their lives.

One might ask why I chose to focus solely on women writers in Kashmir. Well, there is already a lot of research on Kashmiri male writers, whereas hardly any attention has been paid to female writers of Kashmir, who feel that by ignoring or deliberately disregarding their works, they are 'silenced.' These writers are, perhaps, neglected regardless of their significance. Absence of any critical work, on their writings, is a revealing sign of such neglect. They deserve to be brought to our attention, introduced, discussed and critically analyzed, so as to facilitate and foreground the articulation of their 'voices.' In other words, we can say, this research foregrounds 'absence' and negligence as primary to research enquiry, so as, to make new research possible!

¹ Detailed bio-notes are given in chapter 3.

A telling example would be the 13 volumes of *Katha Prize Stories* (1991-2004).²

Reviewing the eight volume in 1998, *Sunday Times* noted:

The process of selection of these stories is a year-long grind, involving myriad of imaginative minds. No wonder, it showcases the best that Indian literature has to offer in 1997. Barring a *few patches* like Kashmir, North East other than Assam, the whole Indian society finds expression in these stories. If the editor's note be our guide, with the projects in hand, these parts will soon be mirrored in the future volumes.³

Despite such promising and voluminous futures, neither the 11th 2002 *Katha Prize Stories; Best of 1990s* volume, being a selection from fifteen languages in the ten previous volumes, nor the 13th 2004 volume have a Nominating Editor from Kashmiri. If such is the state of the Kashmiri short story; the status of women short story writers need not be further belaboured!

There is also a personal angle for choosing short stories as reading and analyzing short stories in Kashmiri, Urdu, Hindi and English has always been my interest. I have always been curious to know how women generally, and, particularly, how Kashmiri women represent themselves in short stories.⁴ Being a Kashmiri student outside Kashmir working on Kashmiri narratives, I was astonished to notice an absolute silence on this genre, within academic and quasi-academic circles. They barely appear in any Indian anthologies. The second volume of *Women Writing in*

² *Katha Prize Stories* (1991-2004), celebrated by *India Today* as the "Best of India Translated"; http://books.google.co.in/books/about/Katha_Prize_Stories_Best_of_The_90s.html?id=mck-aUIVK_UC&redir_esc=y; accessed on 30-11-2013.

³ See, http://www.katha.org/site/book-view?book_isbn=9788185586847&book_isbn_10=0; accessed on 29-11-2013; emphasis added.

⁴ Further, of the 37 short stories selected as representative in *Indian Short Stories (1900-2004)* anthology edited by E.V. Ramakrishnan (New Delhi; Sahitya Akademi, 2000), only one Kashmiri short story, "The Cock Flight" (Kokar Jung) by Amin Kamil, is included.

*India*⁵ provides short stories from different Indian languages: 11 from Marathi, 13 from Kannada, 11 from Telugu, 7 from Malayalam, 5 from Hindi, 3 from Tamil, 13 from Gujarati, 7 from Bengali, 7 from Odiya, 11 from Urdu, but not a single short story from Kashmir, despite the fact that Kashmiri women have been writing short stories in Urdu and Hindi as well. Hence, such ‘patchy’ attitude and approach is an indication of a larger problematic of regional and nationalistic contours of representation.

Coming back to the question of why my focus is only on short stories, and not novels, poetry or any other literary genre, my M.Phil. dissertation⁶ was on poetry written by women writers of Kashmir. Women in Kashmir, both Muslims and Hindus, have enriched Kashmiri literature in the genre of poetry, although most of it is part of oral tradition. While plays and theatre would probably be an altogether frontier, I have focused on prose narratives and, unfortunately, novels by women from Kashmir are few. But, there are quite a few women writers who have written short fiction worthy of being assessed in terms of their contribution to Kashmiri literature. The questions that interest me are: why do they choose the short story form, and what kind of stories do they write? Are these stories different from those written by male writers? If indeed they are different, how do they differ? It is sad, that not only outside Kashmir, but, Kashmiris themselves are oblivious to the fact that Kashmiri women have written stories. This really astonished me. One needs to ask why there is such neglect of the creative writing by women. What are the

⁵ Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India*, Vol. II (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶ My M.Phil. dissertation titled “Women Poets of Kashmir: A Comparative Study,” focuses on the significant and considerable contribution of three women poets, Naseem shafai (Kashmiri), Tarannum Reyaz (Urdu) and Syeda Afshana (English) to Kashmiri literature.

reasons for this indifference or lack of knowledge?

One of the major issues that is deeply disturbing is the process and protocols of publication in Kashmir. Is women's writing not seen as worth publishing? If yes, then the questions to ask would be: who decides what can be published and publishable, translated and circulated? Who formulates the criteria of judgment? This thesis, in a way, hopes to focus on the significance of women writers from Kashmir.

Mehfooza Jan, Tarannum Reyaz, and Khema Kaul, in their own unique ways of writing and being, offer resistance to the dominant patriarchal values in Kashmiri society. These women writers raise complex issues with regard to notions of gender and interrogate processes of engendering that still pervade Kashmiri society, thus radically breaking away from the stereotypical construction of the 'homely' Kashmiri woman. Their writing engages with the different kinds of injustices that are prevalent in Kashmir, through the registers of family, sexuality, religion, region and politics. Their short stories also offer insights into the nature of individual experience, inscribing these women as writers undeterred by traditional restraints or established literary conventions. Hence, my primary objective was to study at least a selection of short stories of these writers by translating them, which in itself was a daunting task, considering the four languages involved, and to conduct a survey through interviews.⁷

⁷ I must acknowledge that collecting, collating, translating, reading and analyzing short stories written in Kashmiri, Urdu and Hindi have together comprised a challenging task and interviewing women/women writers from Jammu and Kashmir was all the more difficult.

Kashmir is a place, where people, irrespective of class, caste, religion, region and ethnicity, have been brutally killed and viciously tortured; women humiliated, widowed, raped, gang-raped, beaten, poked when pregnant, made refugees in their own land, children orphaned, men abducted, kidnapped, made to eat faeces, drink urine and children forced to watch their mothers being raped in public. As in any conflict ridden area in the world, women in Kashmir also face the maximum brunt of violence, being victims of sexual violence, detention, abduction, torture and exploitation, often accompanied with the sorrow over the disappearance and loss of loved ones. As Kavita Suri in one of her articles titled “Women and Conflict: An Overview” notes:

Conflict situations have a detrimental effect of trauma on women who are likely to have suffered psychologically in different ways than men as a result of personal loss, separation from family, rape or other physical abuse. Women become the soft targets for both state agents as well as the militants. They are harassed, raped by militants, security forces etc. (Suri 2)

This is not new to India – apart from Kashmir; states in the North-East are examples. People face countless problems because of the presence of security forces on one side and insurgents on the other. In these two regions, violence and brutality are so common that people accept that as part and parcel of their lives. Similar experiences of everyday violence continue to permeate the lives of women from subaltern communities like Tribals, Dalits, etc. Such various forms of structural violence have led to isolation, alienation, unwanted pregnancies and prolonged emotional trauma.⁸

⁸ See, Urvashi Bhutalia, ed., *Voices Unheard: Women, Conflict and Kashmir* (Gurgaon: Shubhi Publications, 2011); 1-4.

Thus it becomes important to look at the recent years of conflict in Kashmir to understand how this continuous violence has impacted women's lives, and, ask why this suffering has barely been, until recently, acknowledged. Though there are some representations of the trauma afflicting Kashmir in certain media and internet spaces, by and large, not much systematic documentation has taken place. Moreover, what was important for me was not 'objective' data, since women may hesitate to open up to an outsider, but the personal note, that would reverberate with, as well as, critique my own perceptions. Hence, interviews with various women and women writers from different regions in Kashmir were used to augment my arguments. And I have interviewed women writers and women who generally write, and are not necessarily published.⁹ It gave me insights into the experiences referred to in the short stories, by the women, thus enriching my analysis of the short stories. Interviews were also a mode of enquiry into the structures that determine the contours of writing for these women.

These women include 'half-widows' (women whose husbands are assumed dead), widows, mothers who lost their children, daughters who were raped, young women who have been pushed out of employment, by the fear and uncertainty created by conflict and those countless women who are suffering from medical and psychological conditions related to stress and trauma. These women feel, whether Kashmiri Muslim or Kashmiri Pandit, that they are imprisoned in their own state. Hameeda Bano (Kupwara, Kashmir), Neha Kaul (Rajouri, Jammu) and Supreet Singh (Baramulla, Kashmir) and many others feel that the politicians, while carefully setting themselves aside, have put Kashmiris in a boat and cast them off, if

⁹ See, Appendix II, for more details.

not set them adrift. It is again and again echoed: the politicians are to be blamed for the trauma of the people. For instance, an article titled “Kashmir Imprisoned: A Report”¹⁰ by the Committee for Initiative on Kashmir, observes: “There is no one we can tell our troubles to. No one to share our grief! If we go into the streets or to a neighbour’s house, the army is everywhere with guns pointed at us and fingers on the trigger. We are prisoners in Kashmir.”¹¹

One must admit that it was extremely difficult to conduct such interviews for various reasons. These interviews serve as a research instrument as they provide both grassroots and academic information about the individual as well as region/religion/class/caste conditions. Ram Ahuja, in his book titled *Research Methods* defines interviews as “verbal questioning.” He adds that as a research tool or a method of data collection, interview is different from general interviewing with regard to its preparation, construction and execution. He quotes Bingham and Moore (1994) “who have described the interview as a conversation with a purpose” (Ahuja 221). Moreover, interviews help us to understand the writers better: the difficulties they faced while writing, while publishing and while getting their works translated.

Some of these interviews are with women from remote places where most of them have difficulty in reading and writing. For women writers who generally write but don’t publish, a set of questions was prepared to be responded to. I have used Unstructured Interviews for interviewing women who don’t write and who write

¹⁰ “Kashmir Imprisoned: A Report” was published on January 1, 1990 by ASIA WATCH and PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, New York.

¹¹ The article consists of extracts from an investigative report brought out by the first women’s team to visit Kashmir and the report has been published in June, 1990. This article appears in a book titled *Speaking Peace: Women’s Voices from Kashmir* edited by Urvashi Butalia.

diaries, etc. (mostly illiterate and who belong to remote places) in Kashmir, the reason being that it involves a very casual conversation and therefore, they have the freedom to speak freely. These kinds of interviews are not time-bound, so the conversations with my interviewees went on and on, without any temporal constraints. For women writers like Mehfooza Jan, Tarannum Reyaz and Khema Kaul and other writers, I have used Structured as well as Unstructured Interviews since this gave scope for formal as well as friendly conversation which exposed many unfamiliar issues. After interviewing and reading/analyzing their works, it becomes easier to understand and compare what and how they speak in person and what/how they express through their works. I realized they were more open and frank while discussing/conversing than in their works which do not wholly reflect the problems and issues that they have been facing, whether it is because of militancy or security forces or the region/religion/class/caste they belong to. Of course, many writers have tried their best to express their feelings even after being threatened, but there still needs to be much more openness and sincerity.

It is also important to know what women in Kashmir generally feel about their day-to-day life. Women in Kashmir do not hesitate to share their experiences, but hesitate to reveal their identity. One of them when asked about her name said that *“Asi dimow tunhden sarinai sawaalan hund jawaab magar asi saeth karyu waada zi tuhi diyu na sun naav kuni ti jayi”* (We are ready to answer all your questions and share our experiences but promise us that you won’t disclose our identity). They probably are under the fear that they might be targeted if they discuss issues openly. This is perhaps one of the major reasons why most women in Kashmir publish select works or don’t publish at all, and some like Tarannum Reyaz use pseudonyms. One

can clearly see the fear and uneasiness in their faces. But it gave me immense satisfaction that I could get a lot of information from them even though it took time to reassure them that I will safeguard their identities and ensure anonymity, as I have indeed done.

Translation is another tool of research used in this thesis.¹² Various questions that would bother the researcher doing this sort of work are: Whose/what kind of writing gets translated? Who is the translator? Is there any politics involved in the translation process? What kind of translation is being done? Such questions have already been raised by different critics, Jasbir Jain being one such example. While commenting on Sujit Mukherjee's charge against Gayatri Spivak's use of language while translating,¹³ Jasbir Jain notes that Spivak's observations draw our attention to questions like, 'who' is translating 'what' and 'why.' "What is it that pushes the translator to select a certain text – a political event, ideology, saleability, or/and aesthetic value" (Rahman and Ansari 33). I must admit that I haven't translated much, but I was compelled to translate after looking at the way translation has been done in Kashmir (especially while translating texts written by these contemporary women writers) and the politics involved during the process of translation. I have realized that the translation, done by most of the male writers in Kashmir, depends on several factors like the kind of issues the writer explores, the class she belongs to, the kind of background she comes from, and a list of few more. Hence, the earlier translations of women's writing in Kashmir have definitely helped me to engage

¹² See, for instance, Lawrence Venuti, ed., *Translation Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) for very interesting and paradigm shifting debates in Translation Studies.

¹³ Sujit Mukherjee questions Gayatri Spivak for using a language which "is not accessible to the average Indian reader;" see, "Translation as Dialogue" by Jasbir Jain in *Translation/Representation* by Anisur Rahman and Ameena Kazi Ansari (Delhi: Nice Printing Press, 2007) 33.

with these writers and also inspired me to translate. I have also found that the texts that remain ‘untranslated’ are the ones that reveal the true picture of Kashmiri society and its people, religion and its misinterpretation, the region and its bifurcations, gender related issues, patriarchy, lesbianism, and the like. I think that there is an unsaid censorship imposed on women’s writings in Kashmir. The writing by women writers in Kashmir, irrespective of their class, caste, religion, and the region needs to be translated without being categorized. I also believe that some women translators could perhaps balance this inequality so that women’s voices can be heard by the outside world. There is a whole chunk of undiscovered literature by women which needs to be upheld/shared to readers outside the Valley.

The purpose of this thesis therefore is to make available, to wider readership, a sampling of women’s writing from Kashmir. Translation has always been very important for researchers in Comparative Literature as it allows us to bring in literatures written in different languages, cross the borders, understand each other in a better way, overcome different kinds of prejudices related to region, religion, language, etc., thus forming a better nation rather than just imagining one. Without translation, as C. Subba Rao points out, the world would be “poorer” (Rao 13-14). Translation has also been defined as a form of representation.¹⁴

Moreover, in a multilingual country like India, translation from different Indian languages into English would help in awareness and much more. In an article titled “The making of Indo-English literature,” Sujit Mukherjee points that

the desirable state is one in which an adequate body of material translated

¹⁴ See, preface to *Translation/Representation* edited by Anisur Rahman and Ameena Kazi Ansari.

into English from the different Indian languages is available, so that not only is greater awareness created of the literary achievements of each language, but also a meaningful and sustained critical exchange is made possible among the languages – both processes leading, hopefully, to the betterment of our creative as well as critical activities. (Mukherjee 18)

As Sujit Mukherjee argues in his article titled “An Essay in Definition” that while ancient and medieval literature may be left to scholars and research institutions, there is no reason why more and more of Indian Writing should not become available in English (Mukherjee 11). Translation has been defined as a process which brings together people from different linguistic backgrounds and put forth their issues and concerns to a wider audience. Regional literatures in India, which are “much too alien for western readership” (Rahman and Ansari 27), if translated into English would be the most appropriate medium for bridging the gap.

Towards this aim, my attempt has been to translate select short stories by women in Kashmir from Kashmiri, Urdu and Hindi into English. I have selected 12 short stories for study to include issues as diverse as possible. My translations of the selected short stories have been read by people who are proficient in both the source language and the target language. Short stories translated from Kashmiri and Hindi were read by Prof. Ratan Lal Hangloo¹⁵ and Sharika Kaul Hangloo,¹⁶ and the ones translated from Urdu have been read by Prof. Beig Ehsaas.¹⁷ Translating these short stories from the three languages has been a challenging but learning experience. I

¹⁵ Prof. Ratan Lal Hangloo (Dept. of History, University of Hyderabad), the current Vice-Chancellor, Kalyani University, West Bengal, is proficient in Hindi, Urdu, Kashmir and English, Prof. Hangloo has been extremely patient and helpful while reading and re-reading my translations.

¹⁶ Her mother tongue is Kashmiri and she is proficient in both Hindi and Kashmiri.

¹⁷ Prof. Beig Ehsaas (Dept. of Urdu, University of Hyderabad) was a member of my Doctoral Committee.

learnt much while translating and at the same time felt disappointed at times because of various reasons. While attempts have been made to be as faithful as possible to the source text, it has been extremely difficult to translate certain words and phrases from these three languages into English. Wherever necessary, a footnote has been provided not just because it is difficult to convey all the nuances of the women's narratives through translation but also to explain obscure cultural nuances.¹⁸ I feel that by translating the short stories into English, these writers will be 'discovered,' perhaps even re-discovered.

I also thought that I need to frame my translations of these three Kashmiri women writers. Towards that end, the first chapter, "Short Story from Kashmir: An Overview," discusses the short story as a genre, its development in India, the history of the short story genre in Kashmir and the contribution of women writers to this genre. Apart from commenting on some of the features of this specific genre, I also discuss whether short story in India was influenced by English or other literatures and why it is only the novel and not the short story that has mostly been associated with nation-building in India.

The chapter argues that not only has the short story played a very important role in nation-building, but that it has also been one of the mediums that helped us imagine a nation. The chapter also discusses short story in Kashmir, its history, and raises questions like: what could be called a 'Kashmiri' short story. Should it be written in Kashmiri, Urdu or Hindi? This leads to further questions about readership and what could be called as "Kashmiri Literature?" Should it be written by writers in Kashmir

¹⁸ Also, a glossary of terms is given at the end of the thesis.

Valley or Kashmiri Pandit writers (who have migrated to Jammu)? It also looks at how most of the writers in Kashmir, who started writing in Urdu, switched to Kashmiri with the passage of time. Also, what kinds of issues were discussed in the short stories. It also attempts to locate the short story as a literary genre, within Kashmiri tradition, as short stories in Kashmir have been written in Kashmiri, Urdu and Hindi. The chapter also discusses women's contribution to the short story genre and the issues they have dealt with in order to trace the absence of women writers and re-view the histories of Kashmiri Literature.

The second chapter titled "Women's Writing in Kashmir: Issues and Concerns" attempts to trace the structural and material conditions of women writing in Kashmir. This involves various questions: When did women in Kashmir start writing and in what circumstances? What do they write about? Why do they write, who do they write for and why are their works hardly published or translated? The chapter documents the interviews taken not only with women writers who have managed to publish their works, but also women who generally write.

The first part of the chapter charts out the contribution of women writers to the literature of Kashmir, starting from Hanifa Begum, Taj Begum Renzu, Shamla Mufti, (the first women writers in Kashmiri prose who started writing in the 1950s) Atiqa Bano, Hajra Parvez, Sunita Raina, Fiza Khatoon, Aisha Mastoor, Abida Ahmed, Feroza Shauq, Zeba Zeenat, Rafiq Bashir, Muneera Fatima, Rukhshanda Rashid, Razia Shabnam, Shamima Tabassum, Darakshan Andrabi, Saba Shaheen, Shagufta Nasreen, Sadaf Ghazala, Naseem Shafai, Bimla Raina, Sunita Raina and Syeda Afshana, among others. The chapter also engages with the issue of

publication, as it is not very easy for women in Kashmir to publish their works. It raises questions like whose works get published, what are the kinds of works that are being published and why do certain texts remain unpublished; in short, the politics of publication, as it were. A part of the chapter tries to identify the different reasons that urged women in Kashmir to write and the different means they discovered to write their experiences. It also gives a detailed analysis of the issues that were discussed during the process of interviewing. It becomes very interesting to see how they look at the issues related to patriarchy, marriage, purdah, rape, womanhood, discrimination and gender roles, among others. And the last part of the chapter documents the workshops that have been organized in Jammu, Srinagar and Delhi. These workshops have served as a platform where women writers from Kashmir Valley and Jammu come together and discuss their writings and try to understand each other's problems.

The third chapter titled "Translation of Twelve Short Stories by Three Kashmiri Women Writers" is divided into three sections and introduces the three writers and provides my translation of some of their selected short stories.

The fourth chapter titled "A Comparative Study of the Twelve Short Stories" engages with how far these women writers have succeeded in presenting the complex realities of Kashmiri women, familial and otherwise. While presenting critical and comparative analyses of the translated stories in the light of their themes as well as the nuances with which these women writers respond to time and circumstances, it also explores the way these three writers come to terms with the issues of region, religion, patriarchy and gender.

The Conclusion sums up the main arguments of the thesis and briefly discusses the workshops that have been conducted in Kashmir, Delhi and Jammu. A Glossary, describing a set of words in Kashmiri, Urdu and Hindi is provided to help one understand the unfamiliar terms. While Appendix I provides the transcript of my interviews with Mehfooza Jan, Tarannum Reyaz, and Khema Kaul; the Appendix II gives details of interviews taken with women who generally write and also with other women in different regions of Jammu and Kashmir Valley.

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Chapter One

SHORT STORY IN KASHMIR: AN OVERVIEW

Short story as a literary genre is often spoken about as an inferior one, in hierarchical reference to other genres. Valerie Shaw in her book titled *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* writes that Katherine Mansfield, a famous short story writer, was once asked what she was doing in her life. Here is the conversation between the two people:

‘I am a writer.’

‘Do you write dramas?’

‘No.’ (It sounded as if she were sorry she did not.)

‘Do you write tragedies, novels, romance?’ (I persisted because she looked as if she could write these.)

‘No, she said, and with a deeper distress; ‘only short stories; just short stories.’

(Later on she told me she felt so wretched at that moment she would have given anything if she could have answered at least one ‘yes’ to the ‘big’ things. (Valerie 2)

It is clear from the above excerpt that Katherine Mansfield is apologetic about writing only short stories. On the other hand, another famous short story writer Edgar Allan Poe believed that short story is superior to the novel. The objective of the inquiry into the literary genre of short story is not to fix its position hierarchically. Rather, it becomes important to define short story as a genre to distinguish it from other literary genres like poetry, drama and novel, for enabling a better textual reading.

Short Story Genre:

Though short story as a genre is generally understood as self explanatory, it is still a difficult but pertinent task to delineate its categorical definition. In fact, Valerie Shaw maintains that “a firm definition of short story is impossible” (Valerie 21). Not only Shaw but many other writers are of the same opinion. Some critics call the short story a literary genre that grew organically out of the innate human need to tell stories about themselves, lending the force of nature to their argument. Mellisa Bostrum in her article titled “Story into Short Story: Cultural Roots and Cultural Work” writes that Horacio Quiroga¹⁹ claims that “as long as the human language is our preferred vehicle of expression, man will always make stories because the short story is the one natural, normal and irreplaceable form of story-telling.” Amiri Baraka in an article titled “Short Story and Poetry” argues that a short story should be seen as a sacred form, since it is the most common mode through which we imagine our lives and everybody else’s. A few scholars of the short story form argue that it is a piece of art that tries to convey a specified impression of the world in a single narrative effect, with economy of means and emphasis. Claire Hanson in her essay “In Re-reading the Short Story” argues that “the short story is a more literary form than the novel and that short stories are framed as an aesthetic device which gives a sense of completeness but also allows gaps and absences to remain in the story; thus we accept a degree of mystery or elision in the short story which we would not accept in the novel.” Some critics explain that in a short story every motif is directly related to the character/event and the central conflict and that major characters control the action, events and decisions while minor or supporting characters respond to or receive the effects of those actions. Some define the short story as a vehicle which perhaps through its brevity, presents a composite and

¹⁹ An Uruguayan short story writer who was considered a master of the genre.

intimate nature of writing that can be absorbed in one sitting. The short story tells of various incidents from one's life. Ramesh K. Srivastava, in his preface to the book *Under the Lamp* defines the short story as "an artistic portrayal of ever-unfolding mysteries of human existence." He adds:

It is a tiny mirror that intensely reflects a focused fragment of the vast moving kaleidoscope of life that each day, each moment passes by us in its new yet recognizable ever-changing patterns and combinations. It is like a colour picture shot in a dark night with a flashgun in which things come vibrating to life for an instant and then sink back into obscurity. The powerful incidents happening around the writer move him intensely and fill him with overpowering feelings which find a vent through his short stories.

(Srivastava v)

He also believes that a good short story highlights a serious issue in life. As all the views show, it is difficult to define a short story. The fact is that there are so many different kinds of short stories that no single definition would suffice to cover all the factors that go into its definition. So it is best to define a short story in the most inclusive terms.

Some of the questions that are worth thinking about when we think about short story as a form and that which will be addressed in the course of the research are: What is a short story and what is it that matters in a short story? Is it the writer's preoccupation with the form? Or does the greatness of a story depend on the extent to which it has depicted the range of human experiences? Does the short story impact because of the writer's style and technique? Or does a short story have literary merit because of theme and message? Or is it because a certain kind of story

is in fashion? Does a story matter because of its power to move us? A short story defies exact definition. However, most writers believe that a successful short story must arouse and hold the reader's attention and must convey a sense of completeness in a style that suits the content. All these elements together contribute to the final and special effect that the story would have.

Short Story: Form and Theme:

A short story has been defined as a piece of prose fiction complete in itself and that it has an unlimited range of possible themes just like any other literary genre. Charles E. May argues that short stories are “essential yet seldom read”²⁰ because they typically engage with the inexplicable, reminding us of those aspects of reality which escape our standard modes of cognition and classification. (May 24) A short story may present a particular scene or a series of connected incidents; a moral issue; an aspect of life; a phase of character or an interesting experience. Thus a short story can be about anything. Some writers believe that a short story focuses on a decisive moment of life. Edgar Allan Poe one of the earliest American short storywriter defined it as “an attempt to achieve a single, focused effect.” In one of his essays titled “The Philosophy of Composition,” he explains that a short story should be read in one sitting that may be anywhere from half an hour to one hour. In response to this, many scholars and critics who raise counter questions like what is a sitting and how short or long can it necessarily be. Poe argues that a short story ought to combine objective matter-of-fact description with poetic atmosphere. It ought to present a unified impression of tone, colour and effect. Walter Allen almost

²⁰ Charles A. May, “Why Short Stories Are Essential and Why They Are So Seldom Read,” in *In the Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*, Pet Winther, Jakob Lothe and Hans H. Skei, eds. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004) 14-25.

completely negates Poe's argument by saying that if there be the criteria as "most of them can hardly be called short stories in the modern sense and fewer would satisfy Poe's requirements"(Allen 12).

P.A. Abraham,²¹ while discussing Bharati Mukherjee's work, defines the short story as the perfect form to win swift recognition of excellence and appreciation. He adds that the art of the short story demands a conscious awareness of the form. He also maintains that a short story is impressionistic and instead of depending on structure or plot, it leads the reader to the swiftly perceived design. He cites H.E. Bates, who called the short story the "freest of all artists in words" whether short or long, poetical or reported, plotted or sketched, concrete or cobweb. It must have an insistent and eternal fluidity that slips through the hands. Scholars offer different definitions and interpretations of the short story. One can emphasize that a short story is not just a piece of writing that is short, has limited characters or talks about a single incident, but it actually demands a high degree of compression and concentration. P.A Abraham argues that like poetry a short story maintains a sustained effect. With this framework in place, one can now begin the discussion of the short story in India before plunging into the short story in Kashmir.

Short Story in India:

While discussing the development of the "short story" in India, a persistent concern has been its genealogy: whether it is our own or whether it is borrowed from the West. There are varied observations on the subject. While some scholars maintain

²¹ P.A Abraham teaches English at Sana's University, Yemen. He has published several articles and book reviews in leading journals and newspapers. He has also published *Sherwood Anderson and the American Short Story*.

that drama and poetry have indigenous origins, prose writing and especially the novel and the short story are Western products that came to India through colonial interaction. As argued by many critics, the novel is undoubtedly a Western form but they believe that the short story existed in some form or the other in the oral tradition as illustrated in the *Panchatantra*, *Kathasaritsagara*, *Totanama*, *Aithihyamala*, *Jataka Tales*, etc. Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan²² in an article “The Malayalam Short Story-Evolution, Influences, Original Perspectives” argues that there was a break in the short story tradition especially in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries under the British colonial rule. It is generally accepted that short fiction as ‘tales’ of various kinds is to be found in huge corpus in India, ‘short story’ as such is a western construct. Hence, the present short story in India cannot be traced back to the pre-colonial tradition of the short story.

When the short story in India emerged as a literary form in the later years of the nineteenth century and developed rapidly in strength and style, it is assumed to have been fashioned on the Western, especially the English short story model. However, while assessing the influence of the English tradition on the Indian short story, it would be useful to have a break-up of *form* and *content*- form comprising *structure* and *language* and content consisting of *themes* and *concepts*. It may then be clear that while there has been English influence on the structure, but in terms of content, the short story has always been culture and content specific. Even in the matter of concepts, categories like Romanticism, Surrealism, Existentialism, Expressionism, and Feminism find expression in different ways in the Indian tradition, althoughs not

²² Vasanthi Narayanan is a film scholar based in Chennai and has a Ph.D. on Malayalam Cinema. She has also translated from Malayalam into English and has done projects for leading publishers in India.

termed as such (Sankaranarayanan 19-20). S. Vishwanathan in an article on “The Indian Short Story: Towards a Location Chart” argues that one need not deny the active factors of native influence on the short story in India. Among these, he adds, is the tradition of orality, the important native techniques of storytelling, the orientation as well as the symbolist dimensions of the Indian narrative tradition.

It is believed that the Indian short story has gone through several mutations with time. Writers like Tagore, Premchand, Manto, Chughtai, Basheer, Thakazi, Masti, Mauni, Dhumketu, Chalam, Gadgil and so on have each contributed significantly in redefining the genre in the Indian context. According to E.V. Ramakrishnan, the history of the short story in modern languages is closely related to the political awakening in the Indian society and its democratic aspirations. He adds that no other form reflects the polyphony and plurality of Indian cultural life as the short story does. The short story, he argues, “came to India in the last decades of last century in a different socio-political context” (Ramakrishnan x). While the Indian short story absorbed the modes and models of the Western short story, it struck a path of its own in response to the dynamics of the social change sweeping the Indian society. Ramakrishnan says,

The ‘lonely voice’ that is embedded in the very structure of the short story makes it an ideal medium for recovering the voice of the marginalized, the oppressed and the dispossessed. The colonial experience was one of the displacement and disruption for the majority of the Indian masses. Those who employed the medium of the short story with great felicity such as Tagore, Premchand, Basheer and Thakazhi used it to assert the rights of the disinherited and disfranchised. (Ramakrishnan xv)

He argues that the Indian short story during the first half of the 20th century communicates the collective voice of the community which is working its way into history. The social dimension of individual's identity is emphasized in most of these stories. These were the formative years of the Indian short story as they coincided with the most turbulent decades in Indian history. Therefore the short stories written in Indian languages during this period capture "the tenure and temper of a nation in ferment" (Ramakrishnan xvi). Many other scholars share his views. Tutun Mukherjee discussing Mahasweta Devi's short stories translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, argues that the short story in the modern form developed in India during the turbulent times of the freedom struggle and marked a crucial moment in the history of Indian letters. It was nurtured by the events of national insurgence and has since then remained a mode of expressing the suppressed/repressed (95).

While the Western short story captures the essential solitariness of modern man, the short story in India in the early nineteenth century emphasizes the search for social identity. This, according to E.V. Ramakrishnan, has to be seen in the context of India's emergent nationhood, as short stories of this time were a way to "record the journey of the country to nationhood" (Ramakrishnan xvii). It is clear that historical events impacted the Indian short story which described the society being torn apart by tragic divisions of caste, gender and class. Short stories deal with issues like gender discrimination, hypocrisy, violence, man-woman relationship, the conflict between rural and urban life and most importantly, the reconstruction of India and the assertion of a national identity. According to E.V Ramakrishnan, the short story was one of the media that helped us imagine the nation (Ramakrishnan xxv).

But the question that many critics raise is whether the form was given the due importance it deserved? They strongly believe that the short story as a genre has not received the distinction it deserves. Tutun Mukherjee argues that the critical negligence or complacency that the short story has been subjected to may be due to two factors. First, an elitist bias encouraged by the banal way the short story has generally reached the reader, i.e via pedestrian magazines, anthologies and miscellanies; and secondly, the presupposition that the various types of fiction operated with principles very much the same and the short story could be subsumed generally under fiction (94). It may be useful to juxtapose the two narrative modes of the short story and the novel to understand the critical arguments.

The Short Story and the Novel in India:

The short story and the novel are mostly written in prose; both are fictional and make use of various narrative and descriptive techniques. Both usually have plot, characters, and offer different points of view. As discussed above, the suggestion is that a short story as a genre, has not and does not receive the distinction it deserves. The reason for this negligence may be because the form is regarded in relation with the novel under the broad category of “narrative.” However, as a researcher focusing on the short story as a genre, I think there is a need to mark the difference between the two modes. According to Tutun Mukherjee, it is important to mark the short story as qualitatively different from the novel. It should not be dismissed as a story told short nor condemned with the praise of its logical and coherent unity. She adds:

The brevity of the short story entails a compact intensity of language and style, a concentration of mood and events incorporating the inchoate, an

element of suggestiveness and surprise. The short story has very often served as a vehicle for different kinds of knowledge which may be odd with the stories of the dominant cultures. The short story is the awareness of the complex interweave of independent stories peripheral or palimpsest to the ruling, organizing epistemological narrative. (Mukherjee 95)

In India, the novel has mostly been associated with nation-building but not the short story. But the fact is that the short story has also played a very important role in nation-building. Brennan argues that the novel's role in nation-building was in its accommodation of the enormous cultural heterogeneity of social formations within its specific narrative form (Brennan 49). To say that the short story as a mode of expression succeeded in effecting a rupture in the process of narrativising a nation would be a sweeping generalization, according to Mukherjee. She adds that it is appropriate to review the short story written in the "vernaculars"/ regional languages, rather than in English, as the 'embattled space of struggle' against the prescriptive and proscribing literary and cultural codes. Therefore, as argued by many scholars and critics short story has played a very important role in nation-building and has been one of the mediums that helped us imagine the nation.

Short Story in Kashmir:

We have so far discussed the short story as a genre and form, its emergence and development in India, and the important role it has played in nation-building. We shall now focus on the short story in Kashmir. As every region in India has its own unique literary history and cultural traditions, it is necessary to understand the form that can be called a Kashmiri short story. Is it a story written in Kashmiri or Urdu or English or Hindi by Kashmiri writers? Should it be written by Kashmiri Muslim

writers only or should the writings of Kashmiri Pandit writers be considered as Kashmiri literature? Do they consider themselves as Kashmiris and their literature as Kashmiri literature? Given these questions, we must first grapple with the problem of identifying what can be called a 'Kashmiri' short story.

It also becomes significant to know which language has been most used for short stories. Is it Kashmiri or Urdu or English or Hindi since this becomes to gauge the readership? The statistical would be more important. How many Kashmiris can read English, how many can read Urdu, how many can read Hindi and how many can read Kashmiri? How many people read short stories and which language is preferable for them?

For the purposes of this thesis, a key issue is how many women writers have written short stories in Kashmir? When did women actually start writing short stories? What do their short stories talk about? It is obvious that women in Kashmir have contributed a lot to the literature of the Valley in the form of poetry, though we have received most of it in the form of oral literature. It would be interesting to know whether they have contributed in the same to short story as a form or to what is also referred as grand ma's tales. And if we have grandmother's tales, has there been a written record of these or not? Have they been included in any anthology? If not, why? Another important but very critical question to be asked is that how many Muslim women and how many Hindu in Kashmir women have written short stories? Is religion playing a role here or not? If not, then why do we have less number of Muslim women writers in comparison to Hindu women writers? And, if yes, then how do Muslim women respond to the restrictions, or put it differently, how open

are they in expressing their feelings.

Also how many women writers have published their works? Does class in the society play a role in getting one's works published? How do women get recognition as writers? In order to get answers for all these questions it becomes significant to know the history of short story in Kashmir.

History of Short Story in Kashmir:

Kashmiri is believed to be one of the oldest languages in India with a long history of literature and as anthologies tell us, Kashmir has always been rich in folklore (lok katha). Folklore comprises stories of various kinds of popular tales like in other regions of India. These stories have been received through oral tradition and have been handed down the generations in the same way as poetry like *vaakh*, *shrukh*, *vatsun* and *masnavi*. The stories have been kept alive by professional story tellers called *Kathagary* through recitation. There are fairy tales like *Wazirmaal* and *Laalmaal* and romantic tales like *Shah Sayaar*. Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara* or the "Ocean of Stories" is considered as remarkable collection of stories produced about 900 years ago in Kashmir.

Narratives and tales are believed to date back to the oral story-telling traditions and Kashmir has a very rich tradition of oral story-telling. Oral story telling is a personal and an intimate form that uses metaphors, images and sounds. There is a very close connection between a story-teller and the listener. Oral story-telling helped people both the story-tellers as well as the listeners share their experiences in narrative form in ancient past. It was helpful as a means of entertainment, education, preservation of culture and to instill moral values. In ancient times, when ancestors didn't

understand the reasons behind natural phenomena, they were explained through myths and fables told orally. Even after the written word was created, oral storytelling remained important either because most people still couldn't read, or because it was the faster and more convenient way of informing others. Aline G Chan in an article titled "The Art of the Story-teller" argues that the art of storytelling evolved naturally because some people preferred telling tales and others preferred listening to them.

Some of the Kashmiri stories (mostly adaptations) which were told orally and still survive in different versions are *Saam Naame* or (The Adventures of Legendary Wrestler Saam); love stories of *Himaal Nagrai*, *Shireen Farhad*, *Laila Majnoon*, *Gul Bakaoli*; the treasure hunt of *Ali Baba and Chaalis Chor*, the good deeds of Sindbad and tales of *Alladin and his Magic Lamp*. *Himaal Nagrai*, a local fairy tale of love between the Prince of Cobras (*Nag*) who lived seven earths below, and the stunningly beautiful human girl Himaal. The story tells how Nagrai would often leave his kingdom to visit mother Earth. It was during one such visit that he meets Himaal and is captivated by her beauty and clarity of mind and soul. Nagrai falls in love and does not mind rejecting the maidens of his kingdom. But there is a condition attached to the Nagrai-Himaal union. The Prince could remain on earth as long as he does not drown in a tub of milk. The snubbed maidens hatch a conspiracy to ensure his return to his kingdom. They befriend the innocent Himaal and make her prepare a tub of milk. Nagrai drowns and therefore vanishes. Another such tale is "*Khul ja sim sim, band ja sim sim*" opened and closed treasures for Ali Baba and Chalis Chor and that of Sindbad who could humble demons with his intelligence and prowess. *Gagar Lache* or tales of rats were told to children who would thrust their

hands inside the *phiran* and one of them would get a pebble in his/her eager hands. The others then would have to guess who hides the first precious pebble. The game shows the participant's control over emotions as curious eyes would look for the hint as expressions change. A smile by the lucky one carrying the booty would often let him/her down. There were many tales of this kind, most of which are unfortunately lost as they are not recorded or documented. Similar is the case with the grand ma's tales. Unfortunately there is no written record of these. Women also used to and still sing ritual songs at marriages and other family events. These songs preserve the culture of Kashmir and the women are the bearers of the rich tradition, story-telling and songs; sadly none of the so-called histories of Kashmiri literature discuss these representative forms.

The point that I am trying to make here is that women have been playing an important role in preserving the cultural traditions of Kashmir, but there has hardly been any mention of this anywhere. The same has been the case with their writings. Women have written short stories but they have hardly been included in anthologies or even discussed in the histories of Kashmiri literature. It therefore becomes extremely important to trace the absence of women writers, re-view the histories of Kashmiri Literature. The information that histories of Kashmiri literature tell us about short story in Kashmir and the contribution of the writers towards this genre is given below.

According to Neerja Mattoo, the birth of the short story in Kashmir coincided with the end of monarchy in Kashmir and with the culmination of struggle for freedom which started in 1931 with the establishment of a people's government in 1947. It is

believed that the first short stories, *Javabi Card* (Reply Card) by D.N. Nadim and *Yeli Phol Gaash* (When it was dawn) were read out at a meeting of the Cultural Congress that had become a platform for the Kashmiri intellectuals and writers with a progressive and leftist orientation. National Conference, which had led the people to freedom, had accepted the programme of *Naya Kashmir*. These writers were inspired by other writers like Premchand, Sajjad Zahir, Yashpal, Krishan Chander, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Dinakar, Joshi and Mahmud Hashmi. Azad (1903-48), the renowned Kashmiri poet, was influenced by M.N Roy's 'radical humanism' and P.N. Pardesi (d. 1955) a short story writer, who was associated with the New Kashmir movement.

Initially, the writing was in Urdu but with the passage of time, the spirit of nationalism and the desire to reach out to more people motivated writers to switch over to Kashmiri. Among the stories of this time, most of which appeared in the *Kongposh*, are Nadim Ray's (The Blight) and *Shino Pyato Pyato* (Welcome Snow), A.D. Majbur's *Kwalan* (Desalting of a Stream), Nur Muhammad Roshan's *Nehgata* (Night Darkness) are worth mentioning. The stories of resistance underscore the need to: overthrow the old social system, remain vigilant against the vested interests of the new exploitative class of leaders and bureaucrats. They draw attention to the plight of the peasants and landless labourers hit by droughts and floods. As the ideological upsurge diminished, some of the writers either stopped writing or felt betrayed by the lack of a cultured atmosphere. The literary milieu seemed surcharged with sentimental attachment to socialist clichés and jargon. Some others, who hold Marxism relevant till today, settled down to a more realistic view of human situation and continued to write, as for example, Somnath Zutshi.

The Progressive Movement introduced writers like Chekhov, Gorky, Ostravsky, Gogol, and so on. Realism became their torchlight. The first-ever collection of short stories titled *Sat Sangar* (The Seven hill tops) by Akhtar Mohi-ud-din (b. 1928) was published in 1955 which got him the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1958. This book highlighted the middle class contradictions and also the pulsating life of the disabled backward classes. For instance, *Daryayi hund yezara* (Silken Trousers) recapitulates a moment's love of an old Needleman and his wife; *Dandavazum* (Bickerings) describes a quarreling sweeper-couple. Akhtar Mohi-ud-din has to his credit six collections of short stories which were published posthumously. They reveal a mind constantly grappling with the violent transformations in Kashmiri society. Akhtar Mohi-ud-din had lost his son and his son-in-law in the violence of the 1990s.²³ There are two collections of short stories which appeared just after his death in 2001. One of them, "Seven One Nine One Seven and other Stories" contains stories like *Jali hand dande phal* (The Broken Teeth of Jali), *Nav Byamaer* (The New Disease), *Aatankwaadi* (The Terrorist) which deal creatively with the everyday experience in the 1990s. Many of his short stories remained unpublished for a long time. These stories reveal the moral pressures faced by people living in a society in transition. Social taboos were exposed by writers like Akhtar Mohiuddin and the same was continued by his other contemporaries. For instance, Avtar Krishan Rahbar's short story *Tabruk* (The Sacred Gift, 1958) describes the social and communal tensions in Kasnmir then, Sufi Ghulam Muhammad's *Shisha ta Sangistan* (Mirrors and brickbat, 1962) depicts the condition of helpless people in

²³ The 1990s (the time when Kashmir Pandits were forced to leave Kashmir) represents a radical break in Kashmiri Literature. The idea of exile dominates the works of almost all Kashmiri writers. This is also the time when a new genre of protest literature emerged.

tyrannical circumstances. In addition to this, Ali Mohd. Lone's stories like *Yim Lukh* (These People), *Lawkchi Baji Katha* (Important and Unimportant Things), Umesh Kaul's *Dil* (The Heart) and *Du Vot* (Crossroads), Amin Kamil's *Kwakar Jung* (Cock Fight) present an interplay of intimate human emotions pitched against social hypocrisy. Through these short stories, writers tried to lay out a broad framework of social consciousness.

It is believed that after 1955, the short story genre in Kashmir reached a turning point when writers like Bansi Nirdosh, H.K. Bharati, Taj Begum, G.R. Santosh, Dipak Kaul started writing. These writers were better equipped as their study of Indian and European writers was wider and therefore had a more probing eye. They created an atmosphere of realism in understanding life and letters mostly because they were familiar with writers like Maupassant, Dickens, O. Henry, Hugo, Edgar Allan Poe and Hardy. Love for the native culture and search for a Kashmiri identity was their preoccupation. They wove local customs, creed and colour into the fabric of the story. They did not comment on political theories or their application unlike their predecessors however they brought to light a new political culture of corruption and nepotism.

Nirdosh's stories like *Tular* (Bee), *Shrukh* (The Complex), *Barath* (Destiny) and *Jafar Khan* are bereft of prejudices but suffer unpredictable ends. *Adam chhu yithay badnaam* (Man is No Sinner) gives an incredible presentation of a real life situation and *Khotsun* (Fear) conveys the idea of helplessness of man. In *Kansi mo ravin shure pan* (Songs of Innocence), the frailty of human character carries the situation to an unexpected end. Henceforth characters instead of ideas started dominating the

story. Most of these characters were typecast and reflected the times they belonged to, and carried with them the writer's ideology. In most stories, characters were agents who brought into place new situations in the narrative. Rahbar created characters like Mahady Nyuk, Satar Kyus, Noora and Aftab living a moral conflict amidst a conservative social setup. Writers of this time tried to highlight high values like communal amity, tolerance and humanitarianism, but unfortunately some of these writers discontinued writing and the reasons are hardly known to anyone.

Shankar Raina gave his stories a romantic colour. His characters that live in the world of hospitals, patients, sympathetic doctors and nurses swing between duty and love. He is discernibly present in his short stories and tries to create his own myths and philosophy. His *Zinti Zul* (Illuminations) presents an impression of human behavior in depressing conditions.

It is also believed that the spurt of writers, publication of magazines like *Sheeraza* and the *Son Adab* by J&K Cultural Academy and other literary activities in the seventh decade of the 20th century created a literary atmosphere conducive to the growth of prose in general and short story in particular. Short stories like *Tsas* (Agony 1965) indicated the writer's susceptibility to modern thought and new sensibilities. Later on, *Shiraza* brought out special issue on short story in order to bring new talent to light. One of the numbers (August 1967) brought out new stories like *Taph* (Sunshine) by H.K. Kaul, which depicted new tensions in the middle class. *Avaly Sontaky Posh* (Spring Flowers) by G.N. Shakir, discussed the oldest subject of a woman's love in the modern context. *Sethi Mamuli* (Very Ordinary) by Faruq Masoodi sought to use a refreshingly new idiom and *Tshayi Gati* (Shadows) by R.L. Shant exposed the inner layers of the middle class sub-conscious.

The 1967 issue of *Sheeraza* contained stories like *Gahi taph gahi shihul* (Light and Shadow) by Akhtar, *Shuny* (The Void) by Lone, *Abnusuk Ruler* (The Ebony Ruler) by Bharati, *Myun Marun* (My Death) by Nirdosh, which showed that the story has taken a new turn. Character and situation had now been replaced by thought to a great extent. Mythological symbols were given new meanings in Bharati's *Chakra vyuh* (Labyrinth) where a modern Abhimanyu fights his own self, Kaul's *Batan hanz daram katha* (A Religious Discourse for Hindus) portrays the tension between hypocrisy and sincerity, in Ratanlal Manju's *Tresh* (Thirst), characters like Menaka and Vishvamitra live and suffer the modern life and in Rahbar's *Nirvan*, Gautama happens to be the son of a business person living the dubious life of corruption.

The contemporary Kashmiri writers have exposed the present day political hypocrisy in Kashmir and the reality in Kashmiri society quite boldly, rather than shirking away from it. The socio-cultural situation that exists now is full of chaos and confusion. The electronic-corporate media is intruding into domestic spaces on the one hand, and on the other hand, one is increasingly taking to "sectarian" or "fundamentalist" positions. The sensitive writer finds himself taking sides with the suffering man of the middle class and depicts his symptomatic loneliness and disinterest in social endeavour. There are, however, as many scholars who argue two different categories of short stories now. Some writers pretend to "put on" the mask of 'modernism.' They experiment with form, but do not acutely document different realities that exist in Kashmir, thus leaving the story's narrative with lesser subversive potential. Stories like *Kunyzath* (The Lonely Self) by Iqbal Fahim, Gulshan Majid's *Myani Khofach Kath* (The Story of My Fear) and Bharti's

Anigatichi topaz khanji (Topaz Pieces of Darkness), *Myani tshwapi hund sodar* (The Sea of Quietness), *Me chhu Pandorayi hund intizar* (I wait for Pandora) provide readers with semi-political abstractions, thus rendering it opaque. In these stories, vague metaphors are used and excessive symbolism mars the narrative. Short story as a narrative is, however nurtured by some other writers whose basic theme is the representation of man as a fully involved social being who reacts to the ever-changing social phenomenon and social attitudes. *Myun aftaba* (My Sun) by Akhtar Mohiuddin, *Shithyomut siriyi* (Frozen Sun) by Avtar Krishan Rehbar *Halas chhu rotul* (It is Dark Now) by H.K, Koul, *Zevi handy afsana* (Stories of the Tongue) by Bashir Akhtar, *Akh kakad tray* (A Paper Tray) by Ratanlal Shant also present images and illusions, but these are not rendered obscure by abstractions and opaque metaphors. They prefer to look traditionalist, rather than be abstract and incomprehensible. This is the direction the Kashmiri short story seems to have adopted in the subsequent course of its history.

This chapter has attempted to locate the short story as a literary genre, within Kashmiri tradition. Short stories in Kashmir are also written in Urdu and Hindi. Many short story writers in Kashmir believe that the writing in Urdu and Hindi by Kashmiri writers has not been one way. A lot of writers of Hindi and Urdu chose Kashmiri subjects which included Krishan Chand and Upendranath Ashq. It is believed that the beginnings of a Kashmiri uprising in 1940s saw Kashmiris turn to Urdu for expression just as many Kashmiris turned to English writing in the 1990s. Prominent among the writers in Urdu language are Ghulam Nabi Khayal, Hamidi Kashmiri and Farooq Nazki. Many of the great Urdu writers of South Asia such as Sanaullah Butt or Meeraji, Muhammad Iqbal, Saadat Hassan Manto and Ratan Nath

Sarshar are believed to have ties with Kashmir. When we speak of Urdu in Kashmir, we are reminded of those Urdu writers who owed their origin to Kashmir such as Kashmiri Lal Zakir, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Muhammad Iqbal, Sanaullah Butt (Meeraji), Brij Narain Chakbast, Pandit Anand Narain Mulla and Rattan Nath Sarshar.

In Kashmir, Hamidi Kashmiri is known for his significant contributions to Urdu literature for the last few decades. Hamidi also writes in Kashmiri, but Urdu, he believes is his passion. Another literary figure who devoted to Urdu literature is Ghulam Nabi Khayal. He is believed to have been writing and researching the history of Urdu language in Kashmir. One of the greatest contemporary writers of Urdu in Kashmir, Abdul Ghani Sheikh belongs to Ladakh. His short stories are about the growing tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh. A collection of his short stories, *Forsaking Paradise*, was collected, edited and translated by Raveena Aggarwal.

This is what our histories of short story in Kashmir tell us. There are many emergent questions that the researcher is left grappling with, at the end of mapping this field of the literary history of Kashmir. First is that why is there an absence of women writers in almost all the histories of Kashmiri literature? Have women actually not written any short stories or have they written but didn't get their works published? As for my knowledge, there are many women writers in Kashmir who have contributed a lot to this genre and have written short stories in Kashmiri, Urdu and Hindi. The reason why they hardly appear in the anthologies might be that they find it difficult to get their work published in a place like Kashmir where a few women

writers were threatened because they were breaking the stereotypical way of writing short stories or the issues that they were talking about were unacceptable.

Are these women writers absent because their works have not been translated? Who translates texts from Kashmiri or Urdu or Hindi to English? What kinds of texts get translated? Is there any politics being played in translating the texts? In order to seek if not find answers to such questions, I focus on three women writers, representative of Kashmiri women's writing.

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Chapter Two

WOMEN'S WRITING IN KASHMIR: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The chapter attempts to trace the structural and material conditions of women writing in Kashmir. That will involve a series of questions like: When did women in Kashmir start writing and in what circumstances? What do they write about? Who do they write for and why aren't their works published or translated? To understand these issues I have interviewed women in Jammu and Kashmir, not only women writers who have managed to get their works published, but other women who generally write.²⁴

In the last paragraph of the first chapter of her book *The Female Imagination: Gender and Narrative*,²⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks writes,

What is a woman to do, setting out to write about women? She can imitate men in her writings, or strive for an impersonality beyond sex, but finally she must write as a woman; what other way is there? Examining the problems women reveal in imaginative writing, she will necessarily uncover her own. The students in my course concluded, at the end of the semester, that there were few generalizations, if any, to be made about the forms and techniques of women's writings, but many about "women's problems." Through all literary genres ... women demonstrate their approaches to the solving of those problems. The same consciousness of difficulty presents itself over and

²⁴ Some women in Kashmir write articles, short stories, poems but don't publish them or are not able to publish them. Some write articles in newspapers and others write diaries. This is what is meant by "women who generally write."

²⁵ To analyze a variety by women and to facilitate her investigation, Spacks employing an interesting tool, the tape recording of her students. www.jstor.org/stable/3173249?seq=2.

over. (Spacks 35)

Women writers in Kashmir have been writing from medieval times but very few of their works were published. This being the reason, they are absent in the literary history of contemporary Kashmir, despite the fact that Kashmiri literature is almost synonymous with the poetry of medieval mystic women poets like Lal Ded, Rupa Bhawani, Habba Khatoon and Arinilal. Hanifa Begum, Taj Begum Renzu and Shamla Mufti are the first women writers in Kashmiri prose, and started writing in the 1950s. Shamla Mufti's collection of plays titled *Aes Lukh* (We, the people) was published in 1977. Her plays helped in raising awareness about gender-related issues. Her autobiography titled *Myen Kath* (My Story) which was published in 1990s offers insight into a woman's struggle to make her voice heard in a literary world dominated by men. Taj Begum Renzu, besides being a short story writer was also an important political activist. She began writing in the 1950s. Her collection of short stories published in 1968, discusses gender issues and related questions of social change and cultural transformation. She was also the editor of a Kashmiri weekly *Koshur Akhbar* (Kashmiri Newspaper) in the 1970s. In the late 1990s, a political and cultural activist Atiq Bano started a Kashmiri weekly *Miraas* (Heritage). This was an important and plucky step which unfortunately didn't last for a long time. But her effort must be appreciated since this was the time when the Valley was going through a dreadful time when women could hardly come out of their houses because of the prevailing political conditions and women were ordered to strictly follow the Islamic dress code.²⁶

²⁶ See, <http://kuneer.com>, which offers basic tools to learn Kashmiri language, introduction to Kashmiri writers, poets and brief commentaries on contemporary trends in Kashmiri Literature.) *Ku'neer* is a Kashmiri word which can mean "unity" (of being) or "oneness," "solitude" or "solidarity."

There were some other women writers at this period like Hajra Parvez, Raina,²⁷ Fiza Khatoon, Aisha Mastoor, Abida Ahmed, Feroza Shauq and Zeba Zeenat. The younger generation of Kashmiri women writers include Rafiq Bashir, Muneera Fatima, Rukhshanda Rashid, Razia Shabnam, Shamima Tabassum, Darakshan Andrabi, Saba Shaheen, Shagufta Nasreen and Sadaf Ghazala. By the 1970s, Kashmiri women were not only writing poetry or short stories but also critical and philosophical essays. Writers like Naseem Shafai, Bimla Raina, Suneeta Raina, Tarannum Reyaz and Mehfooza Jan are rare exceptions and are in the forefront of the new wave of women's writing in Kashmir.

Some of these women writers in Kashmir have managed to publish their works. Now the question remains as to what urged them to write and under what circumstances did they write. And also, were there any other means for them to express themselves apart from writing? For the purpose of the thesis, as said earlier, I have interviewed some women and women writers to find answers to these questions.

In Kashmir, publishing a work by a woman writer is not easy. On the contrary, most of the women writers from other parts in India get their works published and are encouraged to do so by the several feminist presses which encourage and assist women to publish their works.²⁸ It is almost impossible for a woman writer to find a

²⁷ Raina was born in 1967 and lives in Delhi. She writes both in Kashmiri and Hindi. In an interview to *The Tribune*, she said that "the greatest casualty of the militancy in Kashmir is not just the ethos of amity, but the creativity of people over there."

²⁸ Women's WORLD (an international initiative to create a network of support and free speech for women writers all over the world), the Hyderabad based women's resource and action centre, ASMITA, among others have been trying to publicize the different kinds of problems faced by women writers in India. One can only wish to see Kashmiri women writer's works in such forums.

publisher in Kashmir. The obvious question then is: whose works and what kind of writings do get published?

The three women writers taken for study give a very interesting picture of the process of publication in Kashmir. While Tarannum Reyaz and Khema Kaul, and some other women writers believe that finding a publisher was not difficult at all, others say that it was/is extremely difficult to get their works published.²⁹ Tarannum Reyaz, who has been living in Delhi, believes that it was easy for her to find a publisher and Khema Kaul, writing from Jammu, also feels the same. Now it becomes very clear that class and region that one belongs to makes a lot of difference in the literary career of a particular writer. Tarannum Reyaz, being a wife of the former Vice-Chancellor of Kashmir University has always had the privilege of publishing her works without bothering much about the complexities involved. Moreover, her works have been read widely and appreciated, and a lot of work has been done on her poems, novels and some short stories. Khema Kaul also feels the same as Tarannum Reyaz does. For both of them, publishing their works was hardly difficult. On the other hand, Mehfooza Jan opines that it has been extremely difficult for her to find a publisher for her works, thus she had to “publish on her own as there was/is no significant reading public available” (Personal Interview with Mehfooza Jan). Furthermore, she was threatened of being thrown out of the university if she wouldn’t stop writing on certain issues. Hence, region, religion, class, etc., do play an important role in deciding whether one could publish her works or not. Interestingly enough, after sharing their experiences, one could easily

²⁹ Tarannum Reyaz has been writing in Delhi, which according to Naseem Shafai gives her a sense of freedom and security so she can talk about issues which she could not have done in Kashmir. Khema Kaul, a Kashmiri Pandit lives in Jammu and writes from there. Almost all her works are published in magazines like *Sakshatkar* and *Akshara* from Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

understand the different reasons each of them had to write.

Despite the fact that most of what they write doesn't get published, women generally and women writers particularly feel that they write because they want people to listen to their sufferings. For instance, one of the contemporary writers, Zamrooda Habib who was imprisoned for quite some time feels it was important to document her "sacrifices." She says:

I think everybody has a story to tell and I cannot find any reason not to document my humiliation in jail and torture in that black cage. I feel there is an urgent need of documenting our own sacrifices and pain. Nobody other than our own selves knows what we have gone through. It was difficult for me to write it down as I had to recall all the ugly episodes of my life and go through that pain again.

She feels that the world totally changed for her when she came out of jail and the problem of not being able to connect with people affected her emotionally. "Writing seemed an option to share my pain, it worked as a vent," she added. Neerja Mattoo,³⁰ a writer, translator, academic and social activist believes that pluralism in Kashmiri society, sense of togetherness and cosmopolitan society prompted her to write. She adds, "I used to teach in Women's College, M A Road, Srinagar, when the conditions started getting worse in Kashmir and education system was affected the most. My job got affected and many of us had to sit at home. That idleness forced me to write." Sudha Kaul, the first Kashmiri woman to publish her memoir, says that homesickness, sorrows and many events in the Valley and a desire to tell

³⁰ A British Council visitor to Oxford University, she was awarded a senior Fellowship by the Ministry of Human Rights Development to work on Kashmiri Poets including Lal Ded (14th century). Her publications include *The Stranger beside Me*, *Contemporary Kashmiri Short Stories*, *Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh*.

her children about her Kashmir combined to create an undeniable urge to write a book. She says that writing with conciliatory approach to most topics makes women's writing different. Afshana, a journalist in Kashmir, opines that other people's pain and sorrow motivated her to write a book about widows and half widows. She says, "I was discouraged by many not to join journalism and even not to continue working as a reporter. This is the reason I did not disclose to anybody that I am writing a book, I didn't show it to anybody except my publisher." She has documented as many as 40 families in her book which details their sufferings. She says that she has tried to capture the distinctions between the women whose husbands have died or have disappeared. "I have written about women who bear the brunt of conflict," she adds.

Some Kashmiri women, who write but have not published their works, have shared their interest in writing as that which helps them break their isolation. Now the question is why and what kind of isolation? Is it because women in Kashmir don't usually share their problems either at their home or at the in-law's place after marriage? Or do they feel that by doing this they are breaking the stereotypical notion of a Kashmiri woman as calm, quiet and so on? Do they feel that by sharing the torture they go through in everyday life, they are defaming the name of the family? If yes, then why it is that only women are forced to think about such issues? Whatever the reasons are, most of them strongly believe that they need to be heard inside and outside Kashmir as well.

Some of them believe that they write because they have a lot of experiences which compels them to write or demands discussion. This reminded me of Sarah

Aboobacker, a Kannada writer who starts her article titled “Growing up as a Woman Writer” saying that “Before I describe my experience as a writer, I would like to mention that my experiences themselves have made me a writer.”³¹ Likewise, one of the reasons why Kashmiri women started writing may possibly be because they have a lot of experiences in their everyday life they want to share. Writing does give voice to the voiceless. In case of Kashmir, writing helps women since they have no other mode to vent their feelings or discuss their life. One of my respondents from Srinagar said that they decided to write because they wanted to challenge the marginalization and exclusion of their experiences. They wanted to share their experiences which they feel would be best expressed by only them and not by men or anyone else.

It is also important to know the other issues that inform their writings apart from the significant experience of marginalization. While conversing with them, one can see the helplessness in their eyes and understand that they desire to discuss a lot of things but because of certain compulsions, they remain unexpressed. Let us not forget that women in Kashmir have hardly been interviewed. Urvashi Butalia quotes a journalist, Manimala, who visited Kashmir many years ago wrote that most of the women she talked to posed one question to her:

Why is it that ‘Indian’ women, women who are within the movement, and who have been quick to stretch the hand of friendship to all women affected by violence, why have they not come to us? Why have they not offered friendship, even sympathy, to us women in Kashmir? (Butalia xix)

It is therefore evident that women in Kashmir are appealing journalists across India

³¹ See *Growing up as a Woman Writer* edited by Jasbir Jain.

to work more closely and with more sincerity with women in Kashmir and try to put an end to the age old communication gap with them.

Coming back to the interviews, when asked about marriage, one of my respondents said that girls in Kashmir don't have much of a choice when it comes to decision making power regarding their own marriage. This, I feel, perhaps leads to innumerable problems because if one does not even know the person she will share her life with, how would she be able to live her life happily. There is a tendency of misunderstanding which may lead to separation and divorce which is detrimental as women are more susceptible to the physical and psychological effects of divorce than men. They may remarry to get rid of the loneliness, but they may have little desire to remarry mainly due to the anxiety that their children might not be well cared for by a second husband. Most of my interviewees said that almost 99% of the widows are married off to their brothers-in-law, and thus made to live a life more torturous than before. This is done because the honour of the family is supposed to remain within the family. One would also wonder and worry about the condition of the young and unmarried men as well, who are also left with no choice about who they should marry. This is fairly common across India but what is more heartbreaking is that the life of half-widows³² is the most miserable one. Besides talking about the mothers in Kashmir who are grieving for their sons, who are either dead or missing, women in Kashmir also express concern about half-widows and their lives, their struggle to survive and bring up their children. According to them, men belonging to families like Syeds, Qureshis, Hashmis, Kirmanis and the like by

³² It would refer to countless women in Kashmir, who don't even know whether their husbands are alive or dead, so they are generally known as half-widows.

and large marry women from Ganai, Wani, etc., but women from these communities are not allowed to marry men with surnames like Ganai, Wani, etc. The reason being, after getting married, a woman gets her husband's surname.³³ Her identity is changed and therefore, becomes one of them. These are certain issues similar to class/caste system. Moreover, there has been an absence of protest against such practices.

It is generally believed that in war, women not only suffer as biological entities but as collective social beings as well. One of my respondents said that in case of a rape, the honour of a family becomes the dominant discourse rather than the violation of a woman's body. Instead of supporting her, people demoralize her by talking time and again about the problems they will face to find a life partner. One can only imagine the trauma women go through. I feel that this is not all. When we talk about a raped woman, it should not be about the honour of the family, the trauma a woman goes through but also about the pain and agony that a father, brother, son, husband of the victim. A relevant example is the Shopian rape/murder case of 2009 in Kashmir when the victim's father after facing the trauma and questions from the people declared that his daughter was killed and not raped. One can only imagine the degree of trauma he would have gone through. I am sure there are hundreds and thousands of such cases.³⁴

Kavita Suri in her article titled "Women and Conflict: An Overview" writes that rape not only affects the female victims but also her family and community who are

³³ Before marriage, Muslim women in Kashmir mostly use their father's name after their name and their husband's after marriage.

³⁴ See, "Rape in Kashmir: A Crime in War," www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/INDIA935.PDF, vol. 5, issue 9, for example.

forced to witness it. I agree with her and would also like to argue that apart from illustrating power as being used/misused, like a lot of scholarship on rape demonstrates, it is also used as a weapon or ‘a strategic instrument’ of war³⁵ against women and thereby also against the community to which they belong. Unfortunately, people are fearful of speaking about it. Urvashi Butalia discusses in the introduction to her book *Speaking Peace: Women’s Voices from Kashmir*, the issue of rape through a survey of the data she has collected after interviewing Kashmiri women. She writes that rape has become so routinised in the lives of Kashmiri women. Initially it was a confluence of militants and security force personnel who were the perpetrators, but “today it seems that by far the large number of offenders come from the security forces.” Butalia writes,

Protected by their power, and also by Draconian laws under which they operate, and protected also by their guns, they use rape, as it has traditionally been used, as a weapon to humiliate the Muslim community through the violation of its women. Mirroring this, the militants similarly use rape to target the Pandit Hindu community through its women. (Butalia xvii)

Raping women in war and thus humiliating each others’ communities have been discussed by many writers. Anuradhadha Chenoy writes with reference to the Partition of India and Pakistan, that “besides large scale genocide gendered crime was a common feature of these events” (Kaufman and Williams 38). Rape according to her is a frequent form of meting out humiliation to the ‘other’ community. While

³⁵ ‘Rape and Sexual Violence as a strategic instrument of war’ is used by Joyce P. Kaufman, Kristen P. Williams in one of the articles titled “Conflict and Violence Against Women” in their book *Women and War: Gender, Identity and Activism in Times of Conflict*, 37. Joyce P. Kaufman, Kristen P. Williams quote Mirindia Alison, who argues that “men who wouldn’t otherwise rape women as an individual act of violence do rape collectively in a group assertion of masculinity.” Therefore, according to Joyce P. Kaufman, Kristen P. Williams, rape of a women in any conflict is undoubtedly a strategic weapon of war.

discussing rape and sexual violence of a woman in war, Joyce P. Kaufman and Kristen P. Williams argue in their book, *Women and War: Gender, Identity and Activism in Times of Conflict* that violating women sexually is one way to assert domination over the 'other' in the most humiliating way possible. Hence, rape and sexual violence during war and conflict "are as old a practice as war itself." In the book titled *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, Joshua S. Goldstein talks about rape of women in wars in different countries of the world, giving examples of countless cases of rape in Netherlands by Spanish troops in 17th century, rapes during the Partition of India and Pakistan, rape of surviving women by the members of California Volunteers during US Civil War, Mozambique in 1991, Libia, Seirra Leone, Burundi, Uganda, Algeria, Indonesia, Kashmir and Burma. He further argues that rape as an instrument of violence is used, stemming from "different motivations in various wars - revenge for Russian soldiers in Berlin in 1945, frustration for US soldiers in Vietnam, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia..." This is further explained by Groth et al, who identify three basic patterns of rape in an article titled "Rape, Power, Anger and Sexuality." These are: *anger* rape,³⁶ in which sexuality becomes a hostile act, *power* rape, in which sexuality becomes an expression of conquest and *sadist* rape, in which anger and power become eroticized.³⁷ (Groth, Burgess and Hulmstorm 1239- 1243) It thus explains that rape of a woman has been used as "an instrument of ethnic cleansing,"³⁸ as an instrument

³⁶ "Being violent is what triggers rapes. The girl I raped began screaming at me. Now she is dead," so commented William Mosbach. Convicted rapist and murderer; cited from Elaine Showalter's "Rethinking the Seventies: Women writers and Violence," *The Antioch Review* 39.2 (Spring 1981): 156-170.

³⁷ See, Burgess Groth and Hulmstrom, "Rape, Power, Anger and Sexuality," *American Journal of Psychiatry* (New York: Plenum Press, 1997) 1239-1243.

³⁸ In Bosnia, rape was used to humiliate and terrorize a population from one ethnic group in order to induce it to abandon desirable territory. Some rapes in Bosnia war, was peculiarly oriented towards forced impregnation as a part of ethnic cleansing; see, "Joshua S. Goldstein's book *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

of territorial control, to humiliate and terrorize a population for ages together. It does arise from different specific motivations like revenge and frustration for the enemies.

Historically, rape in war seems to humiliate enemy males since “in almost every society women are seen as the property of a man and represent the honour of the male, the family and the community,” writes Nirmala Sathe in an article titled “Rape as a Means of Terrorization of Dalit and Tribal Women”³⁹ (Nirmala 144-151). Therefore, to destroy the dignity of the group, women of the class/caste/community/region are raped, which is “the most humiliating way of torture.” She thus argues that rape is used as a means of political torture, and as a terrorizing and punitive mechanism against women.

Joyce P. Kaufman and Kristen P. Williams quote Coomaraswamy who argues that the recent wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda and Kosovo point to the fact that sexual violence can be central instrument of terror especially in campaigns that involve fratricide or nationalist wars. She also argues that both rape and sexual violence “have been used to assert dominance over one’s enemy. Since woman’s sexuality is seen as being under the protection of men of the community, its defilement is an act of domination over the males of the community or group that is under attack” (Kaufman and Williams 38).

It is very interesting and disturbing at the same time to understand how women are

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³⁹ For further details, see Nirmala Sathe, “Rape as a Means of Terrorization of Dalit and Tribal Women,” *Violence against Women, Women Against Violence* (Delhi: Pencraft International, 1998) 144-151.

constructed as “man’s property” discursively through patriarchal norms. That is why the woman’s body becomes a principal site of violence in wars. Such discursive constructions of women, as being property owned by men needs to be challenged. Another point that I was trying to make when I started the discussion about rape is that generally women don’t talk about rape because they recognize the threat to family honour and because of many other issues they remain silent deliberately.⁴⁰ Thus, there is a need for interviews not only with women writers but also women who write but don’t/are unable to publish. This coercive silence about rape of Kashmiri women flowing from patriarchal constructions will be one of the key issues that this thesis will attempt to flag.

The general (mis)perceptions over Purdah⁴¹ would be a way to start addressing such issues as it is also a question about decision making power/agency of women in general. Purdah is thus another important issue to consider, particularly when one writes about Kashmir. Purdah, a Persian word meaning “curtain” has been practiced by Muslims and Hindus in India.⁴² Some scholars view purdah as a symbol of dignity and honour and some argue that it is kind of veil, which Hindu women who belong to high caste used to wear.⁴³ Some others have argued that women (mostly upper class) irrespective of religion would practice purdah. Some historians argue that purdah existed in many countries like Saudi Arabia et cetera and that Islam

⁴⁰ Women in Kashmir, as many other women around the globe, find it very difficult to talk about rape not just because of the honour of the family but they feel that not only they but their family members would be threatened and terrorized, or sometimes killed, as such incidents have taken place earlier.

⁴¹ Purdah is called *Burqa* and sometimes *niqab* in Kashmir. *Burqa* is an Arabized Persian word for purdah, having the same meaning in Persian.

⁴² See, James Heitzman and Robert L. Worden, “Veiling and the Seclusion of Women,” in *India: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995); <http://countrystudies.us/india/84.htm>; accessed on 30-11-2013.

⁴³ It is also believed that among some married Hindu women in rural North India, *ghoonghat*, a form of Purdah, is observed in presence of older male in-laws and also in other public spaces.

hardly added any religious significance to it.⁴⁴ Urvashi Butalia documents that historically, purdah was introduced in Kashmir by Afghan rulers in 14th century⁴⁵ and the upper class Hindu and Muslim women accepted it (Butalia 58). Purdah, then in Kashmir was a choice and it was practiced by people who could afford it, but with the passage of time it became a necessity when Dukhtaran-E-Milat (Daughters of Revolution) said that it was necessary that women practice purdah even if it was imposed on them by force. Butalia writes,

In an interview with us, Nahida Naseem, the General Secretary of Dukhtaran-E-Milat, said that under Islamic Law it was necessary that they practice the purdah, even if it is imposed by force. They saw the purdah as a ‘weapon for the safety’ of the women. (Interview with Nahida Naseem)

In their interviews some women and women writers (Kashmiri Pandits) in Jammu, said there were restrictions on women’s employment and thus, empowerment.⁴⁶ Before marriage as housewives are preferred for marriage; but after marriage the attitude towards them changes and they are criticized and rebuked because they don’t earn. They also talked about womanhood, the problems they faced during pregnancy and while giving birth. Some of them said they have no say in any decision-making regarding the marriage of their children or their children’s education. They talked about discrimination at different levels. Some women in Jammu and Kashmir said they have been denied inheritance rights. Women from far-flung areas in Kashmir especially said that they live in extremely traditional

⁴⁴ See, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/pardah>, for further details.

⁴⁵ In response to Pratibha Patil’s claim that pardah was introduced in India during the Mughal rule “to save women from Mughal invaders,” historians argued that pardah in India started much before Babur heralded the Mughal rule in 1526 AD. They also said that pardah was a status symbol of the higher classes in Medieval India. See, <http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007>, 19 June 2007.

⁴⁶ Muslim women’s empowerment in India and the issues related to it is not new to India, example being Shah Bano Begum from Indore, Madhya Pradesh. She is believed to be the first victim of Mullah regime of Muslim Personal Law Board.

situations.

When asked about the gender roles in their society women, both in Kashmir Valley and Jammu seemed to be very unhappy with the whole system. They feel that men and women have traditionally performed distinct roles, the example being the family which is designated a women's sphere while men dominate the public spheres of politics, culture and business. Women in Kashmir are supposed or expected to perform their traditional roles more effectively than men. These women desire to write about such issues as well. They feel that these issues mostly remained untouched so they decided to pen all the problems they faced and continue to face. These are some of the reasons why these women started writing. Now, an obvious question that needs to be pursued in the research is the problem of underprivileged women who can hardly afford to publish their experiences in any form in journals or books. What happens to this group of women? Who do they share their problems with? How do they let off their anger or frustration? What do they do when such problems arise?

By and large, my interest and engagement with women writers in Kashmir and my endeavour to translate/discuss select short stories in a comparative frame is a modest attempt to understand and address such questions.

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Chapter Three
TRANSLATIONS OF TWELVE SHORT STORIES BY THREE WOMEN
WRITERS

This chapter provides my translation of five short stories by Mehfooza Jan, four by Tarannum Reyaz and three by Khema Kaul. While these three women writers have a wide range and repertoire, my selection of these twelve particular short stories was primarily governed by the questions that concern this thesis.

SECTION A: MEHFOOZA JAN

One of Kashmir's boldest and most outspoken women writers, Mehfooza Jan, born on January 12, 1964, has played an important role in the development of short story written in Kashmiri. She has been bold enough to discuss issues like prostitution, extra-marital relationships, and jealousy within different classes of women in the Valley and so on through her short stories and has been criticized and threatened countless times. She was threatened to be thrown out of Kashmir University, (where she works as Assistant Professor in Kashmiri department) if she continues writing about the same issues. However, she continued writing about issues which according to Kashmiri society was unethical.

While conversing with people from different sections in Kashmir including faculties in Kashmir University, I felt that most of the issues that she talks about are disregarded, ridiculed, made fun of and deliberately ignored. She exposes the reality about Kashmiri societies, where taking such a responsibility is extremely

challenging, even life-threatening.

She teaches literary history, *Mathnavi* and art of writing. She has to her credit twenty three books and besides being a writer and a poet, she is also known as a translator. She has been an associate editor of Kashmiri Literary Journal *Bavath* since 1988.

TRANSLATION OF FIVE SHORT STORIES BY MEHFOOZA JAN:

1. “Darkness/Sightless” (*Anigot*)⁴⁷

What a frightening, terrifying and dark night ... thunder and lightning, and the sound that the roof⁴⁸ created because of it. A gloomy, haunted house ... a nerve-racking and starving ghost in search of human flesh ... people, almost motionless, stuck to each other in fear. Dogs howling and cats shrieking, together producing creepy and weird noises! So many nests built by birds on trees ... but all hushed! Not a soul is seen anywhere! Pin drop silence in the streets! Like ancient times, people quietly sitting in their caves ... mutely breathing in and out. Darkness everywhere!

He just stepped on the street and started walking very fast ... saying to himself, “I think this is the right way. I won’t stumble, would I? I can hear somebody’s

⁴⁷ An earlier version of this translation was published in <http://edhvani.in/anigot-darkness/> (2011), the journal of comparative literature from the Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad.

⁴⁸ Roof in Kashmir is mostly made of tin, which is placed horizontally so that the snow does not get accumulated.

footsteps. I think someone is walking ahead. Oh, there! Some people are sitting close to each other and discussing something... may be some decisions are taken clandestinely. I think I better change my route. It is evil to poke around and create inconvenience for people.”

The moment he started going away from them, they were moving closer to one another.

“Oh, now who is this giant human being?” he asked himself. “Oh God, save me. Am I being chased by some monster? Why on earth did I start back now? But then, when would I have gone back? It is not very easy to go to such places as well. Not that I don’t love myself, but my father and my sister would be eagerly waiting for me. They must be worried, anxious and restless. My father must be enquiring about me. My sister might have stopped eating anything.”

“I almost lost control of my legs. Anyway, no issues! It will only take two to three hours to reach home. Would I be driven away by this storm? God, strengthen me and make things easier for me!”

“Who are these people, holding a lantern, walking slowly? And who is this guy leading them with a huge stick in his hand?”

“May be someone is getting married!

Marriage? In this stormy night?

No, no! May be somebody has guests.

Whoever they are, why am I thinking and worrying about them? I should just keep moving.

I really feel tired now. I think I should take rest for some time under this tree.”

After taking rest for some time, he started walking again and realized that he had reached a house. In his heart of hearts he thought that it must be uncle Naba’s house and thought “it is like my home itself. I think I should get inside and ask them how they have been. Uncle loves me so much and why wouldn’t he ... he has brought me up. I should meet them and then go home.”

“I knocked the door so many times but nobody opened it. May be they are in deep sleep but this deep? Fine, let me try calling them, which might wake them up. I hope they are alright ... but all the family members wouldn’t be...?”

“No. No. God forbid.”

As soon as he raised his head, he realized that all the windows were opened. He just pushed the door and it was open too.

“Where have all these people gone? Is everything okay at home?”

He started walking towards his house, this time faster. On the way, he saw a tall man with a knife in his hand. He was surrounded by some five to six people. They all looked at him very carefully and asked: “Where are you going? Why did you come here? Do you hate yourself? Go back quickly... otherwise... anyway, may be you

are new to this place. So, you are excused. What are you waiting for? Just go back.”

He became very angry after listening to this and said, “Who are you to stop me? I am going home. Where else do you think I would go? My father would be waiting for me and my sister would be crying.” His eyes welled with tears.

All of them started laughing loudly and said, “Which father and sister? Go and find a different route.”

He again pleaded to them to let him go. “Please let me go for God’s sake. They would be waiting for me.”

One of them responded, “There are some half burnt bodies in that barren land nearby. Go and see if you can find your father or sister.”

“Barren land ... dead bodies ...?” he asked. “Hey buddy, please tell me the name of this place. I have to reach home urgently.”

One of them again said, “You have come to the right place. What is your name? What is your father’s name?” He enquired everything about his family. Then he pointed to a door and asked him to go there.

He then screamed and called out to his father and sister loudly. His body was sweating. He could hardly see anything ... he was almost sightless. His head started spinning; he lost balance and fell on the ground.

When he opened his eyes, he had fallen down from his bed and was lying near the radio. He supported his back with his hands, got up, had a glass of water and relaxed.

2. “Hustle and Bustle” (*Tchalalar*)

The sky was absolutely darkened by the clouds and people were unable to hear each other because of the sound of thunder and lightning. Dogs were howling. The storm uprooted the trees and blew away the roof of every house. The sky started shedding tears. There was thunder and lightning ... with it, a bomb blast occurred, which hit a building. Suddenly, the building caught fire and everything around it turned into ashes. After this, the sky was quiet and soundless. Dogs started howling again. “It is believed that dogs howl because they can see demons falling from the sky.”

Maryam’s dead body was lying with opened hands (as if asking them to apply *henna* on her hands), pitiable eyes awaiting her better half. Her body was placed near the coffin in the vicinity of a mosque. It appeared as if she was looking at everybody with a number of unanswered questions in her eyes. A number of women came singing and stood near the dead body. The coffin was laden with sweets. Maryam’s mother came with a bowl of *henna* to apply it on her hands. The place was brimming with garlands of money and flowers. Then her mother wore her bangles,

applied *surma*⁴⁹ in her eyes, put a bridal *dupatta* on her head and started singing along with other women. Within no time, she was unconscious. Countless people gathered around and in a minute Maryam's body was carried towards the graveyard.

Maryam's marriage was just eight days away. Everybody in her house was busy organizing and getting ready for her marriage. She was also busy doing something. Suddenly, people started running here and there. In this hustle and bustle, people almost ran over each other. Everybody was worried and busy rescuing themselves. In no time, burglars surrounded the whole place. With long swords in their hands and guns on their shoulders, they were announcing that if anyone possessed any assets, they must hand them over. And that if any precious items were found in anybody's house later, they would be hanged publicly. This was the order given by these wandering and rootless looters. Their torture was limitless and never-ending. They would find pleasure in killing new born babies. Besides, they would tie the old people to the tires of their vehicles and drag them to death. Not a single girl was seen out of her house. The moment they saw a girl outside, like wild animals, they would pounce on her, molest her in public and quench their thirst; and if any of them would resist, a number of bullets would be shot at her and her body would be blown away into pieces or she would be burnt alive. If a youngster would stare at them or by chance look at them, they would order that his eyes be removed. They would enter into any house they wished to and do whatever they felt like without being questioned. If anybody questioned them, they would punish him by cutting his tongue and both hands. They were neither scared of anybody nor were they God

⁴⁹ *Surma* is a kind of *kajal* which is applied in eyes. People in Kashmir usually get it from Mecca and it is known to be very auspicious. So every bride is supposed to wear *surma* in her eyes.

fearing. But their end was...! If any of them died, even dogs would keep away from their bodies. Their dead bodies would smell to such an extent that the municipality would make use of the wild dogs, who would drag these bodies to a faraway field.

That day too, these wild monsters were on spree. Maryam's younger brother had gone to market to buy something. The moment they saw him, around twenty to thirty of them chased him and chopped him into pieces. Maryam saw this through the window and ran out bare feet and saw her innocent brother being brutally murdered. The wild beasts molested her, cut her tongue and shot five to ten bullets at her and silenced her forever. Then they laughed loudly, took petrol out of one of their vehicles and put a house on fire. In this unfortunate incident, at least ten children, seven women and eleven men were burnt to death. Like spectators, they kept watching until everything turned into ashes. They were satisfied only after killing so many innocent people. Now they filled their vehicles with all the valuable goods and rejoiced while leaving.

3. "Yearning" (*Tamanna*)

Aijaz would almost revolve around the deserted house, from where he was able to see the window where Sheela would come to see him. He would fix his eyes on the window. Sheela would also eagerly wait from morning to evening. He would never be able to convince himself even if all the windows of the house were open. He would walk in and go straight to the kitchen and wait for Sheela for a long time so that she would ask him for tea. Then like a mad man, he would climb the stairs,

go to her room, open the cupboard, take out her photos and converse with them. He would thus share his pain and ask countless questions like, “Why did you do this to me, how could you leave me and go, how could you get peace without me, how am I supposed to bear this pain, where have you been? You completely forgot me! What happened to all those promises, was all that fake? I wish you had at least talked to me once before leaving. I would have accompanied you! You broke all the promises. You broke my heart! But I swear to God, I will never ever forget you. Wherever on earth you are, I will find you.”

Sitting alone in his room, Aijaz would time and again read Sheela’s letter which she had sent him before leaving. He would not feel contented even after reading the letter more than twelve times and it resulted in the fading of the letter. One day his sister ran towards him with a letter in her hands. As soon as he took the letter in his hands, he screamed, “Oh! God! Am I dreaming or is it real? A letter from Sheela!” He quickly opened the cover of the letter and it was actually a letter from Sheela. While reading the letter, he couldn’t control his sentiments and cried his heart out, as the letter was full of emotion. Sheela also loved and adored him equally. She had insisted that he must come to Jammu to visit her. Her parents were planning to marry her off but she was avoiding it by saying that she would first complete her education. But she was completely helpless now. She would always enquire about Aijaz from whoever she met. If anybody from Kashmir would come to meet them, she would eagerly wait to hear about Aijaz. She was never able to share anything regarding this with anybody. Her lips were sealed and there was no way that she could discuss any such issue with anybody. So, finally she decided to write a letter to him without caring much about the amount of risk that she was taking. The letter

said that if he doesn't go and meet her soon in Jammu, she would end her life by committing suicide. Aijaz was dumbfounded after reading the letter. He couldn't sleep at all thinking about the possible consequences. "Would she really do something like that...? Then how am I supposed to live without her? My life is meaningless without her." He thought that there is something wrong. "How did she remember me after all these years? She didn't even inform me before leaving for Jammu. She never tried to contact me, neither did she write a single letter to me, and then how did she miss me today all of a sudden?" Many such doubts were mounting in his mind but after looking at the letter all his doubts were cleared.

The letter said:

"Aijaz, you must be thinking that I forgot you long back but that is impossible. I remember you every time I breathe. And I will always remember you. It is not possible to describe how much I missed you and what I have gone through to suppress my feelings. You would never have even thought like that. May this never happen to anyone! But you, how could you live peacefully? What happened to my Aijaz, who would crave to see me every time? His heart would only beat for me. I spent my life waiting for you but you proved me wrong. Days led to months and months to years but ... you never came. Anyways, I am writing to you with the hope that you will fulfil my last wish and will not disappoint me. You will definitely come!"

Aijaz lost his patience and decided to take a taxi and leave for Jammu the next morning itself.

All the way to Jammu, Aijaz was completely lost in thoughts. He wouldn't believe that he reached Jammu and it was only when the driver told him to get down that he realized that he reached his destination. He took out the address from his pocket that Sheela had written on the letter. On reaching Sheela's house, he got down from the auto and suddenly her brother, Ashok Ji, caught his sight. He lost his temper as he was very much aware of their relationship and that they were trying to meet each other. Many times he had caught them secretly talking to each other because of which he didn't like Aijaz at all. Instead of greeting him, he asked him, "Where on earth did you get this much courage that you actually came here? So you followed us till here? Wouldn't you let my sister get married and live happily?" About six people gathered around Aijaz. Ashok felt stronger. He started shouting in *Pari*⁵⁰ language, "He is a thief, a looter and a murderer. Don't let him go. Catch hold of him. What are you guys waiting for?"

Sheela heard Ashok shouting and looked through the window. It appeared as if someone informed her that Aijaz has come and Ashok was not letting him in. She screamed from there, "He is not a thief, or a looter or a murderer but he is my Aijaz." But nobody paid any heed to her. She tried her best to be heard but all in vain. Ashok ran inside the house, dragged her into her room and locked her in. Someone informed the police about the incident and they arrived at the spot. Aijaz was beaten mercilessly with sticks and guns and then dragged into the police vehicle. He was arrested and declared a thief and a murderer. He was sent to Jhodhpur, where he was imprisoned for five years.

⁵⁰ *Pari* is spoken by people from Jammu.

On the other side, all the preparations for Sheela's marriage were completed. Invitation cards were also distributed. Everybody at her house was in festive mood and eagerly waiting for the day of marriage as she was the youngest daughter. This being the last marriage in the house, they had decided to conduct it in a grand manner.

Sheela's friends were beautifying her hands and feet with different *henna* designs but Sheela was down in the dumps and was crying her heart out.

Finally, it was the day of her marriage and everybody was waiting for her. She had gone to her room to change her clothes. She had decided that she wouldn't allow anybody to beautify her but would do everything herself and that none should disturb her. One and half hours passed and Sheela was still in her room, so her friends were sent to fetch her.

There was no response from Sheela even after her friends called her from outside the door. Everybody started to panic. With the help of some five people, the lock was broken. Sheela was lying on the floor with a bottle of poison beside her. Her whole body had turned pale. She was immediately taken to a hospital, where doctors declared her dead.

4. "After a Long Time" (*Yatch Kaal*)

The mad dog had created havoc in the colony. As soon as it saw a youngster, an old man, a woman or a child, it would chase and attack them. A lot of people, including

men, women and children had already died. Before stepping out of the houses, people would perform all the religious rituals which are carried out before death. There would be hardly any chances of returning home alive. Many times people decided that they would collectively go and give a complaint to the municipality but it was never successful because they were scared to even come out of their houses.

But one day, everybody was disheartened; everybody's eyes were full of tears and everybody was lamenting because this time the mad dog had eaten up a two year old kid. Not a soul had a nerve to rescue the kid. People were peeping from their windows. Women were screaming and men were quietly watching. The mother of that kid has somehow left the door opened. The mad dog had entered the house, dragged the kid and was eating it under a stone. His mother was unconscious for a long time after witnessing the whole episode and she started looking for her child once she was conscious. She screamed and cried her heart out. She pulled out her hair and was hitting her head against the wall.

In the evening, people would close the doors using big stones and some very heavy objects to support them because the dog would attack in the night also. People would switch off the lights and with the help of candles and lanterns, eat dinner and sleep early.

At the break of day, birds of all kinds like sparrows, crows etc. were making a lot of noise. Eagle was flying from one place to another. The new born sparrow had fallen down from the nest and was trying its best to fly. The dog was watching it from a distance and eagerly waiting for a chance to attack it. The second time, when the

bird again tried to fly, dog pounced on it and ate it within a fraction of seconds. All the birds were terrified after witnessing this merciless act and they were quiet and soundless.

Every evening, the dog would pass through the foot of the hill to look for its prey. On this day also, it started its journey accordingly. Without making any kind of sound, people informed each other by whistling and enter into some nearby houses. Women closed their doors and kept an eye on the dog. It was decided that a group of youngsters would go to the nearest municipality by hook or by crook and in the meantime, the rest would be vigilant and take care of the colony. Also, they were advised to stay inside their houses and keep with them some knives, sticks and blades for protection.

Next day itself, people somehow managed to reach out for municipality. They wrote an application and also narrated the entire affair to the municipality officer. He felt extremely sad after listening to their heartbreaking story and assured them that very soon a team will be sent and the mad dog will be poisoned. This gladdened the group of people to such an extent that they couldn't wait to share this good with the people of their colony. The whole colony was overjoyed after hearing the news and decided that they would pay alms to the poor.

The team finally arrived and as soon as the dog saw a group of people coming close to him, he attacked them. Around six of them were bitten by the dog and they fell unconscious. The rest of them rescued themselves by hiding at a safer place. The municipality officer was informed about the incident and he starting worrying more.

He said, “Such a dog and such nerve! No! I can’t remain quiet. I will something at any cost. I must send another team for the operation.”

The second team was ordered to go ahead with the operation. To their astonishment, the dog was taking bites from each of the dead bodies. They were dead scared and started trembling. They had mixed poison in the bread on the way itself. So they left the bread in some corner and ran into a house, from where they could safely watch the dog eating it.

Within some time, the dog came wagging his tail, sniffed the bread and went back in search of his prey. So, this trick also failed. The team went back and informed the officer about the situation.

The municipality officer lost his temper and ordered that his workers be deployed at every corner of the colony. He announced, that the one who catches the dog, dead or alive, would be rewarded and also given bravery award. It was also advised that the workers could take the help of some of the people living in the colony.

The mad dog was wandering in the colony from morning and was staring at each house as if, it was aware of what was going to happen. Meanwhile, the team arrived according to the plan. Heavily armed, they positioned themselves in every corner of the streets. Around fifty stalwart men surrounded the dog. Immediately, the dog pounced over one of them and he fell on the ground and meanwhile the rest of them attacked the dog with sticks. Within some time, the dog fell on the ground. The dog was motionless and was therefore tied to a rope, dragged to the vehicle and

produced in front of the officer. The officer appreciated his men and ordered them to kill the dog. Men and women congratulated each other and started preparing for the celebration.

5. “Tears” (*Oash*)

Darkness everywhere, heavy rains, and because of thunder and lightning, birds were terrified. So, they would hide themselves under the trees and bushes. The shrieking of cats was coming from some corner. Dogs were hiding under the shops [*wana pachi*],⁵¹ looking at the sky and howling. A couple of owls with eyes full of tears came flying and sat on the branches of a tree and looked very restless. Eagles were soundless with their heads down. No other bird was heard chirping and not a single animal was making any kind of sound. Even the sky looked dull and was shedding tears to demonstrate its unhappiness. Suddenly, somebody shouted, “Fire! Fire!” and a vociferous sound of a car exploding was heard. Within no time, hundreds of people gathered. Safeena’s corpse was taken out of the ambulance and kept under the tree. The birds of all kinds flew to the spot and started singing melancholic songs. The place turned into a chaos and darkness prevailed everywhere. Out of the blue, a huge snake, with a crown on its head came out of a *Chinar*⁵² tree and it was followed by a group of different coloured snakes. The huge snake quickly removed the shroud from Safeena’s face, kissed her forehead, stood near her feet and looked at everybody sitting around. The other snakes whispered something in its ears and

⁵¹ A stand like structure attached to the shop where people mostly sit and chat during the day.

⁵² Known as Oriental Plane, this deciduous tree was planted in Kashmir near Hindu holy places under names derived from the goddess Bhavani.

respectfully took it along with them. Safeena's eyes were wide open, facing the sky, as if conversing with it. Her eyes reflected all the faces of earth which she had been witnessing from her childhood till her death. Her innocent face gave a clear picture of the malevolence of the society, a society which she had fallen a prey to.

She had lost her father when she was five. Her mother lived a very challenging life and could hardly make both ends meet. She worked as a servant in many households to earn a living. And when Safeena turned ten, her mother breathed her last and left her daughter alone in this wretched world. She had none to look after her. They had a next door neighbour who also happened to be their relative and Safeena called her as *kaka*⁵³ with love. Ramzan *kaka* also lived alone in his house. He was a labourer and worked during the day to earn his daily bread. He took her home, where Safeena would take care of all the household activities. She would cook for him and feed him as well.

With the passage of time, Safeena turned into a young woman. She turned out to be an extremely beautiful girl ... like God's own creation. One day after taking bath, Safeena was drying her clothes on the rope and Ramzan *kaka* was gazing at her body parts. He began to lose his mind and started dreaming. His eyes started twinkling. When Safeena went inside, he quickly got up from his place and embraced her. Safeena was embarrassed and felt uncomfortable. She tried to free herself from his arms.... Ramzan *kaka* felt humiliated. He felt like he was caught red-handed.

⁵³ *Kaka* is a common word/name in Kashmiri, used for uncle or a relative who is old.

From that day, Safeena had even stopped smiling. She was always silent and lost in her thoughts. She would sob over her ill fate.

And now, Ramzan *kaka* would return early from his work because he would always think about Safeena. He had stopped acting according to his age and was considered himself a twenty year old boy.

One day he took Safeena in his lap and started playing with her hair, kissing her face and patting her body when suddenly, Bashir, his nephew entered the room. He was astonished to see her and said to himself, “Wow! She is just like a moon.” This did not stop Ramzan *kaka* from anything that he was doing because he was also aware of Bashir’s different faces.

When Ramzan *kaka* would go out for work, Bashir would try to assault her but would always fail. She would not let him succeed in his vicious plans. Bashir did not like it at all and would always look for a chance to grab her and take revenge. He bad-mouthed Safeena to Ramzan *kaka* and this way both of them plotted and sold her to a thug.

It was midnight, Ramzan *kaka* was sleeping by her side as usual. He got up slowly and made her smell something because of which she became unconscious. Then both Ramzan and Bashir put her in a vehicle.

The moment Safeena was conscious, she looked at everybody around and found a short but fat women sitting near her pillow. Her lips were hot red, eyes decorated

with *surma*, and hands and feet beautified with henna. She had a *hukka* with a long pipe in front of her and a group of five girls around her. She looked at Safeena and said, "Gorgeous and angelical!" She patted her hair and then Safeena was made to take a shower. She was beautified as a bride and then carried to a large hall. The same lady with a *hukka* was relaxing against a pillow and welcoming the customers. Very rich and dignified men would come from faraway places to visit this place. The hall was redecorated. The musicians started playing music. When people saw Safeena, they all started appreciating her beauty. Every customer got attracted to her and every one of them was ready to pay the highest amount. A well-off man, a little old, wearing a cap covering his half head, *surma* in his eyes, almost drunk paid the highest amount. Hence Safeena was sold to him.

The room was decorated with garlands of flowers and cardamom. The room was scented with perfumes made of roses. With the help of two girls, Safeena was brought inside the room and the door was closed immediately. The old man was continuously looking at the door and eagerly waiting, as if waiting for a full moon. The moment he saw her, he said, "Come quickly. I have been madly waiting for you. I don't have any more patience." He held her hand and dragged her towards him. Safeena's body was shivering with anger. She quickly flicked her hands from his. He really liked it and started appreciating her organs. He said, "You will be my queen. I am not short of anything. I will provide you with everything you want." She again gave him an angry look. He didn't like it, so dragged her towards him and said, "Anything that I like, I own it at any cost! You are just an example. I have bought you. Whatever, and in whichever way I want, I can...enjoy your beauty." After saying this, he started manhandling her. Safeena screamed but all in vain. And

there was silence for some time. Safeena got up, arranged her clothes and went near the place where two glasses of milk were kept. While he was relaxing, she quickly took one of glasses in her hand, broke it, injured him and killed herself. She was immediately rushed to hospital but she was already dead.

SECTION B: TARANNUM REYAZ

Tarannum Reyaz, one of the famous Kashmiri women writers writing in Urdu was born (August 9, 1963) and brought up in a highly educated family in Srinagar, Kashmir but is currently living in Delhi. She holds Masters in Urdu and Masters in Education. A poet, short story writer, translator, critic and novelist, Tarannum Reyaz has to her credit four collections of short stories: *Yeh Tang Zameen* (1998), *Ababeelain Laut Aaengi* (2000), *Mera Rakhte Safar* (2008), *Yimberzal* (2002), one collection of poetry: *Purani Kitaabon ki Khusbhu* (2005), two novels: *Moorti* (2002), *Barf Aashna Parindey* (2009), four novellas: *Fareb-e-Khitta-e-Gul* (2008), critical essays: *Chashme Naqshe Kadam* (2005) and an anthology: *Beeswi Sadi mein Khawateen ka Urdu Adab* (2005). She has worked on television and radio for several years as an Urdu news broadcaster, translator and organizer of literary and cultural programmes. She has received various awards, namely: Delhi Urdu Academy Fiction Award (3 times), Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy Fiction Award, Sahir Ludhyanvi Adeeb International Award, Rasa Javedani Memorial Award, among others.

Tarannum believes that her writings are shaped by events and not by anyone else's writing. In an interview she says, "There is no one who I feel has inspired me but simultaneously anything could inspire me. It may be sadness, environment, and sequence of any event or other factors as there are no hard and fast rules for my inspiration to write" (Personal interview). However, she does acknowledge the role of prominent female Urdu writers who have enriched the language and the literary tradition, like Qurat-ul ain Haider, Ismat Chughtai, Zahida Hina, Bano Qudsia,

Wajida Tabasum and Zakiya Mashadi. Tarannum admires the poetry of Shafiq Fatima Shera of Aurangabad and Kishwar Nahid of Pakistan, Azra Parveen of Lucknow, Shehnaz Nabi of Kolkata.

Commenting on the status of Urdu language in Jammu and Kashmir, she cautions that Urdu has been sidetracked by Hindi and Punjabi. She says, “People generally speak Hindustani rather than converse in Urdu and this is due to viewership of Hindi films at homes and even at school level, not much has been done to inculcate real Urdu lessons to students opting for Urdu for better understanding of language” (Personal Interview with Neerja Mattoo). She is hopeful of seeing positive growth of Urdu in Kashmir and says “Even though people at times tend to ignore the language but if one visits number of bookshops in the Valley, you will find a lot of quality writing in the form of books by new authors and writers which is encouraging for future of Urdu language in Jammu and Kashmir” (Personal Interview with Neerja Mattoo).

TRANSLATION OF FOUR SHORT STORIES BY TARANNUM REYAZ

1. “An Atheist” (*Nakhuda*)

I had never thought I would be all alone once *Amma* leaves. Weak and helpless! My husband would continue with the same behavior and I would again be abandoned. As usual in the darkness, I would have to wait outside on the stairs and he would turn up in the middle of the night ... food at odd times and the same amorphous/unstructured life. I would go around him with eyes full of love and he

would talk, if at all, very brusquely/harshly. He would barely respond to what I say or at times completely pay no heed to me whilst I would be eagerly awaiting his response. Me, a helpless soul and he, too conceited.

I embraced my *Amma* while saying the last goodbye to her at the airport ... irrepressible tears running down my eyes ... almost impossible to stop the ocean which broke its bounds and I completely broke down in *Amma's* arms. She continued holding me close to her heart but how would she calm me down! Unrequited love of *Amma* ... true and warm love! *Amma*, 70 years old, almost looked like a skeletal, scrawny and weak body. Obviously there was nothing in *Amma* which could be related to strength, but then what was it which made me feel so very strong? How would I get the hope that I have the ability to live the rest of my life ... where would I get that much courage from!!!

Anyways! After seeing off *Amma* that day, my husband dropped me at home and went outside ... again my heart was clouded with the sorrows.... Why did you go back *Amma*? Why did you visit for a short while that ... I....

The phase of helplessness that I was going through before your visit has again come into play time and again such thoughts were coming to my mind.... I was getting more and more depressed/distraught ... everything around looked so dark and gloomy all over again.

Amma had met me after a gap of two years and cried her heart out. I was getting dejected with everything around. I was depressed to such an extent that very often I would totally forget who I was! Now I was only a homemaker/lady of the house and

a mother of his child. He was not interested in me any longer.

Amma was dumbfounded to see me in this condition....she would only ask me, “What has happened to you my child ... why is this beautiful face clouded with wretchedness? Comatose and lifelessness!! Oh those beautiful eyes ... those gorgeous curls ... have you been unwell ... then how did this happen all of a sudden ... the climate here doesn’t suit you ... what happened to my daughter?”

I also started weeping with *Amma* without saying anything. I didn’t have any evidence/proof against him. Don’t know what kind of poison he had inserted in my veins which would dry my blood slowly. I wouldn’t understand anything at all. Sometimes I would think this and sometimes that.... I would only question myself and answer as well. I would weep when I would get tired ... for hours together.... After staying with me for some days, *Amma* probably understood everything.

My marriage happened according to my own choice but I did not elope which would stop me from sharing my problems with my family members. Then who would I share this with? My brothers were living across the sea with my sisters-in-law. Now only *Amma* was there who was staying alone in her ancestral home. I did not want to upset her by telling her about my problems. How would I tell her that I am taking care of all household things ... looking after *Munni* and all. How would I say that he comes back home late in the nights ... gets in for some time and goes back again whenever he feels like. And I would only console myself by shedding tears ... these tears had become the most important part of my life. I was fed up with the questions, criticism and the like by different people. I was clueless about the reason behind all

this.

In case I request or remand anything, he would respond with such indifference that I wouldn't dare ask any more questions which could be because he was freer in this city ... nobody knew him ... no relative around ... no friends to question, so he didn't have to repent or feel ashamed for his misbehavior. He would say/do everything according to his own choice. He would very well take care of himself. He always said that because of me only he wouldn't feel like staying at home ... and that I lacked something he wanted to see in me. Then was it the same with *Munni* also...?

God knows what *Amma* understood out of all this! She would ask me what if she wouldn't have turned up..., "my daughter would have gone mad or even died." It was *Amma* who constantly tried to convince me that apart from tolerating the viciousness/violent behavior of my husband there is something more in my life ... a little soul ... *Munni*, who is unintentionally becoming the prey of my carelessness and negligence. *Amma* is the one who made me realize that I exist and have my own life which I had completely forgotten by God! *Amma* persuaded me to live my life ... she actually added life to my body which was almost dead. Once again *Amma* gave birth to me! Once again I started living my life otherwise because of that slow-poisoning I was going to get killed gradually. Giving away one's life is equal to taking away somebody's life ... and who would have taken care of my beautiful doll after my death? ... away from our people ... away from our home ... a new environment ... an immoral husband. Anyways, he remained the same tyrant ... the same oppressor ... and I, the same anxious soul! My eyes would always crave for a

moment of peace. God know why he would always showcase his carelessness; behave like a victimizer and I would have to live like a victim.

I think men act in two different ways when it comes to love. One who gives and receives love from his beloved and feel that their life is complete. They do understand the fact that the whole atmosphere in the house revolves around a woman and that any kind of instability in her mind directly impinges on everything in the house. If she is happy and contented, every corner in the house overflows with happiness ... the house looks beautiful and ideal. Everything in the house looks peaceful ... children look contented and the husband satisfied! Otherwise ... the house doesn't look like a house, rather a worthless place constituting of barren rooms ... lost children growing with a comatose mother and children fed up with the unpleasant atmosphere of the house.

The other category includes men with a different behaviour. It means when he realizes that the woman loves him; he starts showing arrogance and pompousness. To put it in a better way, his behavior says it all, which would mean that because he possesses such a perfect personality, anyone can fall in love with him.

My husband belonged to this category. To put it in plain words, he had taken me for granted as he had realized how madly I loved him. He probably thought that he was successful in suppressing me because of his behavior, and if I also started going out he would also have to share the loneliness that I felt at home. He would think that I stopped my education because he had so much control over my life. I would neither visit University nor library, not because of this reason but because I was extremely

sad that I didn't even wish to live. How on earth would I feel like studying!!

And I decided to do something to get rid of this entire situation. First of all, I should make him realize that I neither need his sympathy nor is he all that important as he thinks he is. Instead he should realize that I am equally important for him and his family as well. After completing M.A., I wanted to go for Ph.D., but he would always fight with me saying, "Are you telling me that I should take care of children and you will go for studies? Just forget it! Why did you get married if you were so much concerned about your carrier? These two things never go together." I would automatically shut myself up as I didn't have any answer for such questions.

Do I have to spend my life fulfilling all his wishes by sacrificing all my dreams and desires ... all for his happiness? What about my dream of getting higher education ... will it never find fulfillment?

Does marriage put an end to a woman's carrier? If a man is capable of handling house and the carrier at the same time a woman can also. I have seen married women working as well, then why this injustice to me? But I didn't say any such thing to him neither could he continue with this behaviour any longer.

When *Ami* was here, he would behave normally and with the passage of time, tried hard to bring about a change in his behaviour. He would come home on time either because of the fear of *Ami*'s pious and sanctimonious personality or because he respected the elderliness in her. An unexpected change in the environment at home was felt ... strange as it was ... that self-importance and arrogance in him also started

diminishing slowly! And because of this I was also kind of relieved and everything was getting back to normalcy. Slowly *Ami* helped me get out of the well of death ... the well which was limitlessly deep ... I must say bottomless! I was falling in it unknowingly. *Ami* gradually dragged me towards the things which were of my interest. She would help me in carrying out household chore and now I had plenty of time to think about my future ... and encourage myself. With the passage of time, I actually began to live a normal life. I took admission in M.Phil.; visited libraries and this way started my educational journey once again. Now I also began to take care of myself, especially my health.

My mother was with us for three months and during these three months I got back my lost paradise. I lived these three month in extreme happiness that all the wretchedness of the past two months was washed away from my mind. *Amma* stood like a firm wall between me and my sorrows. I could see a lot of change in me ... thick and beautiful hair ... eyes full of light. However today after sending off *Amma* I looked into the mirror with eyes full of tears and realized that I was certainly looking as beautiful as before but my moist eyes reminded me of the earlier helplessness and the “lifeless” me! Suddenly my husband declared that he is going out and would be back late in the night. I was taken aback, my heart was flooded with pain and I felt like a branch of a tree which was just chopped off. I looked at him with my eyes full of haplessness and the feeling of loss brimmed over me. My legs started trembling and before I would take the help of the wall as always ... to silence myself and get away from the place ... I was supported by two old and weak arms.... The blood in my veins started flowing very fast ... my feet were freezing ... but suddenly a slight fever ran through my feet and my body was overflowed with a

great zeal, vehemence and courage. I tried to control my emotions and said in a very normal tone: “I have a lot of work to do today so, you stay at home till I get back.”

Earlier *Ami* would take care of *Munni* while two of us would be away. But now the circumstances were completely different. Probably, he didn’t expect any such response from me, perhaps he thought....

He would again start living a King’s life. I would also think the same way but nothing like this happened. I could see myself as someone who wishes to live her life. I kept looking at his face which changed many colours and finally turned red. Then his face looked normal and in a very friendly tone he said, “Come, let us tie-up.”

2. “Cradle” (*Paalna*)

While lying in bed in the hospital, I was lost in some strange thoughts and I again heard it screaming. I got restless and impatient all over again. My heart started aching and I felt like calling its mother who was sleeping on the other bed but I couldn’t do it this time.... I was getting scared of her.

I was unwell even on this day. My blood pressure was high as well. Doctors had advised me to not to change my posture time and again. I was not even able to sit

properly but I fixed my eyes at his cradle. I wished I had a rope so that I could tie it with the cradle and swing it softly ... to not to trouble the most beautiful flower which bloomed last night only. In case it happens I would cuddle it in my lap ... the one with pink cheeks ... keep it close to my heart. I would gently touch the black, silky and soft hair with my lips ... wipe away his tears because it would pierce my heart the moment it cried. I would wonder how the motherly love is developing within me and I would cry my heart out.

How long am I supposed to take the bed rest? I was fed up with lying on the bed like this all the time. It has just been three years that I had taken bed rest in a nursing home ... and then ... I could feel the tiny feet moving inside my belly. Thanks to it for diverting my attention otherwise I was getting lost in some strange thoughts. Doctors had seriously advised me to completely avoid unpleasant thoughts as if we have control over our mind! For me it was impossible to control my mind. I had been living with this sore in my heart for the last three years and that I had no control over this. Very often I think that why did it happen to me but yes, many others have the right to think the same. What is so special about me! But of course there was something special in me that right from my youth I had a lot of love and affection for babies not only by humans but animals as well. But why is it that the things we love the most go away from us?

That night also I was lying in the hospital, almost motionless! I was admitted because of labour pains. The senior doctor, before leaving for home handed me over to the junior doctor saying that the expected time of the delivery is 5 am. I was dying of pain the whole night and because of some problems back home nobody was with

me. My aunt had died that day only because of which everybody had gone to her house. Neither my sister nor my mother was there and my husband was sitting outside all alone, sad and restless.

Later we came to know that the junior doctor had taken twelve years to complete MBBS. Around 4:30 am, I started getting severe pain and the junior doctor came with a group of nurses and said, “There is still half an hour and because you are screaming many patients are getting disturbed. At 5:00 am the vehicle will be sent to pick up madam.” I couldn’t stop weeping and kept on pleading them to take me to the theatre and do the operation or else I would die. God forbid something might happen to my child!

She didn’t care about anything I said and went on believing that after 5:00 am only something can be done as decided by her madam. As if Madam was some expert magician and that there was no possibility of her coming late. I was dying with pain. My throat was getting dry because of screaming. I was feeling so miserable and weak that I couldn’t even describe my condition to her. Moreover nobody was in a mood to listen to me and I was immature, unintelligent and inexperienced. Exactly at 4:45 am I had intolerable pain and I felt like breaking all the chains that I was caught in...was tossing my arms and legs ... every other second I would feel unconscious and the moment I was conscious I would feel like every moment was equivalent to hundred years ... such pain! Before we started from home, I had plaited my hair very tightly and I didn’t realize when it came out. My hair was breaking every time I tossed about restlessly. Not only this, my hands, fingers and even nails were hurting whenever I was writhing in pain. And also because of the intolerable

pain I wounded my lips very badly. My only wish was to cut my body apart to save myself from the severe pangs of pain but nobody was sympathetic towards me. No time for me!

Subsequently, I felt that my child was shuddering and struggling and this was probably its last attempt to come out. At last a nurse showed up. Much to my disappointment, she was smiling while I was crying my heart out and even my eyes and my throat had dried off because of crying and screaming. With a big smile on her face, in a typical north Indian tone she said, “Why are you irritating? Within some time the driver will go to pick up madam. Sleep, Sleep!” Then she checked the fetal heart beat with the help of stethoscope. After this she ran and came back with another doctor and she also checked the fetal heart beat. Immediately I was rushed to the operation theatre and a vehicle was sent for madam. Somehow she came and I gave birth to very healthy (say around ten kilos) and beautiful son ... but....

But nobody heard its first cry. He was lying on a table in front of me. He looked extremely handsome ... with curly hair ... as beautiful as a flower; my *Munna* was silent with eyes shut. For some time madam tried to pump oxygen through his lifeless lips into his lungs but his delicate neck was falling on either sides. His nose and lips looked very beautiful. His eyes, though closed looked really big like his aunt's (father's sister), nevertheless I kept wondering about the colour of his eyes. He neither opened his eyes nor could I hear his voice! He was lying there lifeless in front of me. Just before some time he was struggling inside my belly probably trying for his last attempt for survival. It was so agonizing that my whole body shuddered. That must have been the time when he breathed his last and that is why that nurse was running!

In the morning, a notice was pasted in the delivery column of the notice board which said that the reason for his death was ‘chord asphyxia,’ which would mean that the death was caused because of a failure to start regular respiration within a minute of birth. Nevertheless, I knew this was not the truth and this was not at all the reason for his death. I needed their help and support to give birth to my baby which they didn’t provide because of their negligence. My *Munna* died because he stayed in my belly without getting adequate oxygen. He didn’t get oxygen from his mother. He could have breathed his own! How ill-fated was he that he didn’t even get a single breath of oxygen from this world! Who would I blame? Why on earth did I come to this nursing home, just because it had a good name? If they really had a couple of good doctors then I wouldn’t have to witness this loss, these tears and this feeling of loneliness! If they had a good equipment to provide oxygen, then this part of my soul would not be lying lifeless in front of my eyes! I wouldn’t have been disconsolate and dejected!

Then they took him away from me. I could only touch his face while he was being carried away. I felt a sharp stabbing pain through my heart. Out of breath I cried my heart out. I wished I could just die. Don’t know why I didn’t. I have been living with this intolerable pain in my heart.

After some time two nurses with half covered faces stood in front of me. I was getting sharp pains in my heart. I was soaked in tears. My lap was deserted. Uncontrollable tears running down my eyes! The cradle near my bed was empty. The nurses were carrying huge syringes. My baby was already barred from food and

now the stream of milk, which was the witness for him being a part of me, was also drying slowly. Had he been with me I would have been a complete mother!

Perhaps I would have been embracing him at this moment and I would be caressing his cute little head. I would be observing his tiny body. While he was growing within me, I would forget all my anxieties that would occupy my mind. I would be looking at his feet to make sure that they are in perfect shape and, and see if all his fingers are all right. I would see if his hands are like mine or they resemble his father's. But his cold and white body was already buried deep under the soil. How would I get him back? Where would I find him? My baby, my flower! Why are these tears uncontrollable today? Doctors had advised me to keep myself stress free. This would harm me and also the flower which is budding inside me after a long time. Then why was I thinking about all that? I should forget it.

The baby in the cradle nearby was still crying and his mother was sleeping inconsiderately. Many a times I woke her up but I did understand her pain. She was relieved after giving birth to him because of which she wasn't able to wake up. But I had to wake her up and probably she did not like it.

I kept wondering what happened to people, why they are so careless or it is that I am too cautious! She is his mother but she must be thinking what if he cries for some time, he is just a child. But I couldn't tolerate any such thing.

The first time I woke her up, she switched on the tube light and I could see a drop of tear shining at the corner of the baby's tiny eye and the eyebrows were yet to grow.

This time she quickly got up and calmed him down. The second time I called her, she kept staring at me for some time. She definitely did not like it. Had this cute little soul not cried, I would not have disturbed her sleep. It was very difficult for me to see the baby crying. The third time I woke her up, she said in a bitter tone, “Sorry! You are not able to sleep because he is crying that is why the moment he cries, you wake me up.” Then she got busy feeding him. It was impossible to make her understand that I wasn’t getting disturbed but I would lose my calm and composure when I hear him cry. His first cry is definitely the most important but if he cries the whole night, it would also mean that he is not fine and is going through some pain. He would also be exhausted as he had put a lot of effort coming to this world. In fact he should be sleeping for a couple of hours at least. I was incapable to explain to her that children belong to all of us and not only me or her.

Had I not woken her up, the baby would not have stopped crying at all. Then what all would have happened ... that cradle ... no, no, nothing like that is going to happen. I would get restless whenever I looked at the cradle. Probably I would die thinking about it. And this cute little soul ... but why should I get scared of his mother? The child might be hungry. He sleeps after taking only two or three drops of milk. If he continues crying like this, his umbilical cord might get injured. Anyway, I have to wake her up again. Whatsoever happens! So I decided to wake her up. I called her and confidently turned the other side.

3. “Straws/Particles” (*Tinkey*)

By chance I met her after so many years and I was really surprised. She called me in a very low and sweet tone and that is how I recognized her. I had actually seen her passing by and for a moment I did think it was her but then I told myself that I am wrong and it can't be her. A little bit of familiarity can be seen in most of the things around us, but that face was quite different ... unique, I felt. But she had changed so much and that I thought would be one of reasons that I didn't recognize her. The only thing that still existed in her was the feeling of insecurity in her eyes which was always felt even when she was a child. Did she get married but then there is no guaranty that a woman would feel secure after marriage!

Both of us studied in one of the best English medium schools of the city. She was my class fellow and was very dear to me. The silent impressions on her face would always impress me. Our friendship was confined to school only. We had never even visited each other's house but one day she took the initiative and invited me home. I was so happy and I kept on asking the reason for being invited. She replied by saying that a bride is going to come to our home. I thought to myself that neither does she have an elder brother who would be getting married nor is there any such close relative. Neither was she a fool nor I innocent. I was left with countless unanswered questions as she did not answer any of them.

Anyway, I reached her house in the evening but didn't see much jollity though from the ambiance, one would understand that some kind of function is happening. She introduced me to everyone; her three cute little sisters, her father and her grandmother. I sat with her grand-mother and she started talking to me exactly the way they talk to kids of my age. She discussed about my studies and my engagements

and all but she was not aware that even at that stage of my life I was as mature as I am today. And I would go to the depth of everything to know and understand whatever I wanted to.

My anxiety was that nobody told me till now that whose bride is coming!

Lost in many thoughts, I was moving my legs while sitting on the sofa near her grand-mother when all of a sudden a very beautiful dog come up to us. I felt like touching his soft white hair and I had almost made my mind when it suddenly started barking at me at the top of its voice.

Quietly, I moved closer to *Dadi Jaan* (grandmother) who promptly attended to the dog and said “Shut up-go-go.” The moment she said this, the dog was soundless and left the place while wagging its tail. I was almost breathless till now. Good that the dog understood English.

I was still thinking about this incident when out of the blue a woman wearing a black scarf entered and kept the tea flask and left the room. I could not help but observe her because her face was covered and only the left side of her face was visible. This part of her face looked so beautiful even though rest of it was covered with a black scarf.

I just asked *Dadi Jaan*, “who is she?” After some time with great difficulty she said, “this ... this ... this hmmm....” Meanwhile the same lady entered the room again with a tray in her hand which contained breakfast. This time I observed her more

carefully. Her scarf was slipping from her head and the moment she put it arranged it, I saw both her eyes. Very big, black, extremely beautiful eyes ... but very serious.... Her hands were shivering. Gently putting her delicate feet on the floor, she went back. While arranging her scarf again, a very sorrowful/mourning sound was made by her bangles.

I was neither interested in the fragrance of tea nor in *barfi*. So I got up from my place to look for my friend who I finally found in kitchen. She was talking to someone. She got me out from that place the moment she saw me and again made me sit on the sofa between her and her *Dadi Jaan*. I started getting annoyed and irritated with her. It was getting more and more difficult for me to control my anger when suddenly with her cute little hands she put a piece of *barfi* in my mouth. The bitterness in my mind got mixed with the sweetness of *barfi*.

Her *Abba* (father) passed from there and called her inside. He was of a different kind of nature. Almost everyone was happy there. He must have been around 48-50 years old.

I did not wait for the bride to come and don't know why was very sad and left the place.

My friend didn't come to school for a couple of days and everything got back to normalcy with the passage of time. I didn't ask her anything about the bride. After a couple of days I went to her house and everyone was sitting in the lawn. That is to say, her younger sister, her father and a young girl, must have been around 18 years

old, with bridal make-up was quietly sitting on the sofa near grandmother. My friend's father was playing with kids ... three cute little girls were moving around him. Suddenly they jumped over the sofa and dragged the girl who was sitting with grandmother and made her play with them. Their father was also running and playing with them. The girl was shy in the beginning but within some time felt relaxed and got busy playing with the kids. This whole thing continued for a long time. After some time my friend's father tried running at the speed of this girl but failed and finally came and sat on the sofa while breathing heavily. He gave a sly look to the house just like a thief and quickly turned the other side.

This particular day cleared all my doubts! I just walked towards the drawing room which was filled with guests during the last gathering. I could not take my eyes off a photo which was lying among others in a decorated showcase. It had that beautiful girl (who had covered her face with black scarf) wearing a red coloured dress standing with my friend's father. Both of them looked happy and contented. Those shining eyes had some dreams in them in this photograph....

There was one more photograph, a fresh one; outside the showcase with my friend's father with tintured moustaches with the same girl ... I didn't feel like looking at it. Then I happened to stroll towards the kitchen and I saw the same girl with black scarf busy cooking different kinds of dishes. I could only see half of her face. Her lips were fixed in such a way that it looked like she would never talk ... and it seemed that she had tied her hair some days back. She was busy doing her work like a robot ... felt like a dead body was moving. She was taking deep breaths time and again but was working with a good pace. She was working like machine that knows

the next work to be done. Unlike the photo in the drawing room, her neck looked twisted as if her shoulders couldn't carry the weight of her neck.

She was damn busy with her work and lost in her thoughts ... lean ... weak and feeble ... as if her life was meaningless and her birth useless!

She had not seen me till now. All of a sudden she turned towards the door and saw me. She didn't say a word! She just looked at me and got busy with her work again. I saw marks of some stitches on her nose and it was almost bent. Her beautiful face had become spotted and stained but still none could replace her. What crime had she committed for which she got this punishment!

My friend told me that this was the outcome of an accident wherein her mother (the woman in black scarf) got badly injured while saving her husband ... the criminal was equitable ... whose wife without caring about herself lost her beauty while saving him. He ... yes, he had been blaming her for not giving birth to a baby boy. My friend's grandmother had also distanced herself from her daughter-in-law for the same reason. The result was that my friend's father married a girl of his daughter's age. I was shocked out of my wits! I am still not able to get that traumatic incident out of my mind. At that age, that woman without saying anything to me had taught me a lot of things. She made a very strong impression on my mind. What kind of relation is this after all ... blood relation, friendship, love? No! Love makes no requisition! Does appearance really matter and to this extent? How can human beings make each other's life miserable!

The story didn't end here. Next time I visited my friend, the bride was pregnant ... *Dadi Jaan* and *Abba* (my friend's father) were extremely happy. The environment was such that it looked like somebody was getting married. *Dadi Jaan* had already started knitting socks and sweaters of different colours. She would proudly say that "the new bride is going to deliver a baby boy while as the earlier one was born to deliver baby girls only."

A lot of toys were bought for the upcoming baby the same way as was done on my friend's birth. Rest of her three sisters had to compromise with only broken toys. My friend who was also studying in convent school was not permitted to go there anymore as she was given the responsibility to take care of the new mother (bride). Though very young but mature enough, these little girls would feel depressed about their mother's miserable and despondent life.

My friend's father would always stay in the bride's room and my friend would serve them the dishes prepared by her mother.

As a result, her mother was getting weaker and weaker day by day. She had turned pale and her eyes full of sadness and misery. She would not meet anybody anymore but stay alone all the time.

The house looked sorrowful and desolate except for the bride's room. Her room was the only bright thing in the whole house and the brightness of the room could be compared to a table-lamp which only brightens the place nearest to it and leaves rest of the place in darkness.

After all, how was this woman able to live, who now looked more like a skeleton!

What is the purpose of her existence ... perhaps ... to make these sweet little girls realize the reality of life! Just because of the huge size of younger daughter-in-law's belly, *Dadi Jaan* was confident enough that the upcoming baby was a boy but only almighty has the knowledge of it all. She gave birth to a healthy baby girl but was still given the treatment of a new bride. Her husband was proud of the fact that he had married a girl half his age and that she would hardly understand what he was doing in his life. She would also never bother him or interfere in any of his matters so he was completely free and independent. He would come and go out of his home whenever he wished to as she would never question him. He would proudly tell everyone that he was very fortunate to have her in his life and that she has added colour to his life. Of course there was a huge difference between his first wife and his second wife! The first one was extremely possessive and would take account of each and every moment of his day. She would cry her heart out whenever he got home late and would ask him hundreds of questions.

Sometimes I would notice very strange things happening out there. My friend's father had changed a lot and seemed dismay with this new life. He would do strange things while playing with his newly born daughter ... he would revolve around her and at times take deep breaths while hiding from his wife. However the new bride/mother was aware of all this and was kind of fed up with everything around her and within a couple of days came to know about the reason behind it.

One of her cousin brothers almost her age would always come to visit her but had stopped visiting for a couple of days. She looked quite and restless and discontent. One fine day, without anybody's knowledge, she came up to me and said, "Could you please write a letter for me without telling anyone?" I accepted and starting writing the letter. I was half way through when all of a sudden her husband entered the room. The relation of a husband and a wife is such that it is impossible to hide things from each other. I think he was also suspecting her for quite some time and that day all this doubts were cleared.

After that I never went there and today I met this dear friend of mine after a long time. The first question I asked her was whether her mom was doing fine and how her [my friend's] life was going on.

Her mother was living more or less like a dead body for so many years. But the day my friend's father saw the letter, he came to know about many things. He had understood that though the new bride was lucky enough for him but had brought bad name not only to him but to the entire family. He did feel proud about the fact that he could marry a girl much younger to him but everybody felt that he destroyed the life of a very young girl. Now he had realized the true meaning of this relation which was actually fake.

Suddenly he had started thinking about all the sins that he had committed. He realized that he was running a race where defeat/failure was certain. At this age where would he get the pace of the youngsters! So it was understood that he would have to lose this game, either he would leave her or she would leave him and go.

However, what exactly happened was that one day her real brother came to visit her. She went along with him and never did she return.

Now it was incredibly difficult for him ... to face this miserable wife of his.

She was staying in the last room of the house where she had been bedridden from a couple of months now. She had not been to the rest of the house for quite some time and it appeared useless to her. She was unable to do anything and was even breathing with great difficulty. She had completely forgotten how to walk, laugh and even eat or drink. She had tried to live even if it was extremely painful and difficult to. She had tried very hard to compromise with the circumstances she was put through but nothing helped. She was left alone to live and die with her miseries.

Slowly he walked towards her room but stopped exactly at the door.

He turned his eyes around and somehow gathered the strength and entered the desolate room but didn't utter a word. Two lifeless eyes were continuously gazing at him. He moved forward and tried to hold her feet, small but cold ... but no one knows when ... they had become lifeless. They didn't feel anything. After witnessing this, he also could not live for a long time and my friend was left all alone in this world. She didn't lose hope and with great courage she taught her younger sisters and got them married as well.

Her mother was living and dying every now and then. She was witness to countless tragic and distressing incidents. The most tragic of all was when *Abba* (father) would enjoy with his new bride/wife and my friend's mother would observe the

whole scene ... aghast and terrified and slowly walk towards her desolate room ... bang her head on the wall and cry her heart out. My friend would watch all this silently, sometimes peep through the door and then quietly sit in one corner of the house and cry uncontrollably. So, I didn't have courage to ask any more questions like whether she got married or not!

4. “The World So Confined” (*Yeh Tang Zameen*)

I was a little upset the moment I saw all the beautiful toys that I had bought for him. They were lying in the corner. With so much enthusiasm, I had bought these toys for him ... this small piano ... a small guitar ... a talking parrot ... a teddy bear beating the drum ... a singing nightingale and mostly importantly, the piano; it would create hundreds of tunes plus the tones of all the musical instruments. But he had not even touched them. He was madly in love with such toys then what made him change! Didn't he consider himself as my child or did he not find me affectionate anymore! The one who I embraced and loved as someone closest to my heart! The one who gave life to the mother in me, when I had lost my first fruit after it lived for a couple of seconds! The sleepless nights, when my eyes had dried of tears, and my lips had turned lifeless and out of tune/inharmonious before singing lullabies. That is (around 11 pm) when my husband came up to me holding him in his hands. He was wearing a cute tweed *phiran* and the moment he saw me, like a robot he said, “Aunty don't cry. I am here. Now don't cry.” This is what his uncle had trained him to say to me. I wiped my tears, went closer, hugged and clasped him close to my heart. I held his face (which was chilling because of cold) close to my smoldering/blazing heart. The

blood that was pouring from my heart stopped gradually. While his curly hair was getting washed away by my tears, I just replied,

“Shouldn’t I cry? Would you stay with me and not go to your *Amma*? Would you stay with only aunty?”

He said, “Yes, I will stay with aunty only. Would I get biscuits and chocolates every day?” He, instead of eating half of the chocolate in his hand, he applied it on his face and wiped it off quickly. He then put his hand in the *phiran* pocket to grab another chocolate and biscuit.

I gained a lot of patience from this.

He was my sister’s son and my husband had got him along to console both me and himself. Whenever he was around, I would tend to forget the most unfortunate incident that had happened to me. Not that I had completely forgotten it but his presence would console me to a great extent. He would stay with me for a couple of months and whenever his mom would come to take him away for a day or so, he would promise me the exact date of returning. And after leaving he would harass them to drop him back and would come back before the promised date. Knowing the pain in my heart, even his mother wouldn’t stop him and everything would look lively the moment he entered the house. His habits also were awe-inspiring and out of the world. His nature was such that he was always seen playing in the lawn and he would almost feel imprisoned inside the house. Wearing pretty shoes, taking small but fast steps, he would hold my hand and come out of the house. As soon as

he comes out of the house, he would observe flowers, chase butterflies, shoo away the hidden frogs and step out of the gate. From there, along with the *Chinar* trees, he could see the lake. He would stay there for a long time and fix his eyes at the lake. With the support of a small branch of *Chinar* tree, he would whirl around or would hide in the hollow stem and ask me to search for him. I would go inside time and again to make sure that by seeing me leave, he would follow me and get inside the house but nothing would work. I would have to come out again to look for him and i would find him relaxing on the green grass and gazing at the blue sky. He would wait for the whole day to listen to the chirping of birds. At dusk, the different kinds of birds, before getting inside their nests would sit together on the branches of the *Chinar* tree and make all kinds of sounds. He would seem to be lost in the whole scene. He would ask me their names and would try to memorize them by saying; this is sparrow, that a parrot, this a crow, that is and would recognize every bird's tune and even imitate each of them. If a bird would change its place by just moving from the lower branch to the upper one, he would look for it for a long time to come back. No matter what, he would observe each and everything about these birds; their movements, their way of grabbing food and feeding their little ones, the way they build their nests. In case he was not able see anything clearly, he would quickly go inside and grab his telescope and carry on with his keen observation. As a result, I lost interest in doing other things and instead, regard his intelligence and innocence. This was something that I would enjoy the most. Moreover, I would make use of his innocence by making him eat while he would be busy in his own world. Otherwise, he would just fall asleep while thinking about the moon and gazing at the stars. In the morning he would be seen looking at how the woodpecker gets hold of small insects from soil.

When my husband would go out of the house, we would always talk about him on the phone. He had become a part of our life. He was incredibly intelligent and had a magnificent memory power. He had an amazing sense of music that whichever musical instrument you give to him, he would create/invent his own tone and play for hours together. Never would he feel exhausted ... his cute little hands and feet ... sometimes one leg forward and sometimes backward ... sometimes one leg on the pillow and sometimes jumping on the pillow with both legs ... and both hands flying in the air ... and head moving right and at times left in such a way that in every action, there was a rhythm. He would sweat like anything. I would watch him doing all this and laugh my guts out and then would clasp him in my arms. He would look at me very curiously, wanting to go back and continue doing whatever he had been. I would cuddle him and ask:

“Just close your eyes.” He would close his eyes, almost wink.

“Where did you get these eyelashes from?”

Very innocently he would reply, “From market.”

“How much did you pay?”

“Two rupees,” he would quickly say while opening his eyes wide. Every conversation with him would convince me that life is not meaningless. His being in my life had put an end to all my miseries and also lessened my emotional instability. Almighty has bestowed me with a child.

With the passage of time he was admitted in a school and now he would only visit us during weekends. Nonetheless, within a year I got transferred from there and we had to leave the place. Parting and saying goodbye to him and the pain that it caused

to me was almost impossible to tolerate. I had always treated him as my first child and would crave to see him, exactly like a mother would, for her own child. Moreover, he had started his childhood in my lap only and also acquainted me with love, warmth and affection.

He would also remember both of us and would crave to meet us. Now phone was the only hope and we would talk over phone for a long time. I would say, “Close your eyes” and he would quickly close his eyes. I would again ask where he got them from, to which he would promptly respond, “from market ... for two rupees.” He wouldn’t even realize that I can’t see him closing his eyes but his mother would tell me whatever he did while talking to me.

Three years passed. Sometimes the phone would connect and sometimes it wouldn’t and talking to him was not possible but my love for him never reduced. I would miss him so badly that my eyes would get filled with tears the moment I thought about him. My heart would yearn to meet him and my arms would eagerly wait to hug him. My heart would writhe in pain but I would somehow console myself ... I would look at my children and find solace ... and this is how I would comfort myself and of course, he was the one who had taught me how to be patient. Many a times, we had planned to meet them and so had they, but none of the plans actually worked partly because of the weather here and the situation there. And they finally came when winter had just started. I could not believe my eyes the moment I saw them. He had grown taller ... was talking lesser than before ... stammering had reduced ... but as cute and good-looking as before ... dark eyes full of innocence ... long and thick eyelashes ... cheeks like apple and red coloured ears ... fair and

beautiful hands and feet ... as soft as butter. The moment I embraced him, I almost broke down, couldn't stop crying and he went on laughing. I somehow smiled and asked, "Just close your eyes" and he bent down his head. I asked where he got the eyelashes from and he smiled out of embarrassment. My house was animated. Food was cooked according to his choice. I would take him out for a drive. I had devoted all my time towards him. I felt like I regained my paradise.

One morning I woke up to the noise of bullets, came out running and saw him in the balcony making different kinds of sounds (bullets) with his mouth. It was difficult to make out whether it was the real bullet sound or the fake one, such was the precision.

It was entirely my fault, for the reason that I had not bought any toys for him, now that he was here for a couple of days. That evening itself, I went out and bought all his favourite toys. When he went to sleep, I kept all these toys near the curtain so that he would be delighted to see them once he wakes up. It was Sunday so I woke up a bit late. To my surprise, all the toys were thrown in the corner and he was missing. I enquired about him from his mother and she told me that all kids are playing in the hall.

His little sister was standing at the entrance of the hall with her finger on her lips. "Shh! ... don't go there, firing is going on," she cautioned me. I peeped through the door and saw that something very strange happening inside. All the pillows in the house were placed on top of each other exactly the same way as bunkers are made out of cement bags. He was lying upside down in the middle making different kinds

of sounds, holding a huge wooden gun in his hands. Both my sons, holding their old guns (toys) were surrounding and supporting him.

They would act according to his orders and change positions as directed. One would jump over the book rack and the other would hide behind the cupboard and stick to the wall.

But he would take charge of the bunker and at times advice them and also point the gun against them.

Now, this was his favourite sport.

That music, those tunes, those melodies ... he had forgotten everything of that sort.

Where would I take him to remind him of all those things?

SECTION C: KHEMA KAUL

Khema Kaul, a well-known writer in Hindi was born on July 17, 1956 at Srinagar in Kashmir. After migration, she along with her family moved to Jammu, where she has been living till date. Her works mostly depict the pain, suffering, anguish and traumatic experiences of Kashmiri Pandits, who migrated to Jammu. She has to her credit short stories, poems, reviews and so on, which are published in leading Hindi journals in India. Her autobiography *Samay ke Baad*, subtitled “*Meri Diary*” (My Diary), apart from discussing issues like exile, loneliness, alienation, etc., it ridicules Pandit community for their selfishness, egoism, their lack of dedication and sense of purpose of understanding. It also mocks at the political and social leadership in India.⁵⁴ She has also published a collection of poems titled *Baadalon mein Aag* and a novel titled *Dardpur*. She was awarded ‘Hindi Writers Award’ by the President of India in 1997.⁵⁵

“When I want to say something straight, I go for prose,” says Khema Kaul in an interview with Anupama R. She gives a lot of credit to a short story and chooses to continue writing them. When she wrote *Dardpur* (City of Pain), her first novel, she said that she “tried to be loyal to the truth and nothing else.... Whether I get bouquets or brickbats, I will continue to write on these realities” (Kaul 186). According to her, Kashmiri Pandit society has never been progressive; its men are backward and lacking open outlook. She also believes that Pandit men often abuse their own strength and women become nothing but objects to be consumed and used.

⁵⁴ For further details, see <http://www.loausa.org>.

⁵⁵ See, <http://www.museindia.com/authorprofile.asp>.

In one of her articles titled “A Pandit Story,” she writes that the worst part is that “women also give in to this kind of thinking and become its victims – that is what is so frightening.” She adds:

Kashmiri Pandit society has always been afflicted by this disease of pride among men. The moment he takes birth, his mother feels she has achieved something by giving birth to a male. She is feted and honoured. Even if later he turns out to be a crook or a good-for-nothing, but nonetheless, he is man. There is a saying that if a boy is born, the news is spread as far as Mecca and Madina, but if it is a girl, then even Nuruddin, he whose name means light, falls silent. When a girl is born, a body is born, a problem is born, this problem then spreads. (Kaul 187)

TRANSLATIONS OF THREE SHORT STORIES BY KHEMA KAUL

1. “A Deep Catechu Colored Velvet *Phiran*”

(*Gehre Kathaai Rang Ka Makhmali Phiran*)

This certainly covers more than half her life. She had made a muffler out of the left-over cloth from the *phiran*, of which she had an ardent desire to wrap around her neck, but when she put it around her neck, she found that it looked merely like a piece of cloth and not how a good muffler should.

The day she had got this *phiran* and muffler, she made an excuse saying that she wanted to visit Dal Lake, but instead she was with her husband at boulevard road till late in the evening. This was to show off the beauty of the *phiran* and take in some fresh air ... to have a romantic experience and also to reduce the weariness

from the day's work. Her husband had just come along; he was indifferent, since this was not a thing of his interest. He did compliment the *phiran* though, by telling his wife that it made her neck look fair.

Mushtaq, from the office had brought the cloth for the *phiran*. He would generally bring/sell good stuff and this was bought by people who wished to; which included most of the women in the office.

That winter had been the coldest so far, and she thought it a thing of glory that she was wearing this very *phiran*. She liked it very much; even an inch of its cloth was more valuable to her than all the property (everything else) she owned.

Sometimes she experienced a feeling of self-pity and self-ridicule on being stupid to be happy about something so trivial. She was deep in thought, wondering why the idea/feeling of being beautiful gives most women a sense of importance in the world. The idea of self-beautification to her was an illusion, imagination that was bound to face destruction therefore it was rather meaningless. Even though her husband was not with her, she thought of the compliment he gave her, she felt as though he were somewhere around ... looking at her and this thought made her happy.

She would wear it once a week, in this winter season. Through this she would remind everybody of her glorious past. That is how she would want people to think on seeing her in her *phiran*; she assumes that people would think just what she wanted them to/ according to her will. This wish fulfillment that takes place in

her psyche satisfies her and the other five days she would as well wear very ordinary clothes.

When she left from there (Kashmir), she was wearing two sweaters and over those she wore the *phiran*, she had it with her since then. It was an amazing thing of destiny or a blessing of God how she was able to keep it safe/keep it from getting damaged. It was as though she had got it past/through the Javahar cave. This was just like how jewelers would sometimes tie their most precious jewels to keep them safe or even swallow them to hide them. To wear it more often ... she had taken 200 rupees from her higher official Aruna, to buy bright catechu colored shoes. When she wore it for the first time, she was complimented by Aruna madam saying “wow! What a beautiful *phiran*.” On hearing this, she shivered/shook from head to toe. Aruna had complimented her *phiran* but nobody noticed her “fair neck,” which was the thought she had in her mind while wearing it.

It had taken them forty days to finally leave from there (Kashmir). Every evening they would decide on leaving the very next morning before the sun rose, but every morning all of them would just stay in bed and not make a sound so that leaving would be postponed. They would fall asleep in such a way (on purpose) that in the morning, staying back would indeed be the disappointment. This is how each of their days passed in the hope that the situation might improve.

It was the 19th of January, that fateful night when people started running away. When there was an announcement in the mosque saying that the ‘*kaafirs*’ should leave as soon as possible, otherwise they would all be massacred. To put a stamp

on this (to prove this) they would kill one or two or sometimes three people. Leaving their native land, their homes, roots to save their lives seemed no less than death to some people who survived at the end of every day, so they would cancel their plans of running away the next morning in the hope that things would be fine. Every day there would be a terrible killing. Satish Tikku, Naveen Sapru, Sarla Bhatt, Girija Raina, Soni Sumbli, Baalkrishn Ganga, Ashok Qazi were all sacrificed for this hope. It was after the brutal killings of women that the killings happened in various fashions/ways. Every day neighbours would come and tell their neighbours to flee and save themselves; this was just a form of *Jihad*, a warning being given with ‘love.’

“We were stuck in the middle of nowhere, if we ran away...where would we go? What would we eat? Where would we live?”

“One day brother got a call from his office asking him to come for night duty and he could not refuse. He had no choice but to go, such a dark, terrible night it was. Brother was brave enough to jump into such a dangerous situation. In the morning I heard that in Batmaloo (where brother’s office was situated) three policemen on duty had been killed at the gate of the building adjacent to brother’s workplace. On hearing this I went around asking people if he was safe, hoping that there were still some good people left here.”

He was alive. He came home after some time. He said “We cannot stay here for long. We should leave; everything is coming to an end. Saving our lives is our right. The *Tehreek* is gaining momentum quickly. Posters were pasted in the morning saying that in every *Kaafir* family, every man between 15-35 years would

be killed. Be prepared.”

Brother was terrified, he said “we will have to leave now, forget the job, we will work as laborers if we have to, we will do anything but we must save ourselves.”

“She also understood that this was true. Now, leaving had become inevitable if they wanted to live. She was very scared on hearing what brother said, but these roots, this house, this warmth, the soil, the sky, the scent of this place...blood and this world ... fine, we’ll leave.”

“But brother, we will have to perform *batuk puja*, otherwise it would be a bad omen right!?”

“Fine!” said brother.

Both of them headed towards Amira Kadal, quietly with fear in their hearts...as if scared of each other as well. As they walked on the road, they saw that after every ten steps there were army men and brutal *Jihadists*. Both of them masked their appearance, they were covering their faces, to look like Muslims and they kept quiet. They were walking very slowly; when they reached the temple ... they slightly turned their faces towards it and prayed in their hearts and continued to walk. To them, this was the first step in over passing the mountain named death.

Brother said “I was scared that when I told you we have to leave, you would make an excuse again and find a way to stay like you did for the last forty days.” These

words broke the silence between them. The sky was filled with dense clouds; dense, dark, thundering clouds. The last walk on this road, under this sky...maybe these clouds are saying goodbye.

These roads, this atmosphere were filled with a strange silence. Her brother's words upset her but she did not say a word, she kept on walking; matching the speed of his steps. They had to escape, whether they would have to beg, or work as laborers; no matter what the consequences they had to escape to survive, that was their right. Her brother's words about this were ringing in her head. They disturbed her.

"Oh! She really upset brother, did not try to understand the reason for his fear. How long was this game of hide and seek with death going to go on?" She remembered that there were certain things they needed to do, without doing them they would not be able to leave.

"I am sorry about it brother, thank God we are still alive." He almost laughed, as if saying "I'm glad that you understood at least now, that you finally thought about it."

"So we've finished the puja" she paused for a while and then resumed "There are still many things to do before we leave...."

"Oh! Like...?" said brother, scared about what these things might be.

"Don't get scared! Firstly, we have to clean the house. Secondly, wash all the dirty

clothes, if you have somebody else's belongings with you at your workplace, return them. And lastly, one of you will have to sneak out and buy a lock from a shop that is open. Locks must be selling a lot these days, locks without a purpose, huh! Will an auto rickshaw drive us till TRC? *Bhabhi* will cook. We shall have our last meal of our last night in this house; the stove shall be lit for the last time. We will have to pack everything that we can carry with us, in case we need it." She repeated the word 'last' so many times...that expressed her state of mind, but the house had to be cleaned and clothes washed...as if they were returning in a day or two ... and that did not seem possible.

Brother said to her "but some of these tasks are difficult, sister. Right?"

"Like returning somebody's belongings kept at my workplace."

"Okay, but we're definitely leaving. We'll return those things if we can. But there's one thing we will have to do – call mother, and tell her that we're leaving the house ... there's no point in staying here anymore. So that she doesn't mourn on seeing us, or do anything that'll make us feel like it would have been better if we had died here. Because I don't think being in Delhi she would be able to understand the situation we're facing. She'll probably ask us to stay put here, like she says "the condition has been bad before this...it went back to normal, didn't it? It might take more time, this time but things will be alright." I tried telling her, but she didn't listen. Worst even, the news from here does go outside the state. I told her that many Hindus have been killed so she said "fine, you people come here, me and your father will stay in the house, we cannot leave the house ... we'll keep a few rice bags, some dried vegetables, some pulses ... we'll survive till the

condition gets better and two old people wouldn't be harmed anyway."

She does not understand that this is not like old times, so many have been killed since the 19th of January, this time 'they' are using weapons, things that cannot be defeated and I cannot tell her this over the phone. So, I've decided that we'll make it through the cave first ... and then make mom understand."

"You didn't tell me you spoke about all this with mom."

"I understand how terrified you are, now that we've decided ... why don't we be a little more courageous and go to sister's (elder sister's) house and tell them that it would be best for them to leave as well, no good can come out of staying here anymore, it is our duty."

"Outside sister's house there was a lawn covered with colorful flowers which stated that it would stay (continue to exist), a sign that it would be missed after leaving. We heard that brother-in law had already been attacked but somebody had saved him. But they still refused to leave because they had just built the house, with all that they had left. They had not even lived there long enough, so they decided to stay back but sent their 11 year old daughter with us."

So they left, nobody knew who would get where, who would find who, this is what happens when people die. In the other world, where it is uncertain where, how, who you would find in what form. This was the only thing they could tell themselves.

Before entering the house, on their way back ... they heard somebody say that there was a bounty of 8 lakhs on Jag Mohan's head, alive or dead.

Brother went to his workplace straightaway and his sister went to gather the clothes that were to be washed. It was as if she were possessed, she felt a strong urge to visit her husband's house before leaving.

She climbed down the stairs hastily and said to her brother "No problem brother, so what if we're upset with each other, I'll still tell him the he should leave the place. I'm sure they've put him in the hit-list, then it's up to him to do what he wants but it's my duty to tell him." She did not even wait for her brother's reply instead rushed to her husband's house.

When she met him she said, "You must leave as soon as possible, you're in danger."

"You are also in danger...when are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow morning, brother is under great threat, poor guy was at his workplace the whole night. You should leave; we can sort out matters later."

"I was thinking we should file for divorce."

"Sure! Why not? Okay! At least that's better than this humiliation."

"So should we do it tomorrow?"

"Why not!?"

"How?"

"If I don't leave tomorrow and the office is open, call at 1 pm. I'll come where you ask me to, and sign whatever papers you want me to...but your life is in danger,

you must leave. For God's sake!"

"Why do you care so much?"

"Because ... I don't know ... I don't know!"

Meanwhile her mother-in law came and called her son and he replied saying that he would come in a while.

She got up and left saying "leave this city as soon as possible though."

Perhaps he knew after the conversation that 'leaving the city quickly' was just a skillful theatrical performance. She was a stranger to him. But she wanted to stay back and leave with him instead of leaving with her brother. She was torn from two ends, first that she was living without her husband and now she would have to lose the house too. She could only face one of the truths at a time; she wanted to veil one of them with another. She was talking in her head, thinking "That you ask for it, how could I deny you? Something as trivial as divorce, take it if you want, I'll sign where you want me to. Tomorrow at 1 pm, take what you want ... from my heart, my hope and trust, my dreams, anything." But in her heart she knew she was lying to herself.

Brother was waiting for her at his workplace, worried about her. She hastily brought all the clothes that were to be washed and threw them in the bathroom. Her brother did not ask her what went in between them, how the atmosphere was or what they spoke about. He did not want to interfere in her personal matter. He understood that whenever his sister had been wearing that *phiran*, she had returned

empty handed. She took it off and threw it on the bed after returning and got back to work. Her face (cheeks) was red and her eyes dry, sparkling with the stubbornness in them.

A voice in her head said “he did not even look at the fairness of her neck.”

“Tomorrow when he calls I would have got past the cave, after that we will not know each other’s whereabouts. I took a good advantage of knowing his address by visiting him one last time. I will have no complaints from myself. No regrets, only the search for solutions to the problem.”

She tried to console herself, and forget about it ... so she started cleaning the house, washed the stairs, washed all the clothes ... put them on the ropes to dry, there were wood planks with nails stuck in them on the ground. Out of these, a six inch nail pierced right through her foot, she was brave enough to remove the nail from her foot, and she waited till it stopped bleeding. So she went to Mehraj Ahmed’s clinic to get an injection of tetanus. Another person named Nissar Ahmed was also there. He had also come for the injection. Mehraj Ahmed charged him 6 rupees and took 10 rupees from her. She stood there for a while, when he asked her why she was standing there, she replied saying that she was waiting for him to return 4 rupees. Mehraj Ahmed said, “That is the price, I owe you nothing!” She was astonished to hear this, but she kept mum and walked as though she had decided something.

She was talking to her brother about the things at his workplace, so they came to a

conclusion that they would leave one of the televisions outside, on the road...fortunately its owner had said that he would collect it the very next day. The people had been watching a lot of TV lately, with every moment they see themselves getting closer to freedom. The rest of the stuff would be returned if and when they returned.

She trembled when somebody knocked the door. Her brother opened the door. She got scared, so she picked up the stick (that her brother had got from Amarnath Yatra) and rushed to the door. It was the customer who had come back for his TV. He laughed on seeing her, understanding that she meant to protect her brother. He said "Terrorists carry guns; they don't give you an opportunity of attacking them with a stick." She understood that picking up a stick for defense was inappropriate but at least she tried.

That night, at 4 am, on the 30th of March, 1990 ... they dragged themselves down the stairs they had climbed so many times, *Bhabhi* locked the door and they quietly walked ... the kids were quiet as well, suddenly the kids seemed to have grown up. The temperature remained below freezing point the whole night, every one of them wore a lot of clothes ... the kids wore about four garments each. Herself, she wore a warm suit (*shalwar kameez*) and a sweater over it, another catechu colored sweater over them and finally the *phiran* ... he also wrapped the ridiculous muffler around her neck so that in the dark of this night she would have this illusion of her 'fair neck.'

If she hadn't worn so many clothes, she would not be able to carry any of them.

After reaching Jammu, they spent the night in a hotel called 'Raj.' All of them spent the night thinking about the house, how it was filled with cheer and life a few days back and now deserted. The neighbors must have been very happy on seeing the door locked, the first person to see the lock must've gone and said to the others that "look! Our *Tehreek* is a success; we shall finally get rid of all these *kafirs*."

Last night when they had slept in their house for the last time, they watched the news on the T.V before going to sleep, where they showed that in Delhi and Jammu, relief camps were being set up by the people who were displaced, and thousands carried out processions on the roads...this gave them an idea of how many people had been displaced already, they felt a strange association with them, as though saying to them that "Oh procession carrying out brothers and sisters, nomads, refugees ... one more day till we join you on those roads."

"The weather was warm in Jammu; there was no need of wearing a *phiran*. The next morning we went to 'geeta bhavan,' where people had gathered to pray, suddenly *Bhabhi*, who had not said a word so far told me that I should go to Delhi and that they would find a means of livelihood here. That was the last time I saw them."

Before leaving for Delhi, she went along with *Bhaiya* and *Bhabhi* to *Bhabi's* sister's house; who had been living in Jammu for a long time. Till then she would depend on her brother and *Bhabhi* ... what else could she do? She had no choice.

Bhabi's sister's mother-in law had to cook for so many people. All of them were dying of hunger. She served her a plate of rice and some dal as well. She was so happy to eat again. *Bhabi's* sister took back some rice from her plate, this was strange she thought; this was a disgrace to the whole of their kind...was this what they had come down to!? Were they going to fight over every single grain of food? Were they headed towards destruction? Every road, every street, helplessness everywhere ... begging for food even from beggars. She let out a sigh of disappointment but did not cry a single tear. She tried to be strong. It was little cold so she put on the *phiran* again while her child was in her lap.

From the Delhi station, she went straight to the relief camp in Laajpat Nagar. It was the destination for all the passengers of the train. It was quite hot here. The odor of her own sweat was bothering her. She was given a lighter *saree* as charity in the relief camp; it had been donated by the Chhatpur temple.

“Last winter, she wore the velvet *phiran* once a week; certainly. She continued doing this the next winter also. Last winter, on her birthday she was gifted a few *sarees* by the women in her office. This winter, it was a sudden incident, as she went to Connaught Place to give her weekly report. There was a phone call for her. I answered. It was her husband. I told him I was her friend; Shashi Kulshreshth. I was very happy about it, so I gave him the number of the office she had joined. Meanwhile I called her to give her the good news and asked her to stay near the phone and not miss his call at any cost. I thought to myself; was it fate that she was wearing the velvet *phiran* today? Or just a coincidence?”

Five days later it was Aruna Madam's birthday and everybody had brought her presents, so had she. She got up from her chair and took out her present from the bag. It was neatly wrapped in a newspaper. She wished Aruna madam on her birthday and gave her the present. In those words was hiding pain, she told everybody in the office what had happened when her husband called her.

Her husband had told her he was waiting outside her office and if she could meet him. She agreed and went down to meet him. She was happy and excited that he might have come to live with her forever and worried about whether he had just come to get her signature on those divorce papers or maybe he just wanted to visit her.

He took her to the Bengali market nearby. They got into a café/shop named 'Naathu Sweets.' He sat down in a chair and she sat across the table in another chair. She asked him "remembered me after such a long time? Why?"

He replied saying, "Just like that ... how are the kids?" This enraged her.

"Come home. Why did you come here? You ask about the kids while you're sitting here!? Come home and see them! How did you remember this unfortunate part of the world ... how did you think of us!?"

He had ordered coffee for them, but now she was refusing to have coffee with him.

"Don't order it for me, I don't want it...having coffee with you here, without the kids is a sin. Let us go home to the kids."

He asked, “Which bus should I take to go to South X roads?” She understood that he was not coming to see the kids.

She went out of the shop, running ... and he got up and walked out as well. She stood on the road and could not control her tears, she tried wiping these tears with the edge of her *phIran* ... although it was lined by wire and was not much help but she kept on doing this anyway. She did not have a handkerchief with her because it was winter. She was not going to sweat, so didn't need it.

Helpless, she cried outside the shop with no one to comfort/console her. This was Delhi ... no one wanted to interfere in another person's life so leaving people to themselves was the rule. This day she understood that a person wearing velvet can also be lost within; sometimes ... things are not what they appear to be.

Don't know if the stupid guy even had coffee (her husband). She still hoped he would come to live with her and the kids ... forever. She kept on crying, thinking about her husband's decision...she thought, as though talking to him. “Go! Making your family sad like you always did...may you never have the opportunity to see them happy. Leave!”

She got up from the bus stop, dragging her feet towards the bus and turned her head towards the bus.

When Aruna madam unpacked her gift, she found that it was the 'beautiful'

phiran, dry-cleaned. She had already requested Aruna madam not to refuse the gift, as she was giving it to her with all her heart and that she wanted to stop loving it so much; get away from it.

2. “The Old World/The Old Times” (*Poorv Lok*)

Pradhyuman had been transferred to Srinagar. Since he was recruited in the armed forces he knew he could be transferred anywhere and therefore was prepared for it. He was returning to Batarbaliyan, Udhampur, his home after two months. There was so much excitement among the family members as if he were coming back safely from an unknown, alien planet and as if it were a miracle. Everybody was curious to hear what he had to say. They expected him to tell them about the spine chilling stories and the unbelievable experiences he had had. They also wanted to hear all that he had witnessed which would lead them to shocking/surprising conclusions.

New conversations, that the people back there have had, the ideology of the people back there ... the world he has returned from as if he had taken birth again. The place where he knew all the ways (roads), the houses, neighbors, temples ... and everything else. People were dying to hear any news from there so there was a crowd in the house. People who themselves belonged to that place/world and had managed to escape from there. They craved for even the smallest/most minute details about that place. Every little piece of news about it seemed important.

“I had gone to Tulmul,” he said in a loud voice like he was making an announcement and then he paused. It was as if he was asking the kids and the younger lot if they had understood what he said. But the kids’ mouth dropped wide open and eyes were about to pop out ... as if Pradhyuman hadn’t spoken the words that would help them know what he meant.

“A family from Lar is living/staying there.”

“What do you mean?” asked his mother.

“I mean to say I had gone home, and I’m telling you about it.” His wife’s face turned pale on hearing this and his mother let out a cry of despair.

Immediately his mother asked “how did they react when they saw you?”

“They did not like it.”

This was another eruption, but Pradhyuman’s mother did not want to hear about it. This was an incident/instance that had already taken place but she wanted to deny anything as such. As if she were telling Pradhyuman that this was a dangerous sign, she would probably die if she heard any more, she wanted him to lie if he must, just to make her feel better. But Pradhyuman was all decided that he was not going to stop here. He was going to tell them everything, everything he saw ... experienced because he couldn’t take to keep the reality from them anymore rather since he couldn’t carry this heavy load/burden alone anymore ... he had to share it. While his whole community had been living in this world, he was living a lie ... still in this magical fake world ... and he had gotten so used to this lie that it had become his reality.

“What was their reaction on seeing you?” asked his wife.

“They didn’t like it.”

“Ahaan...!”

“Yes!”

“Then...?”

“Then what!? I went in, looked around into the rooms; saw the roof, the windows ... not even a single thing in its place ... broken, even though they’re living there!”

“Did they talk about buying the house?”

“Yes, Fifty thousand at the most!”

“Good Lord! Fifty thousand!? I wouldn’t sell it even if they paid fifty lakhs.... Oh God! Put an end to them!” reacted his wife. His mother didn’t say a word but her eyes looked like they would pop out and fall on the ground the very next moment.

“That too as charity, as if they were having mercy on us ... nothing otherwise.”

“For the documents, so that their possession of the property becomes legal.”

“Not really, they have no such fear ... they can make/forged new documents. Who are we? What can we do!? But I told them that I don’t want to sell the house and that we would return, soon.”

Pradhyuman sat next to his mother, trying to console her, who was so much in shock that she could not speak ... her face had become twisted and her eyes were filled with tears.

“Yes, we will go back ... but how ... when and where ... why dream of something impossible, son?” said Pradhyuman’s mother with a heavy frown on her face.

To break this eerie silence, Pradhyuman said: “Then I went to the cow shed, saw the roof was broken, so I asked the man sitting there to get the roof fixed, and he replied saying ‘sell it and I’ll fix the roof.’ When I told him the price, the pig laughed so loud in sarcasm that I lost more than half my senses. Then he said “I’ll pay you ten thousand for it, *Pandit Ji!* Fifty thousand for it along with the house ... and done!” so mercilessly.”

“Anyway, he has nothing to fear even if he takes/occupies the house, by force.”

“It’s nobody’s, not even the army’s. There is an army camp nearby though but they don’t fear the army. The army is practically powerless now. The army officers just pretend to hold all those weapons. They only seize weapons from the terrorists, make a film of it and put it on Doordarshan and then sell those weapons back to them (the terrorists). The so called protectors of the nation, supposedly performing their rightful duties either cause destruction, or end up getting killed. The shame of not being able to make use of their weapons they end with their death. This is the game that the saviors and destroyers play.”

“Yes, Yes! No doubt about that,” said Ratanlal, one of the neighbours. His mother was still quiet; it was like she had turned into a statue now.

“Are you feeling alright mother?” asked Pradhyuman and whispered to his wife “give her medicine, she’ll sleep.”

His wife and he helped his mother lie down and Ratanlal stood up and wanted to help as well.

Luckily this was the month of January, not hot at all ... sunrays were coming in through the chimney ... they also bring in bird feathers with them ... but they still are a blessing. In Jammu, the month of January in itself is a blessing.

Pradhyuman was relieved to see his mother fall asleep. He asked his wife to make tea and sat down with his back against the trunk and said, "The army was honest in the beginning, and even now ... not the whole army is corrupt, but corruption is spreading though ... bribes and corruption! When I walked outside, I came across Ali, the shopkeeper ... he has grown quite old and five of his kids have also grown up."

"Oh! My God! Five kids?" said his wife aloud, so loud as if she wanted Ali and his kids to hear it.

"We exchanged greetings, hugged each other tight ... he was telling me about MuhAmmad who apparently had quit the *Tanzeem*."

"Okay, okay," she said while making tea. She was paying attention to her husband at the same time ... trying not to show disregard to anything he said, like she did earlier about Ali and his kids.

"He was interrogated when he was captured by the army, but then his old father came and begged for him to be released, raising slogans of 'Hindustan Zindabad'. He said "there is no better way, this is the best trick ... wait and watch this mind game."

“Went around shouting slogans, even louder this time ... when he reached the camp he sounded as if he was about to cry and he did cry, cried a lot – “Sir! Major *Sahab*! My son will go against India! Bloody fool ... my son! Practice fake *Jihad*!? Betray his own country? Bloody traitor! I shall kill him myself ... kill him. But Pradyman *Ji* (that is how he pronounced Pradhyuman) what do I tell you? The old man did such a drama that even the major was astonished. He let the old guy enter his son’s cell and on entering he told his son in Kashmiri- “I’m going to beat you up, swear at you ... tolerate. I’ve come to free you.”

“The boy regained colour on his face that he had lost when he saw his father arrive. The old man took off one of his shoes and beat the boy up ... very badly and scolded him. He put up such a great show that even the major believed that the old man was honest, a true Indian. So he let the boy go as asked him not to get into a *Tanzeem* again and advised him to follow his father’s footsteps.”

“So did he leave the *Tanzeem*?”

“No, of course not! He works undercover though, he was caught again.... His father was dead by then, so he had to serve a sentence of four years in prison. Getting caught and being released has become quite normal for him now. He goes to Pakistan through Muzaffarabad and this has become his means of livelihood. He has bought about an acre of land in Indranagar.”

“But you also belong to the same community/religion, then why are you telling me this? I asked him.”

“Because I am a true Indian and not a Pakistani.”

“Is that really true?” asked Ratanlal very innocently.

“Of course not, he was only jealous. He was just feeling bad about the fact that it could’ve been him in the other guy’s place.”

“One more thing”

“What?”

“Everything has changed. On the day of Eid a sea of fake currency was brought into the market and everyone was to accept it. If they didn’t...they would be killed.”

“What, when the fake currency doesn’t work outside the state!?”

“It will have to work. There are many banks in the country that will accept it and even exchange it with real currency. Even the reserve bank will have to accept it. This is a known fact throughout the country. There was a rumor that the reserve bank destroyed fake currency worth 2,500 crore.”

Ratanlal’s mouth dropped wide open and he wiped his forehead with his hand.

“The soil of our country is being polluted.... It drove me crazy when I heard it first, but now I’m going to deal with it with a strong heart. Our home was the first to face destruction, so how is it our nation anyway!?”

The tea was boiling on the stove and made a noise that somehow reduced the gloom that had spread in the air and brought in a feeling of liveliness.

“Is the temple in the backyard still there?” asked his wife as if she were missing the place, the temple that was built on the river bank by Pradhyuman’s father.

How could it be just as it was? It was a temple with a shiv ling and a few other

idols in it, there was a stone that looked like Ganesh Ji... Pradhyuman's father had found it somewhere nearby ... there was an idol of Nandi, which he had bought and another idol also. The shiv ling they found when they were constructing their house, when the laborers were digging ... they found something in the ground ... they dug carefully and saw that it around a foot wide and a foot and a half tall Shiv ling. Pradhyuman's father was surprised and happy but also saddened to see it. Then he announced in the village: "There was once a temple at this very spot which has been demolished, therefore after we construct our house ... we will build a temple at the very same spot." And a temple he did construct. So there stood the small but beautiful temple at the banks of the Sindh River. These were the thoughts going on in his wife's head. She was thinking to herself about what Pradhyuman was going to say about the temple ... how could the temple have survived even if the army tried to protect it, with the hide and seek going on between them and the militants...it was just another spot of combat.

Pradhyuman was rather hesitant in his reply – "Is the tea ready? There's nothing left for us in the news from that place ... I went there because of my job ... otherwise. Your temple has now become a shelter for hens. The shiv ling and other statues have been thrown into the river ... poor things were rescued from within the ground/soil before... now they rest in peace at the bottom of the river. That bloody MuhAmmad told me "how could I stay there in their presence, Idols are unholy so the first thing we did was to make them disappear into the river. The hens and their chicks stay there now, which by god, is very useful." When I went near it ... the smell coming out of it was terrible, of their feces ... God's will!"

Pradhyuman's wife broke down on hearing this ... her doubt, the worry that the temple would be in a bad condition was not only true, but the reality was far worse than she had expected. When she imagined the hens and chicks, the stink, their feces in such a holy place ... she was lost in sorrow.

She tried to stop herself from thinking about the terrible odor and the poor condition of the temple and tried to concentrate on where she should begin with serving tea.

3. "Human Rights" (*Maanavadhikaar*)

When Peter entered through the door, they (the family) understood that he was the German guest who was supposed to arrive. His blue eyes were a strong sign of the country he was from. Although his round face was not very red, very rarely but sometimes we also find Indians looking like that (i.e., such facial features) and he had brownish hair. He was making an effort to speak in Hindi as often as he could and also did not want to miss out on an opportunity of speaking the few Kashmiri words that he has learnt, because those words themselves conveyed the meaning of full sentences.

Dulaari said 'Namaskaar' to Peter and he replied with double the enthusiasm saying "Namaskaar. Namaskaar."

"Oh, yes, [orzuv]...[orzuv]" meaning thank you...the last two words he spoke in

english. He did this to show his knowledge of Kashmiri.

As soon as Peter spoke these words, an unbelievable sense of understanding and reliability spread in the atmosphere. He sat in a chair and all the children of the house sat down on the ground surrounding him. The children wanted to speak with Peter in English to let him know they were good at it but Peter wanted to show how impressed he was with the Indian culture and therefore wanted to speak in a language that was Indian.

“You’ve had to wait a lot?” said Dulaari.

“That’s not a problem,” replied Peter.

“Would you like something to eat?”

“No, not until he’s here.” (Dulaari’s husband)

“Okay, but would you like to have some tea?”

“No, thank you,” said Peter.

“Why don’t we talk for a while to kill time?” Said Dulaari.

“Yes, why not!”

“I’ve come to know that you are thinking of doing something great considering human rights”

“Yes, you see, from this point of view Kashmir has become a unique rather scary/terrifying place. They think they’re a part of the world, the most important part of the world. They want the world to revolve around them and every part of it should move according to their will. Their words should be considered as the ultimate truth. They always want their demands fulfilled at any cost or else

they're going to do something! Do something ... as if they can do it to the whole universe! Bloody bastards! What will they do!? Poisonous snakes they are! When they see a foreigner they start whispering to each other ... that see, a *gora* has come/arrived that let's loot him ... let's rob him of every penny he has ... even kill him if you can, killing a *kaafir* will earn you a better 'Hajj.'”

Peter paused for a while and then resumed – “Then one by one they are after your life! First it's the *phiran walas* who sell cheap cloth in the name of *Pashmeena* and they won't leave until you buy from them ... then it's the ones selling *Papier Mache* stuff, they'll sell you something very ordinary worth a hundred rupees for thousands...and then the dry fruit sellers who won't leave you until they burn a hole in your pocket, shamelessly they beg you to buy things from them. They've no self-respect, no self-esteem when it comes to making money or looting a *kaafir* whether he's an Indian or a Christian!”

“But after that he becomes a different person altogether, drenched in self-respect, assuming himself and his religion to be superior. Try pleasing him, do anything for him ... he'll still not be happy/impressed with you. He uses these tricks to earn but doesn't think if it's morally right ... when his religion suggests that *kaafirs* are enemies and killing them would result in forgiveness of sins. He does so because that ideology would result in his loss.” Peter paused again, a very long pause, but the people listening to him understood that he had not finished talking yet. He resumed saying, “now they've learnt to pelt stones, 10-15 years old. My god! (He even touched/held his ears while saying this) They gather in their localities and pelt stones at the Indian armed forces. This is their younger

generation! So many were killed but it seems like so many of them are born every day! And the women do nothing but give birth! Oh yes and carry out protests and processions. So many kids ... as if they were insects, so many in number! This is a new disease they have ... having shut downs and curfews every other day.... I don't understand where they get all the money from!"

"Don't you think this is fake currency? They're given money by the ministry of finance from the reserve bank, so that they vote for them in the elections ... they don't want to upset Muslims. And that very money helps support this terrorism ... So, you see! There is a deep connection between the government and such activities. This doesn't happen in Europe."

One of the children sitting near Peter said, "That's not all, India gives them so much money that they've gone mad with it! People own luxurious bungalows even in villages. You'll barely see any such houses in Jammu. It was better if the Indian government spent all that money in naxalite prone areas! They protest because of poverty but in Kashmir its 'Islamic terrorism.' The government should be hard on Kashmiris. If those people were given all the money wasted on these [Kashmiris] ... why would they want to throw their lives away for nothing!? There's no value for life if there's no money. But these Kashmiris, in spite of having everything, they can't shut up. They want to establish Islamic rule through this terror, through *Jihad*." Now Peter who had travelled in India, came to Kashmir and then to Jammu, opposed "Islamic Terrorism" and was a knowledgeable man.

Dulaari wanted to ask him a question, after so much enthusiasm. She felt that it

was a great opportunity to meet a foreigner who was their well-wisher and friend.

“What’s your view of the Kashmiri Hindus considering human rights, Mr. Peter?”

Peter did not answer her question, but went on to say, “In Europe wherever I’ve been, I told everybody I came across, not to go to Kashmir, not even by mistake! If it’s India you want to visit, go to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttaranchal, South India, and in fact go anywhere you like ... but please don’t go to Kashmir! There’s no humanity left in that place, those living there are not humans. They’ve got the faces of humans but they are something else, and what they are in real, I do not know!”

Dulaari and her children were quite happy that Peter shared their view and belief. “Or I would suggest that they go somewhere in the west, there’s some incredible beauty there ... the Machu Picchu, Switzerland, Niagara falls ... see the whole world but for god’s sake don’t go to Kashmir! Why do you go to Kashmir? Why? Don’t fall into the trap of those monsters ... there are no humans left there ... they ran away from that place long back.”

“Mr. Peter, about twenty years ago I had written a story about this issue and gave it to a journalist in Delhi. Half her name is Muslim and the other half Hindu. She considers herself an advocate of matters concerning women ... and also Muslims ... she calls vulgarity and impudence love!”

“She didn’t hesitate one bit while narrating the story of an old man, who was caught naked by his wife with a girl half his age ... in fact she was praising him

... saying that this is the extent of the greatness of love. I gave her my story because she asked for it, she returned the story with an advice “you want to portray India as a saint and Pakistan as a monster, I am returning your story and I advise you not to portray Pakistan in such bad light.”

“Should a writer side with those monsters or does she suggest that the Indian saints are more wretched than those Pakistani monsters?” Mr. Peter, “That thought lingered in my head for quite some time after that, I’ve tried to calm myself ... silence all such thoughts but these people will not change.”

“Yes, yes! They are terrible people ... and they are spreading this poison throughout the world, which is why I am worried about your rights. But the Indian government isn’t willing to do anything about it either.”

“Not India, Mr. Peter. It is the ruling political parties of India. Ever since we’ve been displaced from our Kashmir, all the governments that have been formed since then have done nothing but they ignore us, ignore all our worries, our problems, although they did promise us our rights. Please do something for us, Mr. Peter.”

Dulaari’s brother walked in and joined the conversation. The last few words through which Peter understood the aloofness shown to them by their country, they ... the real Kashmiris ... the owners/rulers of Kashmir were living in despair ... like refugees ... with barely a roof over their heads ... they had been denied of every basic right! They were sad, devastated ... they again said to Peter: “Please

do something for us, Mr. Peter ... please help us.”

“Oh! God! What do I do!?” Peter thought to himself in the few quiet moments that followed the conversation.

Dulaari’s son broke the silence telling Peter that he looks like an Indian, in fact a Kashmiri in the kurta pajama that he was wearing.

Peter immediately replied: “What do I tell you!? I greeted a Muslim in Delhi saying Assalamualaikum, he looked quite calm and secular but he scolded me saying I was wearing a Hindu *kurta pajama* and the word that I spoke had too much worth to be spoken by a *kaafir*. I was astonished! Where’s the world heading towards!”

There was a knock at the door, and by the sound of it everybody understood that it was Dulaari’s husband ... who Peter had been waiting for. “Big boss has come,” said Peter. “Prepare for the meal.”

The time from here till the food was served was spent in conversation with peter frankly saying what he felt and the family realizing they agreed with him and that they had found a friend in him. Dulaari placed a glass of water near Peter’s plate and he replied saying, “Thank You!”

“These bloody Kashmiri Muslims, they are such hypocrites ... so fake ... ask for a glass of wine in a restaurant and they’ll say “sorry, serving wine is un-Islamic.

We follow Islamic law and everyone who comes here has to as well, therefore no wine!”

“Well, at least we don’t get drunk on the roads and fall into sewers like them. In our culture it’s [drinking] a tradition ... why should we follow what their religion says!? To hell with their religion! What do they think, non-Muslims are – animals? Damn these Muslims! They should be doomed ... here and in Europe as well.”

Every word Peter spoke showed how angry he was and his hatred for Muslims ... we went on talking and Dulaari’s children told him the stories of violence they had heard from their mother. Everybody was eating, Dulaari was busy attending to everybody ... the conversation between him and Peter had come to an end. Dulaari was thinking to herself that what if Peter felt bad about wine not being served but it’s not a custom for us ... or did he just talk about it to relate with them on how Muslims force Islamic laws on others. And also she hoped he would understand that it was because of their financial conditions. Dulaari looked at Peter as though apologizing for not serving wine with the food and to understand it was because of their bad financial condition and Peter looked back at her as though he were saying that he understood. Dulaari asked Peter if he would like a cup of tea and he obliged.

“The food was good,” said Peter, standing between Dulaari’s husband and brother ... he was preparing to leave. He bid goodbye to all of them and told them he was leaving for Germany the next day. This surprised Dulaari. She asked, “Really?”

“Yes,” replied Peter.

“Then I request you to tell everybody you meet what you heard here. Will you?”

“Yes, yes, why not!” replied Peter.

“We all want to be relieved of Islamic terrorism. We should act against it together ... shouldn’t we? You will also tell everybody, right? You will help us, won’t you?”

Dulaari’s husband laughed, he thought this was an impossible task. Peter smiled and said “yes, why not ... we have started work on it from today itself, haven’t we?”

Dulaari had a heavy heart but forced a smile on her face as Peter left waving goodbye to all of them. She picked up the cups and went into the kitchen.

4. “Wabah” (The Upsurge)

The other part of Hassan Pir’s house is his shop of witchcraft [removing evil spirits]. A huge crowd had gathered at his shop that day. His shop was loaded with cupboards.

The overwhelming crowd that had gathered at Hassan Pir’s place was visible from the fourth lane of the colony.

It is Friday so the place is more crowded than usual. There are sharp sounds coming from the mosque. Allah-u-Akbar! These are the very sounds she was born listening to. She has grown up with these words. But now it is as though someone has taken out all the understanding, these similarities just like taking out a soul from a body.

The mullah from the Bal Garden mosque would give the *azaan* in a rhythm, but that sound hasn't been heard for ages ... with very long preludes.

They started giving speeches in mosques. Very sharp, the type to make the ground slip off one's feet....

Nowadays everything has been that way. Conversation of the helpers. The planning of barriers, talks of the neighbours, speeches in the mosques!

So, the oppressed will be free/independent one day, and that day is here! "Oh Muslims Wake up and break the hands that gave you these shackles...."

She looks at the mosque from top to bottom. The building had been constructed very recently. The wood work was still going on at the other side of the mosque. Nowadays, mosques are built at such a speed, and so many of them. There is construction going on everywhere. A mosque was built in her locality as well, a huge one, with its premises covering about 250 feet. The work started so quickly, the construction would go on through the nights under the light of huge lamps. The youth of the locality did really well at supervising the whole process. One month, and the mosque was complete, with the microphone and the other stuff set as well.

Other than this, there are already two more mosques in here. Vimla had similar things to say that in her locality without any knowledge of it, many new mosques have been built, in no time.

“They are the majority They can do anything....” She had said ... why only her, they all believed so. They all followed the same thought in their mind. Mosques were built. That was fine. But these kinds of speeches? ... Are these speeches? This is a mutiny! This is antagonism! Revolt! Revolt! Mosques ... or places of revolt? Her brain lit up like lightening. Doubt and fear filled the sky like a thick layer of clouds. Don’t know what led to this situation, but it only got worst from here.

On the right side, people are walking out and on the left side people are slowly moving forward. After them, the fourth person is a middle-aged woman dressed in a *saree*, she feels like talking to her. But she thought it wasn’t the right time for that, even the smallest of conversation could prove to be dangerous.

People are talking about the condition of the city. A tall broad *pathan* like middle aged man is standing in the queue before her. His son has been arrested by the police. He has come to meet Hassan Pir. He was narrating the story to another man who looked like him [Assadullah]. His lips have dried because he is worried to a great extent. He moves, rubs his tongue across his lips and says, “The principal of the High School, Pandit Dwarkanath turned out to be a fraud. He has prepared a fake letter. Bloody *kafir*!! Filthy!” Moving his tongue across his lips, he continues, “the symbol of Islam on the top of the letter ‘Hillal-warning-Dwarkanath.’ Leave the city within one week, or else you will be shot through your chest on Friday

morning!” Dwarkanath filed a complaint in the police station ... showed them the letter ... must have told them that he suspects Mushtaq. The police came and took away my son in the middle of the night. Look at the guy’s [Pandit Dwarkanath] guts! Got me into trouble instead of getting alarmed. The boy is in prison, I am only waiting for him to come out and then....”

“Don’t I know my own son? I swear, let him be released from prison and then I will show that bloody Dwarkanath....” He felt he was talking to Dwarkanath himself. Well who knows, he might have been around.

Asadullah put his hand in his pocket and took a pack of cigarette and a matchbox. He offered one cigarette to him and said, “Smoke this Yaqoob *Sahab* Allah will fix everything. I have strong belief in the *Pir*.”

He took the cigarette, his eyes were moist, heavily moist, moved his tongue over his dried lips again and then placed the cigarette between them. His face had turned pale because of all the worrying.

Taking a puff of the cigarette, he was trying to console himself, “I want to get to the base of Dwarkanath’s suspicion. It is all my fault because Pandit Dwarkanath is a wise man.” He let the smoke out in a tensed manner again and paused. He was now whispering, “a year and a half ago the idiot (Mushtaq) had gone to Pakistan. Told me that after writing his 10th class exam he would go visit his uncle in Muzaffarabad. I permitted him to go. He returned with a gun. Told me his uncle has given it to him, as a gift! Wasn’t there any checking on the way?”

“Nah! Not really. Anyway, when I saw the gun, I lost my mind. What would I do with it? I couldn’t sleep for three nights. Mushtaq insisted that since it was a gift, he wouldn’t give it to anybody else. I tried telling him that it was a thing too dangerous to keep at home.”

“I knew Mushtaq would pass with a first division asked the Pandit to teach him for 11th standard. But I must say he is a very good teacher, Mushtaq himself says this.”

“Of course, after all he’s a Pandit, all of them are like that.”

“Without a doubt Mister, but they will never be our own ... how much ever we try ... a Pandit can never be our friend.”

“Yes, so I thought I would share this problem with the tutor.”

“Mushtaq wasn’t studying those days, he would get upset very often. He had also started arguing, he had changed after returning from Pakistan. Zeba would tell the tutor ‘father is ill so Mushtaq can’t study today’ and he would leave. There was a gun at home and I thought the whole world knew about it, as if everybody was talking about it, as if every eye was fixed upon me. There is a limit to simplicity; I thought I would share this with the tutor. I thought he would be able to help me in solving the problem.”

“What does *Pir Sahab* say?”

“Says he’ll be released ... they say that he is somehow involved, how should I tell

you!? I know him. Mushtaq is of a different mindset. What should I do? I'm worried. I want to hold on to everything that's falling my way, never know ... something might cause a miracle."

"So, what did Dwarkanath [the tutor] say?"

"I'll tell you, let's go inside ..."

The queue moved forwards. All of them entered into the room. Hassan *Pir* was busy, he would thrust the knife on his wrist, close his eyes, and murmur something.

"Have you got them?"

"Yes, *hazrat*."

"How many?"

"Four, as you had asked me to."

"Any relief...?"

"Nothing yet, *hazrat*. He is always away from home. He didn't even appear for his exams. Says he won't study any further. I don't understand *huzoor*, where he goes, where he stays, I am worried about him. Suggest something..." and she began to cry, then fell at Hassan *Pir*'s feet.

"Don't know what is wrong with the boys nowadays. Give it here. Are you clean?"

"You are not in your menstrual cycle, are you?"

"No, *huzoor*."

"It's Friday today...put it in the river today itself...and if you care about the boy, avoid non-vegetarian food...go, drop it in the river while going."

She left teary eyed, holding the *Pir*'s feet before she left. "Allah, *Tauba!*" said Hassan *Pir* in a raised tone. Then he gave the knife to Shaal, "take this and cut open

the fish's stomach." Shaal held the fish in his left hand and cut open the fish's stomach in one go. Whose stomach did he really cut? Durgavati's sister-in law's.

"Here, *huzoor*" said Shaal.

Hassan *Pir* gave Shaal some pins, and asked him to insert twenty four into either side of the fish. "You know right!?" Shaal took the pins. Hassan *Pir* once again thrust the knife against a young girl's wrist ... murmuring, then in a loud voice said "What is happening? A knife is being thrust into the wrist of the whole city!"

Doubt, needles, revenge, knives, weapons...weapons...weapons...weapons! They're saying that there are a lot of weapons in the city. Yesterday *Boba* was telling milkman Gafoor, "Gafoor, gone are the days when the police would fire bullets and the crowd would reply with stones, now the crowd will fire bullets and the police will run for their lives. Times have changed! What will the army do now? They will die ... now they'll learn a lesson."

Boba wasn't saying this to Gafoor, she was saying it to her, *Pir* again thrust the knife upon her (*Wazeera*) wrist and started murmuring. *Wazeera* let out a cry, but the cry ascended and subsided on its own. She was numb, she fell down. Shaal was inserting the pins carefully, one by one into the fish's stomach, as if he were planting seeds of poison.

Yaqoob broke the ice, "see people come to *Pir Sahab* from all over the world. He is very famous, he has solved so many problems, a boy returned from Pakistan after ten years, bruised, battered, as if all the blood from his body had been drained out

and look now ... by God's grace, he even got married."

"What did Dwarkanath say to you?"

"Nothing. He did not say anything. Actually it was my foolishness. I assumed Dwarkanath had seen the gun in my house!"

"Master *Ji* has come," said Zeba. "These Pandits, they know how to behave."

"That is true," said Assadullah.

"You have not been well.....He said to me, I interrupted, Master *Ji*, you know I wasn't ill, you know it well."

"Not at all, I know nothing other than that." "He was telling the truth but I thought he was trying to fool me. He is a Pandit after all. But he really believed me to be ill."

"Anyway I told him, Mushtaq *Sahab* has gone to Pakistan to visit his uncle, after his exams."

"Yes Sir, i know that...he met me before he left, he had come to say goodbye."

"He is childish and stupid. In Pakistan, especially in Azad Kashmir there is very less literacy."

"Hmm....but that is true."

"So, his uncle gifted him a gun...thank God for he came back safe and sound."

"A gun?" Dwarkanath's eyes popped out and with his tongue gripped in his teeth, he asked, "Mushtaq didn't refuse to take it!?"

"No, however smart he might be but he is still a kid after all ... so Master *Ji* I am worried, what do I do with the gun? I cannot keep it at home."

"Assadullah *Sahab*, Pandits are cowards, they get scared very easily," said Yaqoob.

"But I was sure that I could take advice from him."

“So!?” said Dwarkanath in a low voice.

“Master *Ji*, you will have to help me!”

“How? Yoqoob *Sahab* ... how do you want me to help you?”

“Master *Ji*, you keep the gun with yourself, for me. By God this is a good way ... you love Mushtaq just like a father, don’t you?”

Master *Ji*’s face turned pale, he kept looking at the ground ... without even blinking.

I insisted.... “Master *Ji*, what are you thinking? What is the problem? You can keep it right!?”

Master looked at me, as if I had asked him to die. Zeba got us tea so master was sipping on it like it were poison.

I said, “Don’t worry master *Sahab*! The wise find a solution to every problem. You might think it is the wrong thing to do, and it is wrong....i am not saying it is right...but we have no other choice. And a parent is helpless when it is about his children, he can do anything for them...why, you are a father too...aren’t you?”

I know he was troubled by this, he couldn’t even sip on the tea in fear...but I was trying to make him understand.

“They are smart, and they put that to very good use, India is because of them,” said Assadullah.

Shaal took a white cloth and started sewing it around the fish, as if she were sewing a dead body in a cloth for burial. “Here, this is done...make sure nobody sees you.”

“Okay, Huzoor,” said Gunvati.

Now there was a vacant spot when Gunvati left, he asked everybody to move forward.

“How are you, Maree?”

Afroza couldn't say anything but her eyes were filled with tears.

“Any relief?”

“No Hazrat. I have no idea, he keeps whispering everybody's ears at home.”

“Your mother-in-law is such a bitch...bitch...she will rot. Don't lose heart, get up.”

“Take this, drop it in the stream and in the evening hit it with your shoe ten times. Make sure that the shoe is your's, he sleeps with you, right?” Afroza blushed. “Here, make him drink this anyhow.” She was crying silently...Hassan *Pir* pated her on the back and she left.

“Her husband just returned from Pakistan after spending six months there. Such a beautiful girl...! God knows what is wrong with the youth.”

He moved his hand over his beard and murmured a few words. The siren blowing in his ears- Pakistan, Pakistan, Pakistan...! What kind of an upsurge is this...he felt like he was in a ring of fire. Making space for himself, people moved in closer as Afroza left.

Both Assadullah and Yaqoob were looking at Hassan *Pir* and were proudly waiting for their turn. Yaqoob's worries were clearly visible from his face.

“Yaqoob *Sahab*, what did you do with the gun then?” asked Assadullah.

“Master *Ji* stopped teaching the kids. He said he didn’t have time and now we all see this plague. The gun is with me in the trunk for now and the key is with me.”

“Where is Dwarkanath?”

“At home, but I am certain he is the one who got Mushtaq arrested. I have heard, he has been warned. He is the one who has complained in the police station and he must have told them about the gun, isn’t it?” Yaqoob was doubtful about all this which he wanted to ascertain through Assadullah. But he was astonished and worried as well which was evident because he would twist his lips time and again.

“I just want him to be released...I have sworn by God...” Assadullah couldn’t find anything to say.

“Not yet released?” asks Hassan *Pir*.

“No Huzoor.”

“Did you get a photograph?”

“Here, Huzoor.”

Hassan *Pir* gave the photograph to Shaal and said, “Burn it on this corner. The youth is heading towards destruction.”

“Yes, Jenaab,” says Shaal.

“Try telling him so much aggression is not good, what do they want?”

Shaal burnt the photo in the corner and handed it to Hassan *Pir*. Hassan *Pir* made a hole in it and gave it back to Yaqoob. “Hang it in his place of study and stop worrying...within a couple of days he will be released.” On hearing this Yaqoob’s eyes were filled with tears, he moved his tongue over his dried lips again.

Hassan *Pir* gave him a pat on his back and then said, “Make him understand that

Pakistan is nothing but black sand. Go now.”

He was careful while putting it in the pocket of his *pheran*. He tied a scarf around his head so as to cover his ears.

Chapter Four

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWELVE SHORT STORIES

While the first chapter explored the history and development of the short story, with particular focus on marginality in the Indian context, the second chapter engaged with the question of women writing. The third chapter presented selected translations of three Kashmiri women's short stories, five of Mehfooza Jan's stories in Kashmiri, three of Tarannum Reyaz's in Urdu and four of Khema Kaul's in Hindi. After discussing each of the short stories in some detail, this chapter will venture towards a comparative analysis with regard to the similarities as well as differences, in terms of technique as well as theme, in the socio-cultural and political context of contemporary Kashmir. To contextualize the major points to be discussed, this chapter will give the gist of the short stories to frame the critical analyses and comparisons.

A) MEHFOOZA JAN

1. “Anigot” (Darkness/Sightless)

The protagonist starts walking on the road in a gloomy all encompassing darkness: the ambience created is of – thunder and lightning, ghosts, the shrieking of cats and dogs, yet the protagonist is full of hope of reaching his destination. The sight of people on the road makes him sense danger and he changes his course. He feels that a monster is chasing him, but the thought about his father and sister pushes him onward. Various sights on the way make his thoughts wander. He suddenly spots uncle Naba's house and decides to pay a visit. He is surprised to find it deserted. He

walks on, eager to reach his father and sister. A few people gathered on the road try to stop him, warn him to go back and not walk further unless he hates himself. They enquire about his whereabouts and point to a barren land with burnt corpses. Screaming with shock, he enters through a door there. He loses balance in the darkness and falls on the ground. He awakens to find himself lying near the radio in his bedroom, fallen from his bed and awakened from a nightmare!

The anonymity of the protagonist is the intriguing element in the story. Adding to this mystery is the ambience filled with darkness and constructing a world of fear, insecurity and anxiety. This has tremendous impact. There is a sense of alertness throughout. At the same time, the protagonist's thoughts presented in direct speech reduces the pace of his walk. This might seem a little weird but the revelation at the end, that the whole set of incidents was a nightmare, justifies everything the protagonist experiences in the narrative. The sense of evil that he feels in the people around him fades out when the same group of people point to him the possible remains of his family. This disproportion of human nature, in the case of the monster; the initial hurried nature of his walk and the interim thoughts appear perfectly normal in a nightmare. Nevertheless, despite being a dream, the protagonist's anxiety and fear of menacing danger runs throughout the account of his travel. Despite the fear, what makes him go on is the thought about his family that gives him courage and hope. The short story reflects the apprehension that every family in Kashmir experiences, indeed daily when a person steps out of the door. The apprehension is present not only in the mind of the ones who step out, but also in the minds of those left at home. The apparent continuity of thoughts regardless of the abnormalities is a typical characteristic of a nightmare. This could also imply the

thoughts of common people in Kashmir who live with constant fear and threat to life.

2. “*Tchalalar*” (Hustle and Bustle)

A stormy night with heavy rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning culminates in a bomb blast. The eerie night is charged with dogs howling as Maryam's dead body lies near the coffin with her hands open. Her mother applies henna on her hands, puts bangles on her arms, applies *surma* and covers her head with a bridal *dupatta*. With only eight days left for her marriage, Maryam could wear the attire as dead. She is taken to the graveyard.

With all the arrangements for her marriage gaining pace, the house is filled with people and bustles with activity. But there is danger lurking in the corners. Some evil is on the loose. Armed and ruthless burglars enter the house. They rejoice in molesting women and killing men. Maryam's brother is on his way back home. These monsters surround him and chop him to pieces. As Maryam runs towards him, she is molested by these hungry monsters and is dead. The robbers then set fire to the house and drive away.

The author reveals Maryam's death in the setting of a dark stormy night. The preparations for an apparently happy event is interrupted by vicious acts of violence. Violence may be a tool used by many writers, but the extent of human brutality portrayed here is terrifying. The thugs are called “wild beasts.” The tension is crafted skilfully. On the other hand, human compassion is also at its peak. Maryam runs to her younger brother when he is being slaughtered, knowing that she is

walking into her own molestation and death. The beasts here could represent various forces that people of Kashmir fear: the military, the insurgents, etc. The level of their operations and the fear they generate in people are evident from the intense descriptions of violence in the story. The story raises several questions about the identity of these looters. Whether the writer deliberately conceals their identities and the extent of violence that is depicted in the story are both matters of debate.

3. “*Tamanna*” (Yearning)

Aijaz felt as deserted as Sheela's house after she moved out without telling him. He visited her room frequently to stare at her photos to talk to her. He kept asking her why she did such a terrible thing to him. He read and re-read her letters sent before leaving. One day, his sister brings him a letter, which was, to his surprise, from Sheela. He finds this very surprising. But this didn't reduce his joy. The letter said that Sheela, who was in Jammu, was about to be married. She wanted Aijaz to come to her and that she wanted to spend her life with him. She also said that if he didn't come, she would commit suicide. Aijaz is taken aback by this and immediately takes a taxi to Jammu. Sheela's brother, Ashok spots him first when he arrives and sends his men to beat him up calling him a thief and a murderer. Sheela protests but no one pays attention. The police arrives and arrests Aijaz. He would spend the next five years in prison. Meanwhile, Sheela's house booms with the preparations for her marriage. On the wedding day, she poisons herself and commits suicide.

The story begins with a melodramatic tone where Aijaz stares at Sheela's pictures, his heart full of love. The tone of his thoughts reveals the intensity of his love for her. But it is, at the same time, slightly exaggerated. It may be so due to the lack of

freedom in Kashmiri society which does not give opportunities for lovers to even meet. In the case of Aijaz and Sheela, the window acts as a rendezvous, and even symbolizes the depth of their love. The melodrama builds when Aijaz receives a letter from Sheela and sets out to meet her. Society and religion have torn them apart for years without any possibility of contact. The two of them yearn for each other without knowing how the other person feels. Despite this uncertainty, their love for each other remains unconditional.

What happens later is also very realistic. The reaction of Sheela's brother Ashok and the forced separation of Aijaz and Sheela are also only usual. A brother is expected to take such a step, given their social and religious identities. Ashok knows of their love but considers Aijaz as someone from 'the other side.' The uncertain and sudden nature of Sheela's migration to Jammu also suggests the social and religious tension that occurred in Jammu and Kashmir. The ending is realistic, though presented in a melodramatic mode. Ashok's response illustrates the prevailing mistrust among the people of different communities. This is evident in the manner the family continues the preparations for Sheela's marriage as if nothing happened. No one is shown to even acknowledge that Sheela has her own hopes and desires. The marriage becomes coercive act. While the person getting married is stricken with grief, the others rejoice.

4. “*Yatch Kaal*” (After a Long Time)

A mad dog creating great havoc in the colony attacked everyone ferociously. The residents were naturally scared of this beast and kept their doors closed. They didn't

even venture out to the Municipality to report the matter. One day, unfortunately, a careless mother kept the door open and so lost her two-year-old boy to the mad dog. She was hysterical with grief, and the rest of the colony were heart-broken too. A group of youngsters gather some courage and report to the municipality. The municipal officer orders a team to capture the beast. The team is bitten to pieces by the ferocious beast. The officer sends a second team who tried to poison the dog, but they also fail in their mission. The officer gets enraged and declares bounty on the dog, dead or alive. The larger third team manages to capture the mad dog. The municipal officer orders it to be killed. The colony celebrates the return of peace and joy in their lives, which they thought was gone forever.

In this story, the author takes us away from reality both in time and space. The mad dog resembles deadly monsters in tales of fantasy. The fury it unleashes, the way it attacks is out of the ordinary. The mentality of the people – the fear, their inability to respond – appears naïve. Suddenly, the use of the term ‘municipality’ brings us down-to-earth. The municipal officer’s behaviour about arranging their capture of the beast and of protecting the people seems kingly. The suffering of the people, especially the death of the two-year-old, generates pity and fear in the reader. Placing this in the context of Kashmir, the mad dog could allude to many things that frighten the people. The military is the closest possible one. This is evident in the way people perform the rites of afterlife before stepping out of their houses. The most shocking illustration is, however, the inability of the people to save a two-year-old child while the dog tears it apart. Altogether, the author uses the image of the mad dog to represent the terror it produces and thereby leaving the people helpless in all respects.

5. “Oash” (Tears)

Nature seemed unhappy; the sky seemed to cry. Birds and animals were all melancholic. Suddenly, someone shouted: “Fire, fire”! Hundreds of people gathered and Safeena's body was taken out of the ambulance and placed under a tree. A mysterious group of snakes came out of the woods, kissed her forehead, whispered something and went back.

The orphan, Safeena is cared for by a neighbour Ramzan *kaka*. After Safeena attained youth, Ramzan *kaka* assaults her. Shocked by the traumatic incident, Safeena became a changed person. Ramzan *kaka* did not give up his desires and one day his nephew Bashir, sees him being physically intimate with Safeena. Ramzan *kaka* does not seem to mind Bashir's intrusive presence. Later, Bashir too tried to attack Safeena. Ramzan *kaka* and Bashir then conspired to sell Safeena. They made her unconscious and sold her to an old woman, who bathed and dressed her in prior to presenting her before rich men. One pays the highest sum and is in a room with Safeena. He physically assaults her, boasting of his power of money. Later Safeena breaks one of the glasses in which milk was kept, injures the man and kills herself.

The very title hints that the story is tragic. The reader finds out the tragedy. The beginning makes one wonder what the story is about from the mysterious response of nature to Safeena's death. All the mystery vanishes when we learn that the cause of Safeena's woes is completely worldly. The way her eyes are portrayed “in a conversation with the sky,” in itself is a critique of the society that she was a part of. The author succeeds in intensifying it with the portrayal of Ramzan abusing

Safeena, whom she considered *kaka* (uncle). Besides using her to satisfy his lust, the uncle (a supposedly father-like figure) treats her as a servant. The pathetic fate of being a woman, especially an orphan, is emphasized when both Ramzan *kaka* and his nephew Bashir (of Safeena's generation) try to abuse her. The values of family relations are shattered here, maintaining only a man-woman binary. Adding to the pile of woes, as much as the concept of selling a human being is shocking, the use of body as a commodity is also hinted at. The author reveals the presence of prostitution in Kashmir, and the only way out of it as taking one's life as exemplified in Safeena's actions.

B) TARANNUM REYAZ

1. “*Nakhuda*” (An Atheist)

The short story demonstrates the life of a young educated woman, who has a lot of dreams about her career but none of them find fulfillment because of her marriage. Tarannum Reyaz portrays how marriage, children, household works and many responsibilities can make a woman's life miserable and sometimes shatters her dreams and ambitions. A woman sets into marriage with lot of hopes and dreams. Men are not affected by marriage as women are because it is the woman who leaves her parents, siblings, home, relatives and friends after marriage. She must cope with a new family and an entirely new atmosphere; whereas a man hardly faces any disruption. *Nakhuda* describes a married woman with a baby girl who is no more loved by her husband. The protagonist is an educated woman but her dreams are lost after marriage. She marries as per her choice but slowly her husband loses interest in her, stays away from home to avoid being with her. His indifference pushes her into mental trauma which leads her to lose balance in life. That is when like an angel

from God her mother comes to stay with her. The mother-in-law's presence forces her husband to behave normally. He doesn't go out at odd times and isn't rude with her any more. The presence of her mother adds flesh and blood to her life. She joins for higher studies. After a couple of months when her mother leaves, she thinks everything will be as before. When she comes home after her mother's departure her husband tells her that he is pushing off. Initially she feels she is losing her courage, control and regresses into earlier days of ignorance and loneliness. But suddenly an urge for living comes to her and she asks him to stay home and take care of the baby as she has to go out for some important work. This was unexpected. Her husband takes some time to get out of this shock and says that they should "tie-up." His last response is like surrendering before her boldness. After attaining her desired life she refuses to go back to the old life style and give up her dreams. It is her bold attitude and firmness which defeats her husband's arrogance. The story carries a strong message to the readers: Do not give up your dreams, ambitions, and happiness because you are a woman. If you are firm with your decision and have a stand in your life, you will get equal position in marriage with your partner; otherwise you will lose your value. The other remarkable aspect of this story is the love of a mother. Her mother's presence brings her back into life. Nothing can replace a mother's love. The author does not particularize the protagonist as it is not the story of one woman. There are hundreds of women who are experiencing similar situations, who are destined to put themselves within four walls, who have been suppressed by their husbands, are forced to give up their career and studies just to do the house hold works and to look after children. *Nakhuda* tells us that women are not a puppet in the hands of men. They are not lifeless things and are not fated to remain only at home. The world is open for them as it is to the men. They are no more

slaves to men.

This particular short story comes across strongly rooted in feminist standpoint, and deals with important issues related to gender in Indian/ South East Asian/ Kashmiri societies/society. Besides talking about different gender roles assumed and forced upon men and women, it stresses the need for women to take a stand for themselves. Like the protagonist, they need to realize their worth and speak up for their rights, dreams and desires. Self-pitying or playing the “victim” will further deteriorate their condition. Whether it is a marriage according to girls’ own choice or her parents’ choice, marriage turns out to be an oppressive institution for women. Sadly the happiness of a woman then depends on the whims of this arbitrary patriarch.

This story also reflects upon a very important aspect of our society that the presence of elders and other family members or relatives become important in proper functioning of a marriage. It shows that how in a marriage other figures like parents and relatives can play a significant role and have a say in the functioning of a marriage of their children or other family members. Whether to disapprove or be appreciative of this aspect is debatable, but I would say that this aspect only hints at the hypocrisy of marriage and forces us to question its sanctity. How is it that a marriage which was dysfunctional earlier tends to function properly by the mere presence of elders or relatives, let alone their interference? What to make of such a marriage? Is it really possible to go on with a marriage like this that requires outside interference for its proper functioning? How many of us are actually happy with this sort of marriage? Does religion, class, caste and region that we belong to make any difference in the way marriages take place in our societies?

Perhaps, the problem in the narrator's marriage is not very grave. So I would not criticize her for going for a 'tie-up' or compromise in the end after all that had happened with her, but she can be accused of giving in to her husband's inappropriate behaviour and not being able to speak up for her rights until and unless she was supported by someone more powerful than her, in this case, her mother. Why does the mother's role become so important in daughter's life even after marriage and how much of a change is a mother capable of bringing? This fact of the story enables us to criticize our society in which women feel powerless when they are on their own and are unable to even freely talk about their dreams and desires with their own husbands.

The story also reflects on how living away from relatives, family and friends, women get caged inside their houses. While men go out and are able to make new friends and meet new people, women are confined to the private domain and fall prey to all kinds of depression inflicted by loneliness. This impels us to consider the equal importance for women to carve a niche for themselves in the outside world. It is important for women as it is for men to indulge in work that gives them freedom and joy. Women in our society are by default bound by the upbringing of children and household chores which burdens them with a huge amount of work and deprives them of time for their own needs.

Tarannum Reyaz asks some extremely important questions in this story, such as, why is a woman always required to make sacrifices? What is so wrong in living for oneself if you are a woman? Even the narrator's mother does not understand this and

asks her daughter to live for ‘munni,’ her grandchild. Why is it not important for the narrator to live properly for herself first and then live properly for her daughter, her husband, her mother or whoever? What becomes of her life, dreams and most importantly her happiness?

2. “*Paalna*” (Cradle)

The story takes place in the labour room of a hospital, where a woman is waiting to give birth to her baby. Her pain, tensions and expectations of yet to be born baby is depicted in Tarannum’s *Paalna*. The woman gets worried every time when she hears the crying of other new born baby. The mother of that baby is tired after her delivery and is not paying much attention to it. This lady keeps calling and telling her that her baby is crying. Initially the mother does not say anything. Later she gets upset and thinks the woman must be getting irritated by the baby’s crying and that is why she keeps disturbing her. While lying in the labour room, the woman remembers her unfortunate baby who dies due to hospital negligence. And the doctors wash their hands off saying the baby died because of chord asphyxia. Now after three years she is again in the labour room expecting her next baby. This time doctors advise her to avoid unpleasant thoughts. She finds it a difficult task. But the baby next to her acts as a diversion. The instinct of a woman to hold and kiss a baby with motherly affection is sketched in this story. It is the woman who has to suffer pain giving birth to the baby and feels much pain when she loses her child. She is born to suffer all the pain and she survives all. The story ends where the woman again calls the crying child’s mother. The story does not say whether that woman gives birth to the baby or not, but her memories about the first child and relentless crying of that baby throughout gives us a gives us a detailed picture of a woman’s gestational

experience.

This short story, in my opinion, deals with issues related to women and their notions of motherhood that are deeply linked with the society. The story swings like a cradle from the conception of a woman to an empty womb, leaving the protagonist of the story with the feeling of 'being incomplete.' Today, a lot of advertisements invite women to buy certain products to make one a 'complete woman.' From childhood, girls are taught that they would grow up to be a woman and perform certain duties such as that of a wife, a daughter-in-law and a mother; in other words, they would have to model themselves according to their own mothers. It is no wonder then how little girls start to play the role of their mothers with their dolls. This woman in the story seems to be part of that culture, from the free-indirect discourse we see the world through her eyes and realize her yearning for a child as she boasts about being liked by children. It seems as though she already knows how to be like a mother.

The story follows the traditional notions of motherhood and parenting. Perhaps motherhood could complete the 'self,' but it is only a socially constructed role. In many societies, it is also a way to bind the woman with the responsibility of a child. In this story, on one hand, there is a woman for whom being a mother is of pivotal importance and on the other hand, a woman who ignores her child's cries. The protagonist, for whom this role of a mother is denied, takes up the role of a judge of motherhood. For her, perhaps the other woman is not a good mother as she could still sleep while her child is crying. For her, this baby's cry is a reminder of her own child who could neither take his first breath of life nor could make his first cry. 'I wish I could just die. Don't know why I didn't.' Here we can see the reality of two facts. One, that the woman has no wish to continue a life without a child but then the

next sentence is a punch from the writer which could only mean that a woman's life does not and cannot end with a child that they have to live on for themselves.

With this story, one begins to wonder why motherhood is so important to women and why the lives of mothers should centre on their children. The woman in this story is paranoid about the doctors since she blames them for her child's death, even when she lies in labour. It is beyond her conception why she shouldn't be the focus of attention necessary in a society where conceiving and having children is so important, then why it is that the women who take so much pain to bring this joy to the world are not given much importance? The story describes the kinds of pain and hardships a woman must endure while delivering a child. It talks about how children are important to the world since they don't belong to the individuals alone but to the entire society. The story does not try to make a direct attempt to assert the importance of mothers who have to go through so much in order to give birth to children, but through the detailed descriptions of labour pains, readers are invited to imagine the kind of mental and physical struggles, women have to undergo, during pregnancy and labour.

What needs to be pointed out here is that the comfort and well-being of mothers is equally important as that of the newly born children. Women should be taken care of as much as children should be, but ironically the protagonist of this story does not understand this as her character is driven by the traditional notions of motherhood inherent in our society. Therefore she feels the comfort of the child to be more important than the comfort of the mother, which is the reason why she calls the other woman so that she can cease to be a negligent mother and attend to the comforts of

her child.

3. “*Tinkey*” (Straws/Particles)

Tinkey is another story which depicts women's despondent condition. The narrator of the story meets her school friend after a long time, and remembers her past life which stops her from asking her friend about the latter's life, marriage etc. The story tells us how a woman's condition can be deplorable to its maximum. It points out social evil such as polygamy, hatred of having a girl child and instead craving for a boy. Such issues lead to second marriages. Narrator's friend once takes her home telling her she will show a new bride. She finds a beautiful woman there, who she later realizes recognises as her friend's mother. Her face seems to have been disfigured because an accident when she tried to save her husband. For that good deed, she has been dumped by her husband for not giving a boy baby. He has therefore married another girl of his daughter's age. When the second wife gets pregnant everybody ignores his first wife and start caring of the second. The first wife is forced to cook and serve the second. Eventually she falls sick and is bed ridden. But defying everybody's expectation, the second wife gives birth to a baby girl. Later she falls in love with another young man. This makes the husband reflect on his wrong doing. He goes back to his first wife who he had thought to be good for nothing. Later he dies leaving all responsibilities to his elder daughter who marries off her younger sisters. The narrator hesitates to ask her whether she herself got married or not. The story ends there. *Tinkey* is a story which portrays helplessness of a woman, who is a mere puppet in the hands of a man.

Tinkey, like the first short story, is an interesting critique on marriage in Indian

culture and questions the position of women in a marriage, where men are always posited as superior to their wives. The story also deals with the important issue of preference for a male child which is internalized in such a way that it becomes an excuse for polygamy. Tarannum Reyaz is trying to bring the Islamic culture of polygamy under scrutiny. The reasons why Islam had the tradition of polygamy was to safeguard the interest of women so that they are taken care of in a time when women did not have equal opportunities and social status as men, but now women are no longer in that position. Practices such as these must be looked upon as anti-modern and obsolete. Polygamy must be discouraged because it is unfair to the woman who has invested the prime of her life to a man who is supposed to take care of her till death. The narrator's friend's father is a man who is proud of the fact that he is able to marry a woman half his age. There are power struggles at play here. He enjoys being a husband of a woman who is young enough to be his daughter because he thinks a girl that young would be naive and not interfere in his matters. He believes he would be able to totally control her. These characters live in a culture which believes that wisdom, power and maturity comes with age. So if we follow this cultural principle the grandmother in the family is the eldest in the family and so with her age she should be the most powerful, mature and wisest authority in the family; but on the contrary, the children seem to be wiser and more mature as they are the ones who see the plight of their mother.

The story also reflects on how women are regarded as child-producing machines, if one machine does not function properly another one should be tried. There are instances of protagonist's mother being described as a 'robot' and working like a 'machine.' The writer here makes a clear juxtaposition of women with machines. If

it is not in the bedroom, then the women are seen constantly working in the kitchen. The story shows that the women have only two domains in a household, one is the bedroom where she obviously has a subordinate position to the man and the other is the kitchen which is obviously centered on taking care of everybody else in the family, thus confining her completely to realm of the home/ the private domain. In this story, we can see the two characters as wives are caught up in these two different spheres of domestic life. The new wife is forever caught in her bedroom, but the condition of the old wife is more pitiful as she is out from her husband's bedroom which signifies that she has lost even the little authority or power that she had in the household. The new wife's authority status also does not look very hopeful, as her role seems to be merely the ability to reproduce, that too to boys only. Both women are at the receiving end of patriarchal violence.

The protagonist's friend's life and the life of her sisters are all the more worrisome, as she has to discontinue her studies just to look after the new born baby girl. This instance reflects on how young girls are given the duty to take care of their younger siblings because that is all what mostly girls are expected to do. It is not that the girls mature faster than boys, but the fact is that they are forced by the society to mature faster than boys.

C) KHEMA KAUL

1. “*Gehre Kathaai Rang Ka Makhmali Phiran*” (A Deep Catechu Colored Velvet *Phiran*)

The story takes place in Kashmir and it explains the problems that were confronted

by Hindus in Kashmir during 1990s. There was a time in Kashmir when Hindus were forced to evacuate their home land, in the name of *Tehreek*.⁵⁶ They were stamped as *kaafirs*⁵⁷ and were forcibly thrown out of the Valley. The story has been narrated through the view point of a Kashmiri Pandit woman, thus portraying the pressure that they underwent because of migration and the problems they faced. The story begins with the narrator's obsession with a *phiran*,⁵⁸ which is very close to her heart. Some sweet memories of her earlier marital life are connected with this *phiran*. Her husband had complemented her fair neck when she wore that *phiran* which "nobody else on earth had noticed." She used to wear it more often because she felt that it made her look much more beautiful. The narrator mocks herself and other women about their obsession with beautifying themselves. Women, according to the narrator find happiness in trivial things. *Phiran* is the only thing which she finds her happiness in, now that this is the only thing that has remained in her life. When *Tehreek* was at its peak, the narrator and her family were also among other Kashmiri Hindus who were forced to leave their place. But she feels that her pain was double than anyone else that left their home because at one hand she has to leave their place and on the other, her husband had left her alone. So, there was none to support her and her children. She left the place for Delhi with her brother and family as living in their homeland was impossible. People were killed in the name of *Tehreek*. Every day they hoped that things would turn into normal but it never happened. However, things worsened with time. Before she decides to leave the place, she meets her husband and asks him to leave the place soon. Without any fear

⁵⁶ It refers to Kashmir freedom movement, which started around 1993.

⁵⁷ The word *Kaafir* usually refers to non Muslims.

⁵⁸ *Phiran* is a traditional Kashmiri garment worn in winters to get warmth from freezing weather. It also provides space for *kangri* (an earthen lamp carried close to the body for more warmth when temperature goes below zero degrees).

of death, she takes the risk to see him off. It shows her love and care for him. But unfortunately, she gets nothing but a cold response from him. To her astonishment, he tells her that he wants the divorce papers to be signed by her before she leaves. Although she expects a reunion, she signs the papers. On the way to Delhi with her children and her brother's family she confronts so many difficulties. She explains how people would fight with each other over a meal. Eventually she is left alone with her children but her hope for reuniting with her husband remains. Once she gets a call from him and both decide to meet. She puts on the same *phiran* which she thinks would bring her luck and she would get back the desired life. But to her disappointment he doesn't show any interest. He does not even want to see or meet his children. She returns with a hopeless heart. Later she gifts her *phiran* to Aruna madam (her colleague) on her birthday. The same *phiran* which was associated with her glorious past and was so close to her heart. The story ends there. The very motive behind the gifting of *phiran* would be to get rid of the past memories. In this story, *Phiran* (which she had kept it as a treasure) stands as a symbol, of her urge to go back to her past days, her home land and her husband. But once she understands that all her hopes are shattered and none of her dreams would be fulfilled, she gifts the *phiran* to her colleague. Interestingly, she does not destroy it because it was something very special for her. It shows that rather than getting rid of the memories of her homeland or husband, she wants the *phiran*/magnificent past to be in one safer hands/ place.

This short-story narrates the experiences of the Kashmiri-Pandits during their exodus in the 1990s from Kashmir, their homeland. Unlike other short-stories of Kaul regarding this issue of displacement, this particular short-story does not take

a direct anti-communal stance as the story coincides with the personal marital crisis of the protagonist and the communal crisis of the entire Kashmiri community. The community that is split in two on the basis of religion, where the 'self' has become the 'other' now owing to the changing ideologies/ changing power structures. The war that was political at first has now become a religious war and the Kashmiri-Pandits appear to have no choice but to get away from their homeland. The story shows that how instead of picking up guns and fighting for their rights against the so-called jihadists, they are compelled to make a 'non-violent' choice of leaving their homes and going to Jammu/Delhi/mainland India. Perhaps, they were ardent believers of the democratic system of the country and thought that they would be given justice if they take shelter as refugees in other parts of the country. But, had the country really been keen on giving justice to the Kashmiri-Pandits, they should have been capable enough of doing so while the Kashmiri-Pandits were still in their native land. Kashmir, since 1989⁵⁹ has always been under the brutal rule of Indian army so how was it that they were unable to provide justice to people whom they were so keen on protecting/ giving shelter to?

There is an instance in the story where the narrator specifically names the "Chattrapur temple" that is donating *sarees* to the refugees. It hints at how religious sentiments of the people are exploited whether it is the refugees or the people who would be giving donations, it is the religion that is being reaffirmed through such acts. Similarly, on the jihadist front it is again a different form of exploitation of religious sentiments that takes the form of extremism.

⁵⁹ For further details, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir_conflict.

But, coming to the ordinary lives of the characters described in this story, the *makhmali phiran* becomes symbolic of Kashmir to the protagonist, her family members and many other refugees like her, as is her marriage. The *phiran* was the most valuable thing to her as Kashmir was to the Kashmiri Pandits, because it was their home, their household and the place where they made their livelihood. But this affinity between the land and them only turns out to be illusionary. The place that used to be a paradise is no longer a paradise for them. A home that needs to make them secure is no longer able to make them feel safe, like the *phiran* that was supposed to give her the feeling of self-importance and self- beauty is no longer able to do so. Like the *phiran*, she/Kashmiri pandits need to give away Kashmir too and besides giving it away she/they also have “to stop loving it so much; get away from it.”

2. “*Poorv Lok*” (The Old World/ The Old Times)

This short story begins with preconceived notions about Kashmir and Kashmiri Muslims, and throughout the story, the writer maintains the inherent bias in the very conception of Kashmiri Muslims, that have been formed based merely upon prejudices and rumours, conflating into a solid stereotype with time.

It discusses issues of nationalism and of morality associated with it. The story shows that there is a split in ideology between the Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims as far as the issue of Indian nationalism is concerned. The Hindus and the Indian Army is portrayed as the protectors of nation and mankind, whereas Muslims are portrayed as traitors to the nation, thus catering to certain hegemonic stereotypes. It is not on the basis of a person’s religion that his or her ideology is to be decided.

It is difficult to understand what Khema Kaul's motives are by representing such biased opinions about Kashmiri-Muslims as well as Kashmiri-pandits. It becomes difficult to understand whether she is trying to be ironic or is it that she wants to affirm existing stereotypes regarding Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri pandits where Kashmiri pandits are often portrayed as allies of Indian army and conformers of Indian nationalism, whereas Muslims are represented as wrongdoers of not only the army and the nation, but also as violators of the rights of Kashmiri Pandits to be Kashmiri. It is not that all Muslims are anti-nationalist and all Kashmiri-Pandits are in favour of Indian nationalism. The writer therefore, I believe, can rightly be accused of stereotyping not only Muslims but also Hindus.

The portrayal of Indian Army as powerless and ineffectual in front of the so-called terrorists is difficult to perceive which again triggers the question whether the writer is being ironic in her regard with the Kashmiris and the Indian Army, or whether she actually means it in a straightforward manner, catering to hegemonic nationalist ideologies.

The other issues being talked about in the story is in regard with the encroachment of abandoned houses of Kashmiri Pandits and the conditions in which they were living. It is obvious that the Kashmiri Pandits have been wronged but it is not an individual community that is to be blamed but humanity. As far as the issue of the temple being converted into a chicken house is concerned it is sadly strong enough an incident to start a Hindu-Muslim riot. The Muslim cannot be blamed for drowning the idols as they consider them unholy and Hindus cannot be blamed for getting upset over the incident because it is what they worship. This speaks of the

prevalent religious fundamentalism among the Hindus and Muslims. The writer does appear to be unbiased when she states the fact of hens being more useful than mute idols, but the effect of the statement is diluted by the sarcasm she infuses while she formally represents this image.

3. “*Maanavadhikaar*” (Human Rights)

Narrated by an omniscient narrator, throughout the story we get to know two perspectives on Muslims: one is of the native Kashmiri Pandit's and the other a foreigner's. The story tries to bring out the myths and rumours that are spread about the Muslims. We see an extreme feeling of hatred and disbelief towards Muslims. It becomes clear from the metaphors used to describe them such as 'Poisonous snakes' and 'monsters.' This signifies the mistrust prevalent in both communities, lost due to insurgency and military rule. A bias against Muslims prevails throughout the story. The story seems to be ironical at times and brings out the assumed views that the people have about the Muslims. Besides, the story brings forth the misconception about Kashmir as a “unique rather scary/terrifying place.”

The partiality against Muslims becomes more apparent at some points like when “real Kashmiris” and the question of religious rule comes forth for instance, serving of wine in case of Muslims comes from a place of Islamic laws and rules over other whereas, in case of the ‘real Kashmiri’ it is their custom. Further, the issue of ‘Naxalite’ and ‘Islamic Terrorism’ makes it clearer. We see how judgements are made over a community always from an outsider's perspective. The story raises questions about the rights of Muslims and is ironical in tone. The very title of the

story is contradictory with the content and makes fun of the question of human rights, when at the same time some people are deprived of their rights. The story raises the question of 'whose rights' when some people are denied even the status of human being: "they've got the faces of humans but they are something else" says Peter, the foreigner character in the story. The entire story is based on the duel of the 'self' and the 'other.' All the opinions are made on the bases of mere assumptions only and there seems to be no attempt to come to an understanding by going deeper into the complexities of reality.

4. "Wabah" (The Upsurge)

The story is completely one sided. There seems to be no attempt to listen to the point of view of the other who is being spoken about. The entire problem emerges out of the gun. Already there is a misunderstanding among people and on top of that owning a gun adds fuel to the fire of suspicion. People are trying to tar everybody of the 'other' side with the same brush which is the reason for the wrong assumptions and the 'doubt and fear' in their minds.

Besides this, there is lack of communication, there are no efforts taken to initiate dialogue between the two communities in a constructive manner. The hegemony of the Pandits can clearly be seen through sentences like "They are smart, and they put that to very good use, India is because of them." The issue of the clashes between army and the crowd is brought out to question the hegemony of the army which is supposed to be the savior of the people.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:

These three writers break the stereotypical image of being an unquestioning wife; they break the stereotype of going against the norms of the society; they also break the stereotype of writing a short story, as defined by the male writers in Kashmir. They try to redefine the life of a woman. They write their own experience in their narratives from a woman's perspective as they believe that they would be able to present the dimensions of female experiences, which are different from those of males. Through their stories, they try to construct identities of their own.

Thematic Concerns

Portrayal of Women:

Experiences of women in these short stories are narrated from a woman's point of view. Women are portrayed as they are living in 'real,' in a place called Kashmir. Women characters portrayed by Mehfooza Jan, Tarannum Reyaz and Khema Kaul are mostly weak and helpless, and suffer throughout their life. Almost all women characters in Mehfooza Jan's stories commit suicide in the end; probably because that is the only choice they are left with to escape the oppressive conditions. Talking on the same lines, Rachel Blau DuPlessis in her book titled *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* concludes that the result of a successful performance of gender, the *euphoric* ending, culminates in the socially mandated heterosexual union of marriage, through which the heroine's fantasies and desires should ultimately be fulfilled. Conversely, the *dysphoric* ending, the result of the heroine's privileging of her desire, climaxes in death. She argues that the start of a project for liberating women from these restrictive patterns

must include looking ‘beyond (these) ending[s].’⁶⁰ In Mehfooza Jan’s short story *Oash* (Tears), Safeena is an orphan who becomes the target of man’s rapaciousness and is sold to a rich man. The story ends with Safeena killing herself. The story also is a critique of the Kashmiri society, where women are denied a voice. Safeena’s eyes were “in a conversation with the sky,” says it all. It also hints at prostitution prevailing in Kashmiri society, a subject which is hardly talked about. Tarannum Reyaz’s women characters go through lots of hardships because of various roles she is expected to play- submissive mother, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a daughter-in-law and yet she cannot raise her voice against the norms of the society. Jidith Butler, in her analysis of socialized roles defines gender as ‘a corporeal field of cultural play’ whose ‘legacy [is] sedimented acts’ performed constantly.⁶¹ Tarannum’s characters don’t give up and continue their endless efforts to be heard. They also suffer from a sense of alienation,⁶² *Nakhuda* (An Atheist) being an example. Tarannum stresses the powerlessness of women, who are dependent on other members of the family and are unable to express themselves; thus their dreams remain unfulfilled. Her short stories *Nakhuda* (An Atheist) and *Tinke* (Straws/Particles) are the best examples. Both Mehfooza Jan and Tarannum Reyaz convey the message that women need to be strong. Khema Kaul criticizes the Kashmiri Pandit men for being incredibly conservative and dominating. She seems annoyed over the issue of continuing women’s suffering, especially after so many years of Independence. She blames women for being responsible for their own

⁶⁰ For further details, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, (Bloomington: Indiana, UP, 1985).

⁶¹ See “Performative Acts of Gender Constitution: an essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Performing Feminisms: Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1990) 282, 274.

⁶² Most of her characters are alienated from the world, society, state, family etc. Moreover man woman relationship among her characters brings alienation, loneliness, isolation and lack of communication., which is similar to most of Anita Desai’s works, especially “Voices in the City.”

miseries and agonies. She wants women to be strong enough to face difficulties created because of the male dominated world and the patriarchal impositions. She writes, “Kashmiri Pandit men often abuse their own strength and women become nothing but objects to be consumed and used. The worst thing is that women also give in to this kind of thinking and become its victims --- this is what is so frightening.”⁶³

Marriage:

Shashi Deshpande,⁶⁴ while questioning marriage writes,

A marriage you start of expecting so many things. And bit by bit, like dead leaves the expectations fall out. But... two people who have shut themselves in two separate jars. Who can see each other, but cannot communicate. Is this a marriage? (Deshpande 24)

Like Shashi Deshpande, the three women writers are also not completely against marriage but it is seen as a disturbing matter and the stories selected for translation here illustrate this. All they want is an honourable adjustment between husband and a wife where the dignity and honour of a wife is safe and secured. Moreover, while giving a picture of the life of a married woman, Tarannum shows her powerlessness in every aspect of life. Marriage, according to her can put an end to the academic aspirations of a woman and she is always expected to compromise and make sacrifices. Tarannum questions the sanctity of marriage in *Tinke* (Straws/Particles) as well. It is an important critique on the conditions of marriage that prevail. Woman is again portrayed as helpless, a mere puppet in the hands of a man and patriarchy. It

⁶³ See, Khema Kaul in “A Pandit Story,” *Speaking Peace: Women’s Voices from Kashmir*, Urvashi Butalia, ed. (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2002) p. 185.

⁶⁴ For further details, refer to <http://www.inflibnet.ac.in/ojs/index.php/JLCMS/art>.

shows how woman is regarded only as a child-producing machine and how men want other woman if one 'machine' doesn't function. This is the story of a woman who gives birth to baby girls and so is rejected by her husband who makes this an excuse for a second marriage. It hints at the misinterpretation of Islam which allows polygamy, but insists on care for all wives equally. It is a critique of patriarchy still prevailing in Kashmir which deliberately misinterprets Islam. Khema Kaul also brings the issue of marriage in her story *Gehre Kathaai Rang Ka Makhmali Phiran* (A Deep Catechu Colored Velvet *Phiran*). She shows how a Pandit woman suffers not only because Kashmiri Pandits were thrown out of Kashmir but because her husband deserts her and their children when she needed him most. Instead, he asks her to sign divorce papers. It shows how men ill-treat women, whether a Muslims or Hindus, and the kinds of hardships women face.

Tarannum, while discussing about the hardships, and the physical and mental struggles that a woman has to undergo at different stages of life, gives the reader a picture of the trauma a woman goes through when pregnant and after the delivery of the baby. The short story *Paalna* (Cradle) portrays the experiences of pregnancy,⁶⁵ the anxieties of a pregnant woman and shows how the general idea of thinking that giving birth to a baby makes a woman 'complete,' so motherhood becomes an important factor in a woman's life. Tarannum describes labour pains and the degree of trauma that a woman undergoes while giving birth to a baby.

⁶⁵ Yoshiko Enomoto talks about the experiences of pregnancy in her article titled "The Reality of Pregnancy and Motherhood for Women: Tsushima Yuko's [Choji] and Margaret Drabble's [The Milestone]." See <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40247150?seq=1&se> for further details. Also, see *The Captive Body: Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century American Women Writers Redefine Pregnancy and Childhood* by Mary Ruth Marotte. <http://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3834&context>.

Violence⁶⁶ at Different Levels:

Since there are so many kinds and forms of violence (Reidel and Welsh 1) and since it is studied from different perspectives (victim, perpetrator, neutral observer), there is a wide variety of definitions of violence. Hence ‘a’ definition of violence, as believed by many critics, is not possible. Violence is seen as a social construct because what and who is considered violent depends on the historical and socio-cultural conditions⁶⁷ (Willem de Haan 28).

Violence by state, security forces, insurgents, society and at home is another theme that runs through almost all stories written by these writers. Khema Kaul, through most of her stories, recalls the time when Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave their homeland, Kashmir. The trauma continued even in Jammu, where religious sentiments of the refugee Kashmiri Pandits were exploited by “our own” people. Her stories describe the hardships of the Kashmiri Pandits during their migration, although stereotyping of Kashmiri Muslims is obvious throughout. The enemy figure is clearly shown as the Kashmiri Muslim. On the other hand, Mehfooza Jan, while talking about violence in Kashmir hardly names the ‘wrongdoers.’ She, like Tarannum Reyaz, gives the reader a true picture of the problems faced by a Kashmiri Muslims on a daily basis but allows the reader to interpret. Mehfooza Jan and Tarannum Reyaz make use of symbols like ‘dog,’ ‘mad dog,’ ‘beast,’ ‘looter’ and so on to represent the terror they produce. The extent of human brutality

⁶⁶ Violence has been defined as an extreme form of aggression, such as assault, rape, murder and so on, and its causes include frustration, aggression etc. Some have defined it a ‘the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or a community, which results in psychological harm, depression, deprivation etc.’”

⁶⁷ See “Violence as an Essentially Contested Concept” by Willem de Haan, where the author tries to defines violence restrictively, inclusively etc.

portrayed by Mehfooza Jan is shocking and the anonymity of the characters is intriguing. It probably hints at the situation in Kashmir, where people live in constant fear and anxiety. In *Tchalalar* (Hustle and Bustle) the way Maryam's brother is killed in front of her eyes followed by her molestation is shocking, yet she doesn't expose the identity of the criminals. Another example is *Yatch Kaal* (After a Long Time), where a 'mad dog' attacks and kills a child as an analogy of violence in Kashmir, where people, irrespective of age, are tormented. Noteworthy is the people's response to such incidents in terms of their helplessness in saving the child or Maryam. Tarannum Reyaz and Mehfooza Jan focus on the violence experienced by women within the family, and outside by the society, insurgents, armed forces and so on.

Identity:

Mehfooza Jan's short story *Anigot* (Darkness/Sightless) raises the question of identity in Kashmir, where people are always asked about their 'whereabouts' and prove their identity in their homeland by 'unknown people.' She conveys the message about the defenselessness of people, who are targeted, tortured, raped, beaten to death, and are always 'suspected.' It shows how Kashmiris live with anxiety, apprehension and fear.

Tarannum Reyaz talks about the relationship between a husband and a wife; Mehfooza Jan talks about a relationship between a mother-in-law and a son-in-law and the problems involved; the domestic violence of women, but such issues are not highlighted by Khema Kaul other than *Gehre Kathaai Rang Ka Makhmali Phiran* (A Deep Catechu Colored Velvet *Phiran*). All these writers in their own way

criticize patriarchy and the imposition of its norms. They convey the mental and physical torture/trauma that a woman goes through, whether a Kashmiri Muslim or a Pandit woman. They question the sanctity of marriage, and the rules dictated by the patriarchal society. By discussing issues like prostitution, polygamy, multi-relationships, the painful process of giving birth to a child and so on, they break the silence of experiencing experience by a Kashmiri woman, considered as shy and inarticulate. They make their voice distinct from that of male writers in Kashmir, who hardly talk about such issues. Moreover, these writers speak more loudly than men writers in Kashmir. The theme of violence of different kinds and experienced at different levels as mentioned earlier has been dealt by all three writers. Many Kashmiri Pandit writers have discussed in their works the pain and trauma they underwent during and after migration, but through Khema Kaul we are introduced to the woman's point of view.

The root cause of violence at different levels as described by these writers is patriarchy and migration, so they discuss the rigid rules of patriarchy and the aftereffects of dislocation. Hence, the characters are mostly the victims of male domination (where male characters oppress female characters by violating their bodies) and the victims of relocation (when a whole community was forced to leave their homeland). The anger and frustration is clearly seen in these stories.

Style, Tone and Characterization

Mehfooza Jan's stories generate fear and anxiety in the reader, whether it is about violence of women, torturous life of the people and her characters, whether men or women suffer silently, and almost all women characters end their life. This is very

disturbing. Tarannum's tone is sometimes of a soft-hearted woman struggling with problems either at her paternal home or at her in-law's place. Sometimes her women characters articulate the problem. Khema Kaul sounds very angry about women who don't protest enough against the injustice meted out to them by the society and religion. Her tone seems very harsh, even when she describes Kashmiri Muslims calling them 'bastards' and so on. This remains her attitude and tone throughout.

Mehfooza Jan's characters remain unnamed perhaps out of fear of being targeted. This is a real threat in Kashmir. But interestingly, while critiquing Kashmiri society, she names some characters. A kind of censorship can be felt here. Tarannum Reyaz, though narrating in the first person, names her characters very rarely. At the same time, one can see how important it is for Khema Kaul to name her characters. It looks like a deliberate thrust/stress on a certain group of people, Muslims being the case here. The characters in the short stories range from every class. We find urban women in Tarannum's and Khema Kaul's short stories, while Mehfooza's women characters are mostly from the rural background.

Underlying/Untold Themes/Issues:

There is an underlying theme in almost all the stories written by these writers, which is of loneliness and isolation. The Kashmiri Muslim woman feels isolated, lonely and perturbed after her father, brother, son is killed before her eyes and she is left all alone to bear the pain and suffering. She also feels lonely after her husband goes for a second marriage because she gives birth to baby girls. She feels lonely and helpless when her child is torn apart by a 'mad dog,' when her daughter or sister is raped and she, along with other people of her locality are left to witness the scene.

She feels alienated when (being an orphan) she is sold to some rich man by her own people. She feels forlorn when she is raped by security forces, the saviours of the country and on the other, she is made to shut up and grieve in silence. The Kashmiri Pandit woman, on the one hand, is devastated because of the pain and trauma caused by dislocation, and her dear ones are killed; her children starve; she is deserted by her husband. At the same time, when she moves to another unknown place, people ill-treat her and the men in her family, including her husband perpetuates the defined rules of patriarchy. She feels isolated when she is left with nothing but only memories of a beautiful 'home,' Kashmir. And, both Kashmiri Muslim and Pandit woman feel isolated, lonely and helpless when they are forced to marry the man chosen by their relatives and are left with no choice. They feel so lonely that many commit suicide, probably only way out for them. They suffer silently when their dreams of higher studies remain unfulfilled.

It is only hoped that both Kashmiri Muslim and Pandit women come together, forgetting their differences and fight the war against patriarchy, violence, isolation, pain, suffering, indifference and make their 'home' (Jammu and Kashmir) a better place to live.

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CONCLUSION

The thesis presented a comparative study of three contemporary women writers from Kashmir: Mehfooza Jan, Tarannum Reyaz and Khema Kaul, who write short stories in Kashmiri, Urdu and Hindi, respectively. The principal aim of this thesis was to bring the voices of the contemporary women writers in Kashmir to a wider audience, in and outside Kashmir. It tried to demonstrate how women writers in Kashmir resist their silencing by telling their stories and exposing the challenges of oppression. Apart from discussing short story as a genre and the contribution of women writers to this genre, part of the thesis critically engaged with the issue of publication and translation as well. It also traced the structural and material conditions of women writing in Kashmir and addressed questions regarding; when women in Kashmir started writing and in what circumstances, the different reasons for opting to write, the kind of issues they discuss, the readership they expect/predict and the different kinds of problems they face while getting their works published or translated. It also documented the interviews taken with women writers who have published their works and also women who generally write. By translating and providing a comparative study of the select short stories by these writers, one gets a better understanding of how far a Kashmiri woman has been successful in giving expression to her silence and in presenting the complex realities of women in Kashmir, familial and otherwise.

The thesis also explored the way these three writers come to terms with the issues of region, religion, patriarchy, gender and so on. Their contribution to short story genre has added a new colour to the literature of Kashmir. Not just that, by breaking the

stereotypes of all kinds, by discussing their experiences in struggling against, and resisting, different forms of oppression, they have also set an example for the upcoming writers. Writing has been used as a weapon of social change and through this process; they are trying to build bridges.

Women writers in Jammu and Kashmir Valley have also started participating in different workshops, where they discuss and therefore introduce their works. The workshops are organized for the hope of bringing together writers from Jammu and Kashmir Valley to understand each other better through literature.

From last couple of years, women in Kashmir, both Muslims and Hindus, have started participating in the workshops initiated by WISCOMP⁶⁸ (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace), known as Women Writers' Meet, where women writers assemble and discuss their writings and try to find solutions for their problems. To provide a safe space for creative expression particularly for women writers across ethnic, political and generational faultlines, these workshops were held alternately in Srinagar and Jammu. The workshops are believed to have been initially conceptualized by *Athwaas*⁶⁹ member Ather Zia and was coordinated by Ashima Kaul (a member of the Hindu Pandit Minority). These workshops were designed to initiate a response to the political violence that had stifled the formation of democratic spaces and broken the ties of trust that had once cemented the communities together. I have tried to conduct an inquiry into the extent to which these workshops helped women in Kashmir to express their feelings and bridge the

⁶⁸ An initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, the Foundation was established with the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to His Holiness in 1989.

⁶⁹ It is a WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) initiative for conflict transformation in the provinces of Jammu and Kashmir.

gaps between the communities.

The First Women Writers' workshop took place on 2nd and 3rd Oct, 2003, which sought to provide a platform for women writers based in Jammu, Kashmir and New Delhi to present their writings and discuss their problems. It helped to bring together women from different communities irrespective of their class, region, and religion. It also brought together the different languages like Kashmiri, Urdu, Hindi and English spoken in Kashmir. The poetry and prose presented here were woven together in and around the conflict in Kashmir. The issues discussed included human rights abuses by security forces, tragic lives of half-widows, the inhumane face of militancy and the anguish of Kashmiri Pandits who were forced to leave the Valley.

The second writer's meet titled 'Literatures in Exile' was held on 28th and 29th May, 2004 in Jammu which focused on the ways in which Kashmiri women had deciphered and interpreted the word 'Exile' in their writings. For the migrant Kashmiri women, the canvas of exile stretched from territorial to ideological and to spiritual exile, and for women from the Valley, exile encompassed isolation from the ongoing processes of violence and religious extremism around her. The narrations reflected the women's inner conflict in negotiating territorial, emotional, psychological and spiritual spaces. There were some moments when participants were constrained by their community identities, but the urge was to appreciate and understand the journey of the other prevailed.

The third writer's meet titled 'Resonances of Understanding' was organized in Srinagar from 6-8 May 2005. The main effort of this meet was to understand each

other through literature. The format was designed to be interactive, all-encompassing and non-hierarchical. Writers sought to collectively explore the terrain of peace and reconciliation. The literature written by young Kashmiri contemporary women, senior authors and poets and the earliest women writers/poets was discussed. I think, the deliberate going back to the earlier writings by women and then coming back to the contemporary writings probably helped these writers forget the newly created boundaries of region, religion and class and understand each other in a better way.

The fourth meet titled ‘Story Telling for Children’ was held in Jammu in December 2006. There was an agreement among the writers that story telling was extremely important for the development of a child. Story telling would help in inducing moral values and thus help children to cultivate good habits and noble thoughts. They felt that there was a need to write short stories for children also because there was a dearth of children’s literature in Kashmir and also the rich tradition of short story telling was gradually fading.

A two-day workshop titled ‘Creating Stories for Children’ was organized on 27th and 28th October 2007 at Srinagar. This workshop intended to create stories for children in the state. It is believed that the workshop on Creating Stories for Children in Jammu and Kashmir was visualized as a democratic space to build on the repository of shared experiences of conflict, and elicit a spectrum of characters, events, stories that could encapsulate in its fold, the history, the dreams, individual as well as collective, of the people of the state. It also aimed to produce these stories as a form of healing. It sought an engagement from the participants to systematically ascertain

the suitability of various literary techniques, themes, plot development, modes of characterization that could be employed to effect the production of good literature for children, in different languages like Dogri, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Hindi, Urdu and English.

The workshop titled ‘Resurrecting Pluralistic Jammu and Kashmir: New Wave Writing 2011’ was held in Delhi on 7th Jan 2011. Fifth in the series, the workshop was an attempt to explore answers for questions which were collectively faced by the two communities-Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims. This workshop helped a lot in bringing close the writers, transcending the religious differences and so on. Both felt that they have been negatively impacted by the conflict in the Valley. Urvashi Butalia writes in one of these meetings, a young Kashmiri woman speaking of the rape of a friend in Kashmir, posed a question to participants: “I want to ask how the militant’s struggle for *Azaadi*⁷⁰ for liberation, will be advanced by the rape of a woman. I want to ask how this rape or the countless other rapes that have taken place in Kashmir will help in the security and protection of the nation” (Butalia xvi).

Similarly, Kashmiri Pandit women not only talked about the trauma that they have gone through because of migration but also because of the Pandit society. According to Khema Kaul, Kashmiri Pandit women have been victims of terrorism as well as the Pandit society. In one of her articles titled “A Pandit Story,” Kaul describes the kind of torture Kashmiri Pandit women have gone through because of Pandit men. She writes that “Men have always been a part of the social project to ignore women, to make them invisible. The society that men create and uphold is the same society

⁷⁰ *Azaadi* (Urdu) means freedom.

that rejects women” (Butalia 186).

Consequently these workshops were incredibly helpful to Kashmiri women (Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims) not only because they found a platform where they could freely articulate their outlook through their writings but these also helped women writers from both communities come together, share their problems, discuss their anxieties and try to discover solutions for living a better and contented life. Unfortunately, because of some reasons these workshops were discontinued.

There is a new wave of women writers emerging in Jammu and Kashmir Valley. To name a few: Rukhsana Jabeen, Naseem Shafai, Chandrakanta, Sanjana Kaul, Hanana Barjees, Sunita Raina, Shabnam Ashai, Sudha Kaul, Shafeeqa Parveen, Bimla Raina, Syeda Afshana, among others. One thing that almost all these writers have in common is the theme of sense of loss, peace and stability. It is hoped that they come out together, forget their differences, and talk about complex, sensitive but important issues more openly and help in enriching the future of Kashmiri women’s literature, and make their voices heard, as every voice counts.

Because of the unavailability of secondary materials, the research has been restricted in some sense. The questions that remained unanswered are: what could be called a ‘Kashmiri’ short story and for that reason ‘Kashmiri Literature’ which could be explored further. Also, since the thesis has taken the thematic concerns as part of the study, sociopolitical and other related issues can be taken up and studied.

This will also strengthen the ways women’s writing is read. The male perspective

and male thinking has been articulated through centuries in the manner of reading. Women's writing has led to a paradigm shift in reader response. Writing of women from Kashmir will extend that sensitivity further.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Ahaan</i>	: Meaning ‘yes.’
<i>Assalam u Alikum</i>	: An Arabic word, meaning ‘peace be upon you.’ It is used by Muslims to greet each other.
<i>Azaan</i>	: Taken from an Arabic word, <i>Adhan</i> , is an Islamic call for worship. It is called out five times a day, in the mosque.
<i>Barfi</i>	: A kind of sweet.
<i>Batuk Puja</i>	: A kind of puja, performed by Hindus in Kashmir.
<i>Bhabhi</i>	: It is an Urdu or Hindi word, meaning brother’s wife.
<i>Boba</i>	: Used for mothers or grandmothers in Kashmiri.
<i>Chhatrapur Temple</i>	: It is a very famous temple, located in south of Delhi. It is believed that, it was considered as the biggest temple in India and second largest in the world till 2005.
<i>Chinar Tree</i>	: Known as <i>Boiun</i> or <i>Booni</i> in Kashmiri language, is a huge tree, grows up to a height of 30 metres and has a life span of more than 500 years. It has a special cultural and religious significance among Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus. Also known as <i>Plantanus Orientalis</i> .
<i>Dadi Jaan</i>	: Name used by children for their grandmother.
<i>Dupatta</i>	: Has different meanings and connotations in different languages and regions in India, but it basically is a piece of cloth used by women to cover one’s head or is wrapped around the neck.
<i>Dulhan</i>	: A Hindi or Urdu word used for bride.
<i>Geeta Bhavan</i>	: A temple complex located in Jammu city, adjacent to the Shiva temple. It was converted into a reception cum transit camp, where the Hindu refugees arriving from Kashmir, disembarked.
<i>Gora</i>	: Term used in some places in India (also by Khema Kaul), mostly to refer to foreigners.
<i>Hazrat</i>	: An Arabic word, <i>Hadhrat</i> , meaning ‘presence.’ It is used to honour a person.
<i>Henna</i>	: A reddish-brown dye made from the powdered leaves of a tropical shrub, used to colour the hair and decorate the body. It is applied on the hands of brides in Kashmir.
<i>Hukkah</i>	: An instrument for smoking tobacco. It is referred to as <i>jijeer</i> in Kashmiri language.
<i>Huzoor</i> respect.	: An Arabic and Urdu word meaning master is used for respect.
<i>Jihad</i>	: An Arabic word and an Islamic term, meaning ‘struggle in the way of Allah,’ an inner spiritual struggle and outer physical struggle.
<i>Jihadist</i>	: A Muslim who follows Jihad.
<i>Jenab</i>	: An honorary title, also used to address elders with respect.
<i>Kaka</i>	: Used in Kashmir when addressing uncle. Example, Bashir <i>kaka</i> , etc.

<i>Kafir</i>	: An Arabic word, usually translated as ‘nonbeliever,’ disbeliever’ or ‘infidel. It refers to a person who rejects God in Islam.
<i>Kurta Pajama</i>	: Consists of two pieces of garments; one of the basic clothing worn in India.
<i>Lar</i>	: It is a town in Ganderbal district in Kashmir.
<i>Maanavadhikar</i>	: Human Rights.
<i>Makhmali</i>	: Velvety.
<i>Masterji</i>	: Mostly used to address teachers in Kashmir.
<i>Mathnavi</i>	: Also written as <i>Masnavi</i> or <i>Ma’navia</i> Persian word is a kind of spiritual writing.
<i>Munna</i>	: Baby boys are usually called as ‘ <i>munna</i> ’ in some places in Kashmir.
<i>Munni</i>	: Endearment used for baby girls.
<i>Nakhuda</i>	: An atheist.
<i>Namaskar</i>	: A traditional way of greeting mostly used by Hindus in Kashmir.
<i>Orzuv</i>	: Refers to a kind of blessing meaning ‘good health.’ It is mostly used by Kashmiri Pandits.
<i>Paalna</i>	: Cradle.
<i>Panditji</i>	: Used to address Kashmiri Pandits.
<i>Papier Mache</i>	: Refers to the art of making an object from mashed and moulded paper pulp.
<i>Pari</i>	: It is a language, used by people in some hilly regions of Kashmir.
<i>Pashmeena</i>	: A cloth made from fine quality goat’s wool.
<i>Pathan</i>	: In Kashmir, it is usually referred to people who are tall and strong.
<i>Phiran</i>	: A long cloak made of wool, worn by women and men in Kashmir.
<i>Phiran Waalas</i>	: Referred to people who wear phiran.
<i>Pir</i>	: A Muslim saint or holy man or guide or teacher.
<i>Sahab</i>	: A polite title or a form of address for a man. <i>Sahiba</i> is for women.
<i>Shiv-ling</i>	: A Sanskrit word meaning ‘mark’ or ‘sign,’ is a representation of Hindu diety, Shiva used for worship in temples.
<i>Surma</i>	: <i>Surma</i> is a kind of <i>kajal</i> which is worn in eyes. People in Kashmir usually get it from Mecca and it is known to be very auspicious. So every bride is supposed to wear <i>Surma</i> in her eyes.
<i>Tauba</i>	: ‘God forbid.’
<i>Tanzeem</i>	: An organization or a group of people with similar ideologies.
<i>Tinkey</i>	: Straws or particles.
<i>Tulmul</i>	: A place of worship for Hindus in Kashmir, <i>Tulmul</i> , where <i>Kheer Bhawani</i> temple is situated.

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEWS WITH THE WOMEN WRITERS

A questionnaire was emailed to all three women writers and their replies are reproduced below. I also personally met and had telephonic conversations for various clarifications. I profusely thank them all for spending their valuable time in conversation with me. I interviewed Mehfooza Jan on 10th December, 2011, Tarannum Reyaz on 25th December, 2011 and Khema Kaul on 15th May, 2012.

1. MEHFOOZA JAN:

- Q *When and how did you start writing short stories?*
MJ : Early College days.
- Q *Why do you prefer writing short stories?*
MJ : It is the medium of expression that suits me most.
- Q *What has motivated you to write?*
MJ : My individuality and the circumstances around.
- Q *Why did you opt to write in Kashmiri?*
MJ : Kashmiri is my mother tongue and I feel more comfortable with the language.
- Q *Did you get a perfect or suitable environment to write?*
MJ : Not exactly.
- Q *Did you get enough support from your family both paternal home and in-laws place?*
MJ : To a certain extent.
- Q *Was it easy for you to find a publisher?*
MJ : Not easy. Had to publish on my own as there is no significant reading public available.
- Q *How did the audience respond to your short stories?*
MJ : I have been writing on the sufferings and the pain of women and feminist aspects thereof. My stories have been discussed, analyzed and referred to by short fiction critics.
- Q *Who was your inspiration?*
MJ : My vision and social milieu.
- Q *What are you working on at the moment?*
MJ : Presently I am compiling an anthology of short stories.
- Q *How did the question of location influence you?*
MJ : I have imbibed tremendous influence from the question of location and assimilated in my writings.
- Q *When writing, do you draw on your experience as a Kashmiri?*
MJ : I begin writing as a Kashmiri and end up as a universal human being.
- Q *Why was there a long gap between women writers like Lal Ded and present women writers?*
MJ : No conducive atmosphere was available to women. Rest is history.
- Q *What are the themes that you use in your short stories?*
MJ : I write on human love, social mores and the meaninglessness of

- materialism.
- Q *You have been writing for a long time. Has the theme (subject matter) changed or not?*
- MJ : My themes have not changed. They have grown and evolved into maturity over the years.
- Q *What are your views on religion? Does it pose restrictions on women especially who write?*
- MJ : For me, my religion is not posing any restrictions.
- Q *What do you think of violence in Kashmir, as in how far has it affected and is affecting the life of people?*
- MJ : It impacted the life of people in Kashmir.
- Q *Does your fiction reflect any such issue?*
- MJ : Yes.
- Q *Do you believe in something like 'personal is political'?*
- MJ : Sometimes yes, sometimes not.
- Q *Do you think that only women, who are privileged, write poetry in Kashmir?*
- MJ : Women from all classes and spheres have taken to writing poetry in Kashmiri and Kashmiri.
- Q *Does it help a writer if she gets support from her husband?*
- MJ : Yes, it does.
- Q *Do you call yourself a feminist writer?*
- MJ : I have feminist leanings.

2. TARANNUM REYAZ

- Q *When and how did you start writing short stories?*
- TR : In my 7th 8th standard, failing my bimonthly mathematics test, a couplet appeared in my mind unwittingly and it was around those days itself that news in a local newspaper inspired me to write a short story on an issue about women.
- Q *Why do you prefer writing short stories?*
- TR : It depends upon the thought or a plot. Sometimes the writer in me gets satisfied after writing a couple of verses and sometimes it demands a long short story or a complete novel.
- Q *Why did you opt to write in Urdu?*
- TR : Urdu is not only a language, it is a culture we call Ganga-Jamni Tehzeeb. It is my Valley's official language and is very sweet and musical to listen to and very soft to speak.
- Q *Did you get a perfect or suitable environment to write?*
- TR : I have an environment of my own inside me. Outer forces do not disturb that.
- Q *Did you get enough support from your family both paternal home and in-laws place?*
- TR : Fortunately, yes.
- Q *Was it easy for you to find a publisher?*
- TR : Fortunately, yes.
- Q *How did the audience respond to your short stories?*
- TR : In a very pleasant way.

- Q *Who was your inspiration?*
 TR : Myself.
- Q *What are you working on at the moment?*
 TR : On my new poetry book, a collection of my columns (published in Kashmir Uzma, Jehan e Pakistan, Siyasat Hyderabad and Inquilab in India) and of course on my collection of short stories.
- Q *How did the question of location influence you?*
 TR : Every place is full of events and topics; anything can inspire a creative person.
- Q *When writing, do you draw on your experience as a Kashmiri?*
 TR : Yes, sometimes.
- Q *Why was there a long gap between women writers like Lal Ded and present women writers?*
 TR : There was never a gap only, we lack creative criticism in our valley.
- Q *What are the themes that you use in your short stories?*
 TR : I write on any theme that inspires me, like social issues, women problems, children, birds, exploitation of poor, racism, environment, natural scenic beauty, poverty, cruelty, motherhood, distance between loved ones, minorities' issues, corruption, etc.
- Q *You have been writing for a long time. Has the theme (subject matter) changed or not?*
 TR : Subject is dynamic and always growing. I do not believe in repetition.
- Q *What are your views on religion? Does it pose restrictions on women especially who write?*
 TR : Every religion teaches love and compassion. I love people, God lives in them. I believe in love, love for everything, living or non-living, as nothing is worthless in the world. A stone on a roadside can be an important part of a wall that can protect someone.
- Q *What do you think of violence in Kashmir, as in how far has it affected and is affecting the life of people? Does your fiction reflect any such issue?*
 TR : Heart problems and mental issues are on a rise in healthy living people, what can be more terrible than that. Yes my fiction does reflect these issues. My novel Barf Aashna Parindey covers the historical events of my valley, Kashmiris under Afghan, Sikh and Dogra rulers, the political situation after the partition and its impact in the near past and today. My short stories, Yimberzal, Ek Pehlu yeh bhi hai, Yeh Tung Zamin, Kashtee, Mitti, Barf Girney Waali Hai in particular and some others also.
- Q *Do you believe in something like 'personal is political'?*
 TR : _____
- Q *Do you think that only women, who are privileged, write in Kashmir?*
 TR : Certainly not.
- Q *Who are you writing for; I mean who do you want to read your short stories?*
 TR : I write for every fiction lover.
- Q *Does it help a writer if she gets support from her husband?*
 TR : Not necessarily.
- Q *Do you call yourself a feminist writer?*
 TR : No, I prefer to be called a humanist writer.

3. KHEMA KAUL

Q *When and how did you start writing short stories?*

A : When I was in high school standard I toyed to write something. I intensely felt that I have something in me that I express to the world. My serious attempt to write a short story was in the final year of my masters in Kashmir University... Thoughts about this world had started flowing in me profusely. World was appearing to me amazing and bizarre, making me happy and sad. I wanted to share it with the people of the world. After getting published in university journal my next short story found space in Sarika New Delhi .After that my short stories were welcome in eminent literary journals of the country.

Q *Why do you prefer writing short stories?*

A : Every literary genre is equally preferable to me. It's someone inside me making choice and I find sometimes a poem and sometimes a long prose written there on the wall of my head and heart .I pick up the pen and down load it.

Q *What has motivated you to write?*

A : .When I was too small, in primary standard I found that my inside remains filled and this filling yearns to flow out in words. Gradually quality, quantity and sense of editing also increased and I found myself in literary pursuits. In brief my trying to see and understand this world motivated me to write.

Q *Why did you opt to write in Hindi?*

A : From the very beginning of my educational carrier I was attracted to read and learn Sanskrit literature. I felt that this language is magically close to my soul. I loved to chant shlokas and learnt them. I thought that Hindi, which originated from Sanskrit, could carry my feelings to the optimum.

Q *Did you get a perfect or suitable environment to write?*

A : It always depends how powerfully you feel and how intense your desire to express it to the world is. Therefore, perfect and suitable environment is to be created by the writer itself. That makes her creativity unique ... authentic, mature and complete.

Q *Did you get enough support from your family both paternal home and in-laws place?*

A : Writer always is a lone creator. Support from family; paternal and in-laws does not mean much to her. I personally don't believe this theory. A writer can write a superior piece of literature even while in hell. So, innermost passion, insight as well as resolution matters.

Q *Was it easy for you to find a publisher?*

A : Yes, very easy. I consider myself lucky enough in this regard that I very easily got publisher ready to publish my works.

Q *How did the audience respond to your short stories?*

A : I think, good enough. The real motive to write a short story is to say something unsaid in a concise and crisp prose. Genuine, powerful and relevant literature creates undercurrents which proves more beneficial to humanity than any other genre of work being done for the welfare and such literature becomes authentic history of it's times. Therefore, whenever I write .audience is ever absent from my mind. It's only the subject matter that I want to communicate to generations down.

- Q *Who was your inspiration?*
A : Truth itself and deep desire to speak it out.
- Q *What are you working on at the moment?*
A : A novel on which I am pondering over. Hope I will begin it soon. The subject of this novel is socio-cultural mystique.
- Q *How did the question of location influence you?*
A : There are two pillars of a creation e.g. time and space (location). I have lost my roots. My location. I crave to regain it. So it's my beloved .I am in exile. Thus it really figures very differently and paramountly in my writings in exile. My lost homeland is my love. Therefore, my hero. My achievable goal.
- Q *When writing, do you draw on your experience as a Kashmiri?*
A : Yes, perfectly, but as an Indian as well.
- Q *Why was there a long gap between women writers like Lal Ded and present women writers?*
A : Laldyad happens to be a millennium icon. Writers after her till date can't be compared with her. She is a universal poet of cosmic sensibility and vision. After her there are few very known and famous. May be there are many more but thrown to oblivion. A thorough research is needed in this direction. Another reason for this gap cud be continuous political social upheavals in Kashmir during last 800 years.
- Q *What are the themes that you use in your short stories?*
A : Certain brief and pointed observations that I feel need to be shared with the people at large, I weave them in short stories.
- Q *You have been writing for a long time. Has the theme (subject matter) changed or not?*
A : Tsunami and jehadi terrorism came at a time towards end of the 20th century and at the same moment, our exodus took place as latter's result. So the agony is multiple, multi- layered and multi-angled. How can subject matter change? So much untold is yet to be told. Yes it cud shift from one layer to another, from one angle to another .one facet to another. The central point of the agony remains the same. We are the people who are suffering and struggling to survive and are writing also. It's too hard and there is no other choice. Bitter truth is that all the pillars of our so called secular democracy has failed us. The very constitution could not save us from becoming refugees in our own country. Even judiciary remained silent on us. Thus the state exhibited apathy and neglect .Politics of vote considerations has fractured the Indian society. You can well imagine the wide range of themes of the literature in exile.
- Q *What are your views on religion? Does it pose restrictions on women especially who write?*
A : My views on religion are straight for I am suffering because of my religion. I have lost my location. My identity. My roots. No, my religion does not pose any restrictions on me as a writer, not even on any ordinary non-writer woman. Rather my religion bestows me more inner power and liberty to live on this earth.
- Q *What do you think of violence in Kashmir, as in how far has it effected and is effecting the life of people?*
A : Violence in Kashmir has turned the lives of lacks of innocent intellectually

superior and peace -loving Kashmiri Pandit minority upside down. Violence in Kashmir culminated in their exodus and genocide. It has resulted in their homelessness poverty, helplessness besides their sharply declining numbers. It has also resulted in continuous sufferings of their future generations. It is a huge saga with endless layers that has ensured their ethnic cleansing, and sad part of it is that the violence has been made an instrument of exploitation and blackmail by the vested interests.

Q *Does your fiction reflect any such issue?*

A : My every work, be it a short story, a novel .a poem or diary depicts the shades of this tragedy.

Q *Do you believe in something like 'personal is political'?*

A : Yes, it implies on my suffering community and I think present political scenario of India has made it imply on every individual of the country. But I can safely speak for myself in a much better way that every day's politics affects my digestion and thoughts. Distortion of reality affects my brain. It pains me.

Q *Do you think that only women, who are privileged, write short stories in Kashmir?*

A : Privileged in what sense? Can't get your point ... to be a genuine writer is tough and demands commitment, passion and study. Very few people endowed with power of language and equally powerful expressions do so and can do so. Do you mean privileged in that sense? Hope so.

Q *Does it help a writer if she gets support from her husband?*

A : What kind of support? To me it sounds childish. If a writer is committed and amply empowered, rest everything between her and her writing does not matter in the moments of sitting on the desk., be it her domestic responsibility, husband, children or her livelihood. She knows how to support everything instead of seeking support from any one.

Q *Do you call yourself a feminist writer?*

A : No. I don't recognize even the very term in Indian context. It's an imported alien construct incongruent to Indian Value system and belief system. Some hi - fi artificial self- style elitist women of the country are busy propagating this. I am, no doubt a woman myself, when creativity occurs in me. I cross the boundaries of gender. Though my eye is a woman's eye, can't it see beyond?

I have greatest respects for the women martyrs of the west who fought war with men, church and the state and laid down their lives and got the liberty. We in India especially in sanatan dharma, woman has greater liberty to enjoy her womanhood. Yes, one thing definitely. Woman is a woman in physical structure, so she has to take special care of herself irrespective of religion, her belonging to east or west, her being an intellectual or non- intellectual, being privileged or ordinary, she's entrusted with an invariable duty of holding herself very carefully as she's the most beautiful mother nature.

APPENDIX II

LIST OF OTHER INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted with 42 women from different age groups (20 to 40) who belong to different regions of Jammu and Kashmir, out of which 30 have been taken for study to include a range of issues. These are mostly Muslim women from Kashmir Valley and Pandit women from Jammu region.

Place of Interview	Date of Interview	Number of Interviewees
Ramban District	25/04/2011	4
Udhampur District	27/04/2011	3
Rajouri District	01/05/2011	3
Jammu District	04/05/2011	5
Ananthnag District	15/05/2011	2
Kupwara District	20/05/2011	3
Shopian District	29/05/2011	2
Bandipora District	03/06/2011	3
Srinagar District	15/06/2011	2
Baramulla District	25/06/2011	3