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Noor-e-Nooran

Syed Saad-ul-din Bukhari (Saidi)

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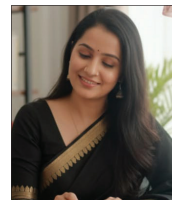


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A weekly supplement of *Headlines Today* dedicated to celebrating the literary spirit of Jammu and Kashmir. It showcases the works and contributions of eminent and emerging voices, with a discerning focus on fiction, criticism, translations, short stories, poetry and prose, feature writing capturing the vibrant pulse of the JK's literary landscape.

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Headlines Today Newspaper

Noor-e-Nooran

A Spiritual Symphony Of Words

LitStream News Desk
Srinagar

A spiritually elevating and culturally rich literary event was held today at the Seminar Hall of Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy, Srinagar, where the much-awaited Naat collection “Noor-e- Nooraan” written by the eminent poet and scholar Syed Sadud-Din Saini was formally released.

The grand ceremony, organised by Lubaab Publications Srinagar, in Collaboration with Adbi Markaz Kamraaz and ALMURAD Foundation held a grand book-release ceremony Which turned into a confluence of faith, art, and intellect, drawing a galaxy of Kashmir's leading poets, writers, scholars, and literary enthusiasts. The dais was graced by distinguished literary figures including Dr. Rafiq Masoodi, Mohammad Amin Bhat, Dr. Hamid Naseem Rafiabad, Rukhsana Jabeen, and The event was presided over by celebrated poet, critic, and scholar Ayaz Rasool Nazki, while noted intellectual and former Parliamentary Sharif-ud-Din Shariq was the chief guest.

A Ceremony steeped in spiritual Essence

The programme began with the recitation of verses from the Holy Qur'an, followed by Naat-e-Rasool-e-Maqbool, creating an ambience of serenity and reverence. Speakers unanimously lauded "Noor-e- Nooraan" as a masterpiece of devotion and poetic craftsmanship, describing it as "a radiant document of love and reverence that enlightens the soul."

Prof. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, while presenting a scholarly paper, said that Saidi's Naat poetry derives its inspiration from the divine message of the Qur'an and represents a pure reflection of Hub-e-Rasool . Ayaz Rasool Nazki, in his presidential address, remarked that writing



Naat is not merely an act of poetry but a living expression of love for the Prophet — something that Saidi has executed with sincerity, artistic maturity, and spiritual finesse. He proposed that a separate seminar be dedicated to exploring the past and present of Kashmiri Naat literature. Rukhsana Jabeen, in her remarks, said that composing Naat is one of the most delicate forms of expression, requiring both deep faith and literary discipline. Fayaz Tilgami also emphasised that Kashmiri language possesses a rich heritage of Naat writing which deserves further promotion and preservation.

Chief Guest's Reflections

Addressing the gathering, Sharif-ud-Din Shariq congratulated the author and described “Noor-e-Nooraan” as “a valuable addition to the contemporary tradition of Naat poetry in Kashmir.” He said, “Poets and writers are the true architects of a nation. Their creativity defines our identity and sustains the moral

and cultural fabric of society.”

New Literary Award Announced "Khilat-e-Ameer"

At the conclusion of the event, Mr. Jahangir Bukhari, CEO of Lubaab Publications, made two significant announcements that added to the grandeur of the occasion. He declared the institution of an annual literary honour titled “Khilat-e-Ameer”, instituted in loving memory of the legendary poet and writer Syed Ameer Shah Kreeri (RA).

This prestigious award will be conferred every year upon a senior and distinguished writer for his or her outstanding contribution to literature and culture. And the Maiden Award for 2025 was given to living legend Mr Mohammad Yousuf Taing Sahib, who couldn't attend the function due to health reasons. The award will be presented to Taing Sahib on 21st of October at his residence in Srinagar. Former HoD of MERC University of Kashmir Mr

Nasir Mirza will present the award to Taing sahib on behalf of Lubaab Publications CEO Mr Jahangir Bukhari.

Promotion of Kashmiri Language through Free Publishing Initiative

In another major initiative, Mr. Bukhari announced that Lubaah Publications will publish books free of cost for financially weak poets and writers, as part of the organisation's literary service mission. He said the move is aimed at encouraging literary creativity and promoting the Kashmiri language by helping talented writers overcome economic constraints.

Vote of Thanks

Expressing heartfelt gratitude, Syed Jahangir Bukhari, son of the author, thanked all dignitaries, writers, and participants for gracing the event. The ceremony concluded with the formal unveiling of the book, amidst applause and admiration from the literary fraternity.



Habba Khatoon: A Ghost or An Enigmatic Poet of Kashmir-I



Professor Muhammad Aslam

Intro

Lately, a debate on social and print media has resurfaced regarding the identity of one of the most celebrated poets of Kashmir, Habba Khatoon, a household name and the most sung lyricist of Kashmir, often referred to as the "Nightingale of Kashmir". Although the debate is confined to whether she is buried in Kashmir or Biswak, Bihar, alongside her supposed husband, the last independent Muslim king of Kashmir, Yousuf Shah Chak, it has necessarily involved a discussion on her mysterious identity as well. There is no doubt that Habba Khatoon is the most popular poet, but she is also the most ghostly or enigmatic personality among all the classical Kashmiri poets. There are many questions that have remained unanswered to date. Some of them are:

1 Who was she, Zoon, Habeeba, or Habba Khatoon?

2 Did she hail from a village, Chandahar, Pampore, or from the main city-centre, called the 'Shehr-e—Khaas' (Downtown)?

3 Was she a simple rustic girl, Zoon, married to an illiterate villager who, along with his mother, ill-treated her, eventually leading to their divorce?

4 Did she become the last queen of Kashmir and the wife of King of Kashmir, Yousuf Shah Chak?

5 How did she get Habba Khatoon as a nom de plume?

6 What happened to Zoon after King Akbar arrested and exiled Yousuf Shah Chak?

7 Was she really married to Yousuf Shah Chak, or did he use her only as a concubine in the royal court like many others?

8 Was Habeeba the real wife of Yousuf Chah Chak, the mother of Yaqoub Shah who was enthroned after Yousuf Shah's exile?

9 If Zoon was from Pampore, who was the “saiyyad kuur” (a high caste girl) that she mentions in one of her poems?

10 Were her in-laws in Jamalata, Srinagar, or in Chandahar, Pampore, or both, one after the other?

11 Where did she die, in Kashmir or outside Kashmir (after Yousuf Shah Chak requested to get her to Biswak as he was feeling desperate without her)?

12 If she was buried in Biswak, why do we have a gravestone in her name at Athwajan, on the outskirts of Srinagar city?



13 Does her poetry help us untangle this knot or make it more complicated?

14 Does her diction and style help us understand what age she must have belonged to?

These and so many other questions need answers, but are there any? Let us explore this ghostly or enigmatic character in the literary and political history of Kashmir. We will approach this issue through:

A. historical accounts—both old and modern.

B. The poetry that is attributed to Habba Khatoon (or Zoon); and

C. by looking at the thematic concerns and style of her poetry.

A. Chaotic History

Habba Khattoon was a 16th-century poet (that is what folklore says) who wrote vaakhs (short lyrical poems) that blend themes of love, longing, nature, and mysticism. Who was she actually? None of the Kashmir chronicles, past and present, has any definitive answers. One of the versions is that she was born as Zoon (meaning ‘moon’) in Chandahar, near the saffron town, Pampore, to Abdi Rather (Perhaps, Abdullah Rather). Her father had brought her up with care, ensuring that she got an education through a local teacher. She was married to a local villager named Haraza Mir or Aziz Lone. Their union proved very disastrous as her husband and his mother ill-treated her. She wandered singing her own songs, which accidentally caught the attention of the last Muslim King of Kashmir, Yousuf Shah Chak (around 1570), when he was hunting in the area. He was captivated by Zoon’s voice and made her his queen after getting a divorce from Haraza or Aziz Mir. Her songs and singing were so luring and sweet that she was renamed as Habba Khattoon (‘Lady of Love’). However, the marriage with the King didn’t last long as the King was tricked by Akbar, invited to Delhi, imprisoned in Bengal, and exiled to Bihar. After his death, he was buried

in Biswak village, Bihar. His lady love didn't accompany him, and she spent her life in Kashmir. However, some undocumented accounts say that on the request of her husband, she was allowed to travel to Bihar and live with her husband until her death. It is believed that she, too, was buried in Biswak.

The above account is the most popular one and is trusted by most Kashmiris. However, there are no authentic historical accounts, past or present, that support the idea that Zoon became Queen Habba Khatoon, died in exile, and is buried beside her husband in Bihar. One of the oldest books that tells us about her is the *Gulistan-e-Kashmir* (Garden of Kashmir), written by Abdul Wahab Shaiqi, fifty years after the death of Habba Khatoon or Zoon, in 1756. He writes that in the court of Yousuf Shah Chak, there was a God-fearing singer, Habiba. Shaiqi (quoted in Amin Kamil 1995) says:

چو بوده است خاتون حبیبہ بنام
یکی عارفہ بود صاحب مقام
کلامش بسوز و گداز آشنا
ہمی داد با مردہ جان از نوا
سخن ہای اور پیش کشمیریان
بود مشتہر زان نگردد بیان

*chu budah ast khatun habibah
ba-nam*

yaki 'arifah bud saib-e maqam
kalamash ba-suz o gadaz ashena
hami dad ba mardah jan az nawa
sukhan-ha-ye u pish-e kashmiriyan
bud mushtahir z-an nagardad bayan

There was a lady by the name of Habibah, A mystic woman, possessing great spiritual rank. Her poetry was filled with passion and ardour.

She could revive a dead soul with her melody. Her words were well-known among the Kashmiris—So famous that they need no further description.

If Habeeba's songs were famous in Kashmir, why would she use Habba Khatoon and not Habeeba as her nom de plume? In Kashmir, Habba Khatoon's songs are well-known, and none is there in the name of Habeeba!

Another classical Persian chronicle is that of Birbal Kachroo (died 1860). He has mentioned that Habba Khatoon was an extraordinarily charming lady with a bewitching voice who hailed from Chandahar, Pampore. She was married in her own dynasty. She had a melodious voice and would sing her own songs, which people overheard and reported to her in-laws. They taunted her and sent her to her parental home with divorce papers in her hand. En route, she was sighted by Yousuf Shah Chak's servants. Seeing her charm and listening to her melodious voice, they escorted her to the prince, who was captivated by the beauty of Habba Khatoon and granted her the honour of admitting to his harem—the actual words are “*hum-bistari ka sharaf bakhsha*” (bestowing the honour of sharing his bed) (See Amin Kamil. Habba Khatoon. Jayyad Barqi Press, 1959: 6). History says that Yousuf Shah Chak was crowned in 1578, and when Habba Khatoon entered his bedroom, his father, Ali Shah (1570-1578), was ruling Kashmir. A famed 19th century Kashmir chronicler, Ghulam Hassan Shah, popularly known as Hassan Khoyihami, also follows Kachroo in saying that Habba Khatoon had entered Yousuf Shah Chak's harem as a keep: “[Habba Khatoon's] fame reached the amorous ears of Yusuf Shah, who admitted her to his harem as a ‘Keep’, and did not allow her the status of a queen. Both the chroniclers [Birbal and Hassan] are punctilious about

using the phrase 'sharing the same bed,' about her' ('Habba Khatoon: Philomela of Medieval Kashmir' by Professor RK Dhar, retrieved; see also Kamil 1959). Modern historians like Muhammad Din Fauq also talk about Yousuf Shah Chak having secured Habba's divorce after paying five thousand dirhams (D119,650) to her husband. He says that he married her. In his book, *hikayet-e-Kashmir* (Tales of Kashmir, 1928, published by Khuda Baxsh Oriental Library, Patna) Muhammad Din Fauq has devoted a chapter entitled 'The End of a Luxury Loving King' (pp. 86-90) to Yousuf Shah Chak wherein he says that Habba Khatoon was already famous in Chandahar when the king heard about her voice and beauty. He secured her divorce after paying heavily to her ill-tempered husband, and father. She got training in royal etiquette before marrying the king. It is believed that at that

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To Naddiyaa: A Love Letter to Silence, Wildness, and the Stuff That Drives You a Little Nuts



Wani Nazir

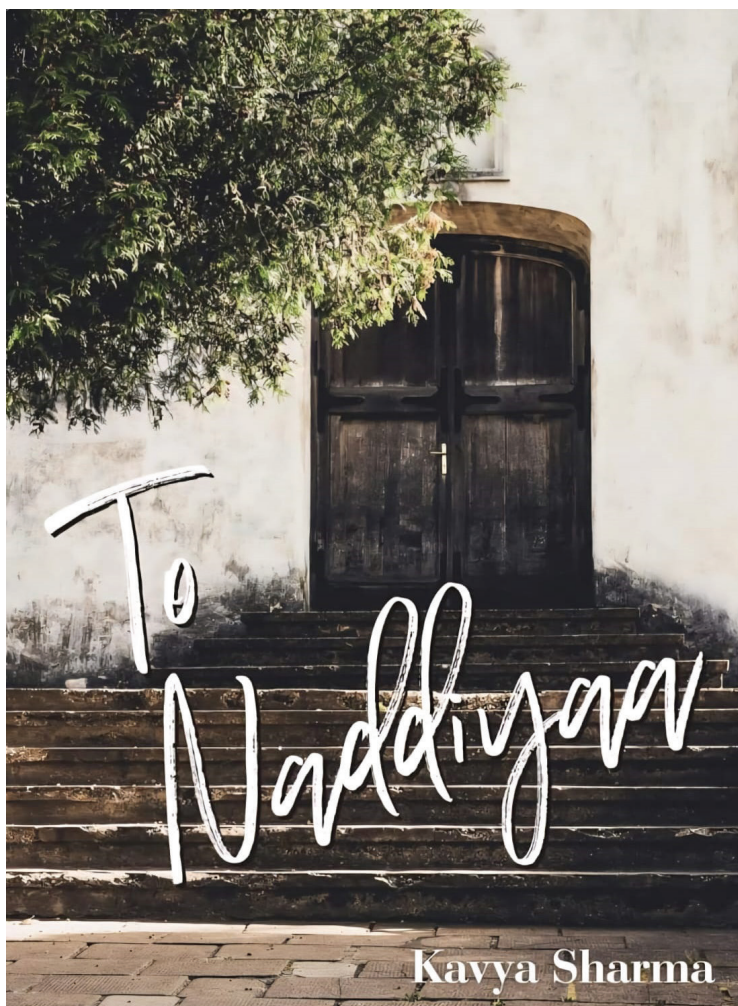
“I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.”

— Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

You know, women's voices have always been there, humming in the background—like a catchy tune you can't quite place, but can't ignore either. Yeah, they've sparked epics, made kings cry, basically kept the whole world emotionally caffeinated, but their actual stories? Usually shoved into the margins, erased, or just... muffled beneath layers of "proper" society. Woolf, in her classic *A Room of One's Own*, totally calls this out—women are everywhere in poetry, but nowhere in the official records. And then there's Hélène Cixous, who basically yells from the rooftops in "The Laugh of the Medusa": Ladies, write your guts out! Let it all pour out, messy and mad and glorious.

So, from that whole messy, silenced-but-bursting lineage, you get Kavya Sharma's *To Naddiyaa*. It's not just some letters strung together. It's longing that's been sitting in your chest for years, wounds that never really scabbed over, and silences that scream way louder than any words ever could. The book is intimate—like, squirm-in-your-seat intimate—and honestly, it grabs the old letter-writing form and makes it do back-flips. You get a story that's both ancient and kind of modern, about love and loss, sanity and the lack thereof, and all the ugly-beautiful blur in between.

Front and center? Naadiya. She's tangled up in longing, duty, and oh-so-much unsaid desire. She's married to Durjoy but emotionally stuck on his brother Pranoy. Not so much a cheater as a woman out of place—like she's wearing someone else's shoes and can't take them off. Her world flips when she finds this stash of unsent letters Durjoy wrote (not to her, but about her) for their kid, Iman. And man, talk about emotional whiplash. Durjoy spills everything—his fears, his memories, all the love he never figured out how to say out loud—dumped onto the page in words that feel like open wounds.



The letters aren't neat or tidy. They jump around, they ramble, they bleed. Durjoy isn't apologizing—he's exploding. And you can feel it: the stuff he can't say, the way love just won't fit into a normal conversation. He needs the page, the privacy, the safety to just... break apart.

Durjoy's a poet, but not in a chill,
Byron-at-the-lake sort of way. More
like a guy lost in a fog, half-mad with
longing, barely holding it together.
Naadiya? She's sculpted by silence,
shaped by the stuff that's missing.
Orphaned, raised by the rules,
taught to keep her chin up and her
mouth shut. He seeks meaning in
words, she finds it in stillness. They
meet, but it's never harmonious—
more like two ghosts brushing past
each other at the edge of something
dangerous.

So yeah, their marriage? Not exactly a fairy tale. More like two people clinging to opposite ends of a sinking raft, staring at the water and hoping the other one figures it out. They don't fight the love—they just don't know how to speak it. So Durjoy drifts toward poetic mad-

ness, Naadiya sinks into spiritual numbness, and in the end? Well, they both wind up behind asylum bars. That's not just a plot twist, it's a punch in the gut—a symbol for what happens when feelings get shoved into a closet, when passion gets labeled as “crazy,” and when nobody bothers to read the fine print of your soul.

Sharma's writing? It's tight and lush at the same time. She doesn't shout—she aches. Each letter is like a slow leak from a broken dam, lyrical but raw. The letters aren't just "I love you's" or "sorry's"—they're desperate Morse code between two people on the edge. In those pages, they finally sound human—messy, open, kind of beautiful in their pain. "How easy was it to go mad?"

Here, madness isn't a disease. It's a way to fight back. Naadiya's cracks aren't defeats—they're survival tactics. She screams with her memories, not her mouth. She's part of that ancient club of women who warmed themselves on cold nights

and prayed for justice that never came. Her cell? Not a prison, but a weird kind of sanctuary.

Durjoy's madness is different—a love so pure it actually burns. He can't fit his feelings into the world's boxes, and that's not a flaw. It's a kind of purity nobody gets anymore. He echoes old-school poets, waiting for a love that's wild and dangerous and real.

"There was nothing else to say, nothing more to reveal. The letters were gone, and so were Nadiya's emotions."

That? That's the line that sticks with you. It's the moment the book stops whispering and just leaves you alone with your own thoughts. And, honestly, it kind of hurts.

Man, if there's one thing this novel nails—it's that brutal, gut-punch truth: when you bottle up love, it curdles into grief, and if you let that grief fester, well, you're one step away from losing your mind. Those letters, you know, the ones that used to drip with raw, desperate poetry? They just... go quiet. The emotions that once threatened to scorch the whole world? Poof. Gone. Left with nothing but that ache. That gnawing, wandering longing that doesn't even know where it wants to go.

But listen, To Naddiyaa isn't just a sad song on repeat. It's kind of a love letter in itself—to the stuff people never say out loud, to stubborn hope, to love that hangs on even when there's nothing left. Sharma's magic trick? Her characters. They're so real, you wanna call them up for coffee or send them a late-night text. Naadiya sticks with you—not because she's some tragic cliché, but because she's raw and honest, the kind of true that makes your chest hurt. And Durjoy? He's not just a mess—he's beautiful in the middle of his wreckage.

Even the book itself is a mood. The cover? Gorgeous. It's not just a wrapper, it's basically a front door into this world where words are both lifeline and, honestly, a bit of a curse. Whoever designed it got the assignment.

To Naddiyaa isn't your typical novel. It's a requiem, honestly—a song for all the things we never got to say, a tear for the love that never made it to the surface, a shout for every voice the world ignored. It doesn't just give you a story—it leaves something raw behind, something that sits in your chest long after you've shut the book. It ends, but it doesn't really end, you know? It hangs around, right where your heart skips a beat and you forget, just for a second, how to breathe.

The Lost Childhood



Vandana Kumari Jena

Manish woke up to the sound of whimpering, coming from the adjacent room. He groaned, then walked into the hall, where he found Akash, lying in the cot, crying into his pillow. Manish said softly, "What is it?" "Ghar ki yaad aa rahi hai," whispered Akash. "Then why did you run away?" he wanted to ask, but he did not say anything. He was supposed to be empathetic, after all he was the caretaker of Ashiana Children's Home, and would soon become the Welfare Officer once he passed his post-graduation. He patted Akash on his back till he fell asleep.

The Children's Home fell silent after breakfast as most of the children left for school. At lunch, he watched indulgently as the boys sat on the durrie eating ravenously. A little later, Inspector Ajit from the nearby police station, came for a visit. "Hey, don't cry," he said, on hearing Akash, who was weeping again. He felt responsible for Akash. After all, he had brought him here a week ago after he had found him loitering on the street. Twelve-year-old Akash had confessed that he had come from Bihar with his brother who had put him to work in a dhaba. But when he had dropped a stack of plates and broken them, his brother had walloped him. Akash had run away. Now he missed his brother, his parents and his house. But he did not know how to reach them. "Child labour," muttered Inspector Ajit. Manish nodded his head slowly.

Akash burst into tears once again. "Now I will never find my parents," he wailed. "Nonsense," said the Inspector. On Sunday he brought Akash a video of the film 'Lion,' in which the hero had been lost as a child and was adopted by a couple who lived in Australia. As he grew up, he longed to trace his roots and was able to do so by using Google maps and by recalling important landmarks. "If he could do it, so can you," said the Inspector.

"Can one really do it? Manish was not aware that he had spoken aloud so yearningly. "Of course one can," Inspector Ajit said. Then he said, "You had told me that your parents were dead, that is how you landed up in this Care Home." Manish remained silent but Inspector Ajit persisted and coaxed him to tell the entire story.

Manish shut his eyes, remembering a sprawling house which often came to him in his dreams. A house with a huge terrace where his father flew kites while he watched. Another memory seeped in, of a big well in which he had accidentally dropped his new ball, and of a giant water tank, the kind he had seen in the film *Sholay* from where Dharmendra had threatened to jump!

Then he remembered the train journey which had thrown his life in turmoil. He remembered dozing off in the train, and waking up only to see his parents disembark. He had followed them in panic, wondering if they had abandoned him, and jostled his way through the crowds to reach them. He held on to his mother's pallu, and was horrified when she turned and he saw that the woman was not his mother. He remembered racing back to the platform, just as the train was leaving, and then running from one end of the platform to another, but in vain. He realized that his parents had probably stepped down to fill water and had boarded the train once again. They must have discovered the he was missing once they had reached their



berths. They must have searched for him frantically inside the train and realized that he too had got down after them. They must have filed a missing person's report, which had yielded no result. He was six years old when he had been sent to Ashiana Care Home where, sixteen years later, he was the caretaker.

“I will do my best to reunite you with your family,” said Inspector Ajit. “I wish there had been Aadhaar cards when you had got lost, then we could have found your address.” Suddenly he looked at Akash. “Do you have an Aadhaar card?” “Yes,” Akash said, “but it is with my parents” “It doesn’t matter,” he said, “Your biometrics must be on record, with them we will be able to find your address.”

"This calls for a celebration," he said excitedly. He took Manish and Akash to a roadside restaurant to celebrate. Looking at the menu, Inspector Ajit said, "I shall have Korma and Naan." "Khorma," shouted Manish. "Not Khorma, but Korma," the Inspector corrected him. "No, Khorma is the name of my village," Manish insisted, wondering how the name came back to him after so many years. Inspector Ajit laughed. "I don't think there is a village called Khorma." "Please check up," pleaded Manish.

Fifteen days later they set out for Mahendragarh district in Haryana in the Inspector's car. "Don't get your hopes up," he warned, "or you may be disappointed." As they entered the village Manish felt a rush of excitement, Nothing seemed to have changed. More memories flooded in, which had been locked up in the deep crevices of his mind. Soon after they drove past the water tank Manish stopped the Inspector. "This is my house," he said, with certainty. "How do you know?" asked Inspector Ajit. "I just know," he said.

They knocked at the door and a man opened the door and looked at them enquiringly. Manish

looked at him searchingly. Was the man his father? He did not know. He had been six years old when he was lost. The Inspector pulled out a photograph of Akash and said, "We are looking for this boy. He has left the Care Home where he lived, and disappeared. We learnt that he was headed this way." This was the story they had decided to tell. "Have you seen him anywhere?" The man shook his head. Manish noticed that his teenaged son and daughter was sitting on the dining table, while their mother was serving them food. Were they his brother and sister? He remembered being an only child. His heart sank. By now he must have been forgotten. After all, sixteen years was a long time. Maybe these were not his parents at all. Maybe his parents had sold their house and moved away.

The table had been laid for five. But he could only see four people. "It has been sixteen years since our son disappeared, but his mother still thinks he will walk through the door," said the man.

Tears began to roll down Manish's eyes. He had not been forgotten, at least by his mother. He was remembered every day. His plate was placed at the dining table for each meal. So what if it remained empty? The woman stared at him. Then she whispered, "Manish." He ran and clung to her, and cried his heart out.

Vandana Kumari Jena is a retired officer of the Indian Administrative Service (1979 batch). She has published two novels, *The Dance of Death* and *Clueless*; four short story collections—*The Incubation Chamber*, *The Future is Mine*, *One Rotten Apple* and *Other Stories*, and *Over the Edge*; and a collection of middles—*In the Middle*. Her poems were published in more than 20 International anthologies. Readers wait for her forthcoming book *Swansong* from the prestigious Rupa Publishing Co Kolkata. Her social welfare activities have a large span from Manipur to Mumbai.

From Epidemic to Pandemic

A Chronicle of Global Angst



Prof. Dr. Shiv Sethi

P.V.Laxmiprasad's *From Epidemic to Pandemic: A Memoir of COVID-19* stands as a powerful testament to one of humanity's darkest hours — the global outbreak that tested the resilience of nations and the inner strength of individuals. Written with the dual perspective of a chronicler and a moral observer, this memoir is part history, part introspection, and part socio-philosophical reflection on what the pandemic revealed about the world's priorities and people's frailties.

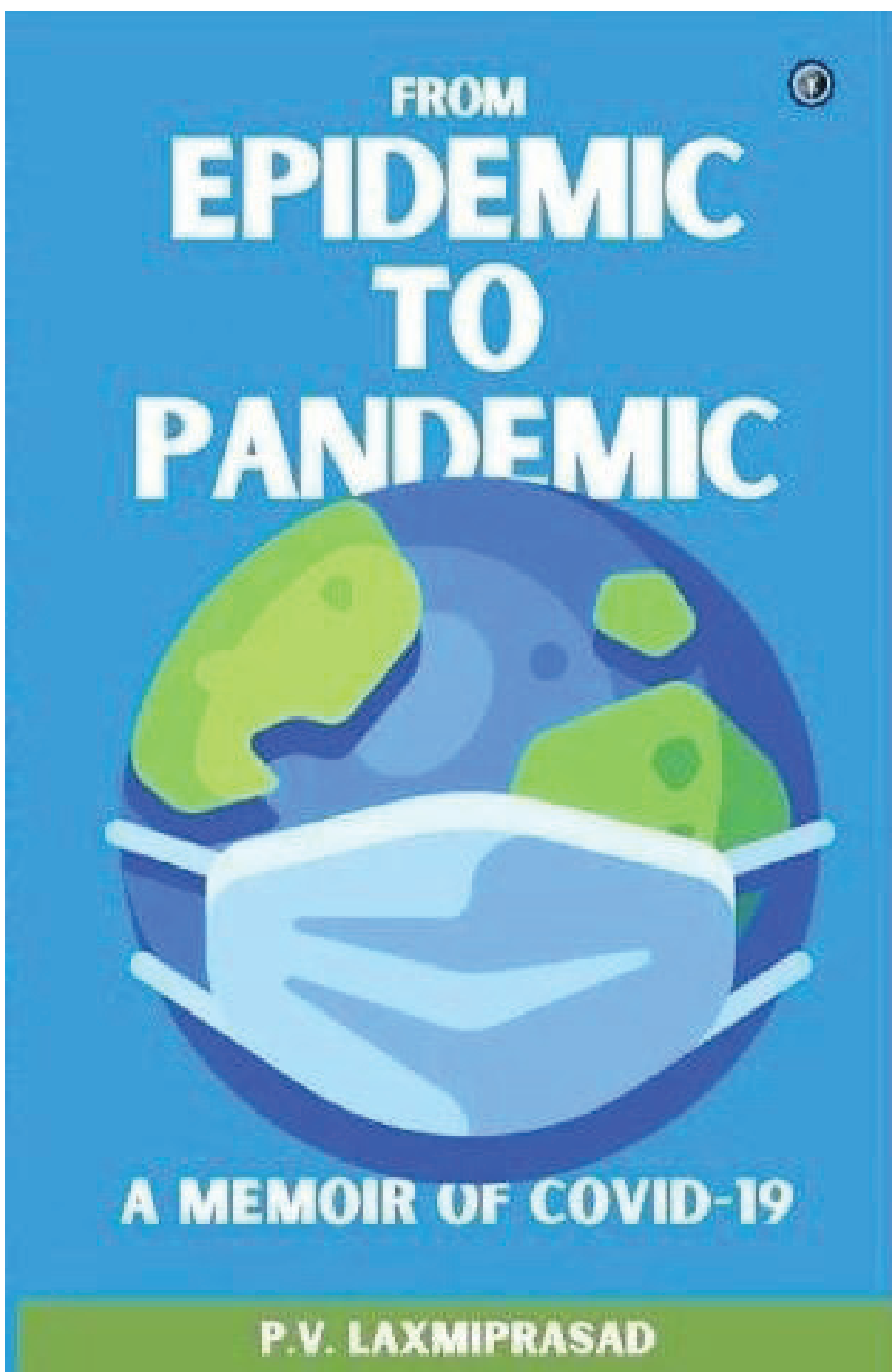
Unlike a conventional diary of events, Laxmiprasad's narrative moves with the measured pace of a researcher yet carries the pulse of lived experience. The memoir opens with his reminiscences of early fascination with viruses in the schoolroom — a gentle prologue to the biological and moral questions that frame his later understanding of COVID-19. Drawing on his grounding as an academic and literary scholar, the author weaves a narrative that moves seamlessly from the microcosm of human vulnerability to the macrocosm of geopolitical blame, policy missteps, and social transformation.

The strength of the memoir lies in its wide scope. The author moves from Wuhan to Washington, from Lombardy to New Delhi, chronicling how the “smallest organism overpowered the mightiest of nations.” He revisits the devastation in Italy and Spain, the indifference of early global responses, and the existential anxiety that gripped even technologically advanced societies. His tone oscillates between the analytical and the elegiac, never allowing sentimentality to cloud his disciplined inquiry into the human condition.

Laxmiprasad's method is documentary yet reflective. Drawing from news bulletins, WHO advisories, and social realities, he reconstructs the unfolding of the pandemic as a historical event while constantly questioning what it meant for civilization itself. The sections on "Quarantine" and "Lockdown" are particularly insightful, tracing their etymological roots and cultural resonances—from Ibn Sina's medieval *quarantena* to Shakespeare's plague-time creativity. Through such literary and historical cross-references, the memoir transcends reportage and enters the realm of philosophical discourse.

Where many pandemic writings veered into despair, Laxmiprasad's work derives moral meaning from adversity. The book argues that COVID-19 was not merely a biomedical crisis but a civilizational mirror—forcing humanity to relearn humility, patience, and the value of collective survival. His reflections on India's spiritual resilience and Gandhian principles of hygiene and simplicity stand out for their cultural rootedness.

Stylistically, the memoir bears the cadence of a seasoned academic who also feels deeply. The prose occasionally digresses into detailed exposition, yet these very digressions—into virology, literature, and human behavior—add to the work's documentary gravity. The author's clear-eyed empathy for victims and frontline workers, combined with his critique of global politics, lends the



book both emotional and ethical weight.

Ultimately, *From Epidemic to Pandemic* is not just a record of the COVID era but a moral meditation on mortality and survival. Laxmiprasad reminds us that history is not written only by victors but by witnesses who dare to feel. His memoir joins that rare genre of pandemic literature which humanizes statistics and restores memory to suffering. In doing so, it invites readers to confront both fear and faith with renewed understanding.

The book moves beyond the immediacy of fear and statistics to explore the cultural, emotional and ethical dimensions of the crisis. Divided into lucid sections — from the origins of the virus to

its impact on India and the global psyche — Laxmiprasad's memoir blends scholarly inquiry with personal insight. His training as an academic lends the work a structural clarity often missing in popular pandemic narratives.

Where many pandemic writings veered into despair, Laxmiprasad's work derives moral meaning from adversity. The book argues that COVID-19 was not merely a biomedical crisis but a civilizational mirror—forcing humanity to relearn humility, patience, and the value of collective survival. His reflections on India's spiritual resilience and Gandhian principles of hygiene and simplicity stand out for their cultural rootedness.

CHOCHIKATIR

(Kashmiri Short Story)

THE FRENZY

(English Translation)



Mushtaq Ahmad Mushtaq
(Author)



Iftikhar Imran
(Translator)

Rahman Saeb woke up with the first raindrops pelting the tin roof. He rubbed his eyes with his hands and looked at the clock on the wall. It was already way past eleven.

How his heart yearned to run downstairs and make straightaway for the greenbelt away from the settlement. The greenbelt, once a sprawling expanse of thousands of kanals, was now – shrinking every year like his body – reduced to a few yards. The lonely and decrepit Rahman Saeb usually spends a few hours every day gazing longingly at the greenbelt. A radiant smile lights up his wrinkled face when he sees the birds in flight or hears their warbling. But come the yelling of the labourers working on the drain being laid around or the noise bellowing from the concrete mixer that scares away the grebes and their companions, and he is fixed to the spot as if benumbed and starts mumbling, God knows what, to himself.

Till recently the greenbelt flanking the main settlement was a vast swamp that remained waterlogged throughout the year. Beautiful birds of myriad colour sang among the tall grasses and the grebes would come visiting when the water level rose in summer. Rahman Saeb says that the whole settlement is actually built on a swamp which was used to cultivate paddy. While water chestnut grew in the ponds, birds of divers colour flew around and sang in the entire swamp.

With increasing population constructions became a craze and the government decided to build a colony here. The beeline of trucks and bull-

dozers filling the swamp with dirt drove the birds out of their habitat. Decades back the land was quickly divided into plots and now even the ditches have given way to houses. Rahman Saeb recalls that when the filling started he had recently passed his matriculation and shifted to the city to join college.

As the downpour continued, a cold shiver ran through Rahman Saeb and he looked around for the blower. All his eyes met was his old companion, the dilapidated radio set. He was reminded that last week his elder daughter-in-law had ordered Bahadur to put away the blower in the storeroom.

'Darn the power department. Had they not installed the meters and forbidden pilfering, the daughter-in-law would not have taken away the blower,' Rahman Saeb said to himself. 'Well, I can hardly blame her. Haven't my own offspring abandoned me to my fate? Ducklings raised by a hen!'

The word ducklings reminded him of the grebes. He wanted to go out tearing through the rain but he was not feeling alright. He could not bring himself to descend three floors and then come back again on his own. Instead, he spread a blanket over his legs and was soon lost in thought.

'How crazed with terror the grebes were yesterday when the damned cowed herd loose his herd in the greenbelt! As if the yelling labourers and the mixer weren't enough. How he come here to torment the peace of the poor birds!' He was talking to himself.

'Actually the cowherd isn't to blame. The mad race for building houses and shops hasn't left an inch of pasture anywhere in villages, not to talk of the city. If all the fields become houses and shops, what will the residents eat and what will the shops sell? They say food will now be taken through capsules and injections. What an insipid life it is going to be.'

Rahman Saeb was seriously questioning himself. He stretched the blanket over his head and was only half asleep when the past came alive before his eyes. He had newly moved from his village to join college in the city. Those days busses were as few as habitations, but lush green fields of paddy and corn and tree-lined downs met the eye wherever one looked. He used to walk some eight miles to catch the bus to the city. If he missed the morning bus, the next one would come when half the day was over. Perhaps that was the reason his family decided to send

him to the city where some relative
had arranged lodgings for him.

In the reputed and well-to-do household he was lodged, he spared no effort, like helping in the daily chores, to ingratiate himself with the family. That is why he did not have to change lodgings for the full two years of college.

In those genteel times reputed households received a lot of respectable visitors. It was one of these, an important minister, who got Rahman Saeb a government job soon after he completed his degree. Already much obliged, he was now too beholden to his lodgers to speak about changing his lodgings. Everything they said he complied with. When they pressed him to marry a girl in their relation who was a good five years his senior, he grinned and bore it. It was a lavish wedding his parents in the village had been inveigled to consenting to. The bride went to visit her parents, as is the custom, after seven days of the wedding but refused to return to the village. At his lodgers bidding, Rahman Saeb demanded his share of family land from his father, sold it to buy land and build a big house in the big new colony. All his savings and money he had accumulated by whatever means went into the house. By the time he moved into the new house his parents had long been resting in their graves. With that was sealed his separation from his village and its sights.

All his relatives now being from his wife's side only, he had started feeling caged in his own home. Always welcome in the house, they lay down the household rules for him to abide by. His feeling of alienation in his own family, the nest he had built with his own hands, deepened as his children grew up. When it came to deciding about their professional choices and matrimony, his wife and her brothers conveniently overlooked him.

The feeling of helplessness that had come over him after his wife's death so deepened with his retirement that he started feeling lonely and miserable. But his sons and their wives, as if waiting for him retire, lost no time to let out the first floor of the house in order to make money for the shopping complex they wanted to build on the outskirts of the settlement. The ground floor now housed the separate households of his two sons.

Hapless, Rahman Saeb took to reading books, watching TV or listening to Amma Sofi on the radio to pass the time. Because he was going deaf, he played the music on

high volume which disturbed his daughters-in-law and his school-going grandchildren. To get rid of the nuisance Rahman Saeb's abode was shifted to the room adjacent to the hall on the second floor. Here he would be the speaker as well as the one spoken to.

For two years he has lived confined to the same room, the Nepali Bahadur bringing him food and other essentials. Once a month or so Saeb Lala and, on an occasional Sunday, Bitu come upstairs and talk to him in loud voices. Rahman Saeb was still lost in reminiscences of his past life and his present when thunder clapped and the heavens burst open, pounding the roof. He gave a start. It was twelve o'clock and he again wanted to go to the greenbelt. But he could not take on the lashing rain to go across the settlement. Again he pulled the blanket over his head and drifted into thought. 'There was a time when the grebes and other birds warbled and flew around the boundless swamp. All they have now is the patch between the drain and the highway, that too without peace. How they are caught between the yells of the Bihari labourers and the deafening noise and acrid smoke created by the traffic!' He was yet to come back from his reverie when he heard somebody coming up the stairs.

'Who can it be? Bahadur. But there is still time for lunch. Is it Sunday today? No, it's Wednesday. It won't be Saeb Lala either. Who's it then? Have they realized after all how miserable I feel in this solitary confinement on the third storey? Nay, that's out of question!' He thought hard but could not figure out.

As the door opened Saeb Lala's wife, his elder daughter-in-law, appeared with a middle-aged stranger. After a half-hearted greeting she spoke to him.

‘This is my parents’ servant. Brother has purchased a plot of land near the mosque around which they are building a wall. The building materials have been delayed by the rain. Now part of it will come later today and the rest tomorrow morning.

Since all rooms downstairs are occupied, this servant will share the room with you till Brother is done with building the wall.'

Having given the orders, she entrusted her parents' servant to Rahman Saeb, gave herself a yank and left the room. Rahman Saeb did not utter a word. In the chocked greenbelt, the cowherd had again let loose his boisterous herd and whipped the grebes into a frenzy.

The real purpose of education

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all” - Aristotle



Rahil Rasheed Wani
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First of all, we must understand what education truly means. It is not an easy task to define education in a single line or through one definition, because it is a comprehensive term that carries wide and deep connotations. Education has been interpreted differently by philosophers, thinkers, and reformers across the world. For some, it is the means to acquire knowledge and skills; for others, it is the process of self-realization and the development of the whole being.

At the moment, I recall two profound definitions — one by Mahatma Gandhi and another by Dr Zakir Hussain. According to Mahatma Gandhi:

According to Dr Zakir Hussain, "Education is the process of the individual mind getting its full possible development."

Both definitions are beautiful and meaningful. However, I personally prefer Gandhi's definition, as it presents education as a harmonious development of the human personality — physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Gandhi's vision emphasises the moral and emotional growth of the individual, not merely the accumulation of information.

Education, in its truest sense, is a process that humanises humanity. It refines our thoughts, cultivates compassion, and awakens the sense of responsibility towards others. It transforms us from being merely living beings to humane beings. Without this transformation, education loses its real purpose and becomes only a means to secure jobs or earn wealth.

The famous Kashmiri poet Ghulam Ahmad Mehjoor once wrote,

“Shakli chhu akh insaan, magar insaanियatas chu be-khabar.”

This couplet reflects a profound reality of our times. Outwardly, we are humans — we have the physical shape of a man — but inwardly, we are often devoid of the essence of humanity. Our hearts are hardened by selfishness, greed, and indifference. We have learned to build machines but forgotten to build character. We have conquered the skies but failed to conquer our own ego.

So, what truly makes one a human being? To me, being human means possessing the ability to feel, to empathise, and to respond to the pain of others. Suppose a dog is injured by someone and lies bleed-



ing by the roadside. If we can pause for a moment, feel its pain, and try to help it, then we are truly human. But if we simply pass by without care, we are nothing more than biological creatures — alive, yet empty from within.

That, dear readers, is the real purpose of education — to awaken humanity within us. It teaches us that compassion is the highest form of intelligence. It helps us distinguish between what is right and what is easy, what is just and what is convenient. Education is not only about literacy or learning to read and write; it is about learning to live rightly, to think deeply, and to act kindly.

The great philosopher Aristotle once said, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." This statement reminds us that true education must shape both intellect and character. Knowledge without moral direction can be dangerous, just as power without purpose can be destructive.

Unfortunately, in today's world, education is often misunderstood as a race for degrees, grades, and positions. We have built grand institutions but lost the soul of learning. The system focuses more on producing professionals than on nurturing good human beings. The emphasis has shifted from values to vocation-

alism, from wisdom to wealth.

But the question remains — what will a person do with all the knowledge of the world if he fails to respect his parents, care for the poor, or stand for truth? Such education, however brilliant, is incomplete.

An individual lives in a society in order to live a lovable, respectful, and successful life. To achieve that, he must possess social values — values that bind individuals together in harmony and mutual respect. Education plays a vital role in nurturing these values. It teaches us to live not only for ourselves but also for others; to share, to cooperate, and to understand that our true strength lies in unity and empathy.

Education should cultivate in us the courage to speak the truth, the patience to listen to others, and the strength to forgive. It should open our eyes to the beauty of diversity and teach us the sacredness of life in all its forms. An educated person is one who uplifts others, who spreads light wherever he goes, and who uses his knowledge to serve humanity.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man." This perfection refers not to worldly success, but to moral excellence and inner awak-

ening. The aim of education is to help every individual discover that divine spark within, which guides him toward goodness and truth.

If we reflect deeply, we will realise that the crisis of our age is not a crisis of knowledge but a crisis of character. The world today does not suffer from a lack of information — it suffers from a lack of empathy. We have educated minds but uneducated hearts. The real purpose of education, therefore, must be to bridge this gap — to blend intellect with emotion, logic with love, and knowledge with wisdom.

Let me conclude with a humble thought:

Education is not something we receive once and for all in schools or universities; it is a lifelong process of becoming better, kinder, and wiser. Every experience, every mistake, every act of kindness is a lesson. Education continues as long as we continue to learn, to feel, and to grow.

Thus, the real purpose of education is not merely to prepare us for making a living, but to prepare us for life itself — a life that stands on truth, compassion, and humanity. For in the end, as Mehtoor reminds us, we must not only appear human but become human in the deepest sense of the word.

THE DREAM OF A BIG CITY



Dr Perwaiz Shaharyar

The big city, the big city, the big city
Satisfaction for someone
Happiness for someone
You are devastating for someone
In longing for the big city,
Many spoiled their lives
Many became angry about their relatives

Many left out their own natives
Get entangled every moment
With true and false dreams
With the dream of a big city
With the new perils of each moment
Kept running the entire life
Having the mirage before the eyes
An unachievable dream in the eyes
Like grass kept before a horse
As if a new hope in each breath
With the vigour to live
Kept dying, kept dying
Leaving the paradise beneath the feet
Leaving the serenity of village life
The soul kept burning throughout the

ages
In the pyre of the body
Keeping a curse-like life
Keeping a dream of the big city
Kept burning, kept heating,
In search of being a rich person
Kept walking, kept walking
In longing for a big city,
We committed many sins
To such an extent that our eyes turned
into stones

Our legs became numb with cold
We turned into like-beasts
In the search for happiness
We have become like living dead bodies
To such an extent that,
We have become insensitive and insane
We became sad by ourselves
The bog city, the big city, the big city
A path of dishonesty
A city of corruption
It is true, in your longing for you,
Many have spoiled their lives
The whole village has become empty of

dear ones

In the mourning atmosphere,
There is sadness and disappointment
everywhere

Even then,
The thirstiness of the big city is such a
deep-rooted

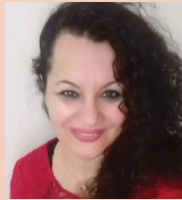
That it never gets quenched well
There is a crowd that never gets stopped
There is a migration that never stops
The life that anyone can defeat is not possible

Life will get set back ever since it is not possible

Life never stops!
Life never bows down!
The dream of a big city has always
grown.

(Dr Perwaiz Shaharyar is a Senior Consultant Editor in the National Council of Educational Research and Training NCERT New Delhi India. He is a bilingual international poet and story writer by my passion for literature and culture and is the author of 20 books including Children's Story Books.)

The Epic of the Phoenix

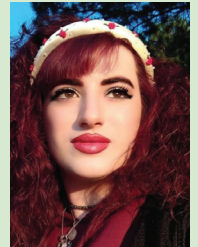


Angela Kosta

Sun-dust glimmers 'neath craters unsealed,
Untold triumphs time has concealed,
Carved in tempests, on stone and flame,
By a tyrant hand with no name.
The blood-drenched Phoenix, whirls the sphere,
Thirsting in hell's own frontier,
Burns to ash 'neath ruins deep
Then rises again, its vow to keep:
To rule the world anew, unbowed,
Above the silence of the crowd.
And we are mute...
I am mute...
Stripped of power, stripped of truth.
I cannot fight what mercy feigns,
Nor time's cruel chain that still remains.
Beheaded, blind, we linger still,
Shadows of glory, bent by will.
We leave behind the sneer of loss,
Bear time's burden, feel its cross,
And chew the darkness of the soul
No tears to cleanse, no centuries whole...

Angela Kosta was born in Elbasan, Albania, and lives in Italy. She is a writer, poet, translator, journalist, and cultural promoter. A member of numerous international academies and associations, she has represented Albanian literature at various festivals and competitions. Her work has been translated into 45 languages and published in many countries. In 2024 alone, her works appeared in over 170 international magazines and newspapers. She was also listed among the 100 most prominent figures in Arabic literature by Al-Rowad News in 2024. Angela is an active member of academies in Italy, the USA, China, Greece, Poland, and other countries.

The silent lake



Elpiola Llouka

In silent waves the lake is
today,
dancing clouds surrounding
the sky...

Your reflection grabbed all
hearts by the way,
and wet footprints beneath the
shore fly...

The wooden boats in horizon
i see,
sailing away silently in your
waves...

The seagulls path now is
unknown to me,
touching the smooth of their
feathers i crave...

Here comes the crimson
sunset,
the ridges are crossing its
flames:

In the depth of water faith
stays red,
as the silent wave always
blames...

(Elpiola Llouka is a an Award-
ee Poet and songwriter from
Albania . She released cover
songs and translated globally
many renowned poets . She
studied in Fan S Noli University)

The Metamorphosis of Dreams



Abdel Latif Moubarak

I gather the faces of people,
in the treasure of folly,
engraving upon my poor dress
a song, a silent prayer.
I add colors to creation,
to weave a metamorphosis,
one after another,
echoing the depths of happiness.
I am your dream,
O people of reason,
a condition veiled in wonder,
eyes gazing towards tomorrow.
The streets are empty,
hearts outstretched,
trodden by the weight
of silent doubt.
I adapt to grandeur,
inhabiting an incapacity,
visible to all,
my nakedness, my fragility.
My feet are nailed
to the pavement's face.

showcases of sorrow,
where hope feels faint.
Sometimes it sighs,
and sometimes it softens,
your dream, O people of words,
is sweeter, but often forgotten.
For I am the one who wanders,
or do people wander with me?
A dervish in a circle,
lost in a memory.
I emerge, my soul pours forth,
between its lines, the strings
of longing for the sanctuary's robe,
and the blessings that true love brings.
They slept upon the shoulders of time,
testimony of interwoven moments,
signs of exchange,
a miracle yet to be found.

(Abdel Latif Moubarak is an Egyptian poet. He is a member of the Egyptian Writers Union and a member of the Arab Writers on the Internet. He was born in Suez and writes poetry using classical Arabic and Egyptian vernacular. He received a Bachelor of Law from Ain Shams University. He was one of the most important poets of the 1980s and his poems were published in several literary magazines in Egypt and the Arab world, including the Arab magazine, Kuwait magazine, News Literature, Republic newspaper, Al-Ahram, the new publishing culture (magazine).[1] Received the Excellence and Creativity Shield from the Arab Media Union in 2014 and Won the shield of excellence and creativity from the East Academy 2021)

The Conformist



Lily Swarn

"THE frost never paints my window twice alike", wondered Miss Child. We are all mostly dishevelled and worn out conformists, with the sticism of a buffalo standing in the rain. The splendour of magnificent nature made us, like flowers in the garden and pebbles on the beach, nique and individual. Our DNA is as varied as can be, yet we stand in queue, dressed alike and passively slaughtering our glorious "me", for the sake of pleasing the multitudes, which would, gladly throttle us, for our trademark personalty. All the wanderers, questioners, seekers will be, labelled, mad, eccentric, crazy, sometime or the other in their lives, and woe be on the lady who dares to be different. She is immediately slotted into another category altogether.

Why on earth should we live a lifetime, caring for a heartless world that makes us squirm for our own selves? Why do we need to hide, behind facades of propriety, in order to be acceptable? Living lives of muffled emotions and strangled voices, is not the way the lord had thought of us. We were born free and breathed pure air, that never reached, our fithy, polluted minds, withering and shrivelling under the



onslaught of censorious eyes and, judgemental mentalities. A painter could never, truly give vent to, the creatiivty flowing from his rapturous brushes and the writer curls up and waits for the conformity brigade, to disdainfully nod to his outpourings. We are a wretched species, that walks gleefully along the well trodden road and throw stones at those who light up a new pathway. It is not easy to break out of a prison until you realize that you are locked up. Surveillance breeds conformity that is why, the dead fish find it easy to go with the flow. One needs a brave heart and a strong

pair of lungs to swim against the roaring tide.

I often feel that even a herd of sheep that blindly and gullibly follow their leader, look different. Their faces and horns look different to me, I am sure that so are their hearts. Yet we live, the whole benificent gift of life, wearing clothes that we abhor and shoes that pinch, only for the sake of 'belonging'. We eat at places, where the insipid food is fashionable. We speak the very reverse of what we feel. Hey, who are we fooling in the whole business of life if we did not remain true to ourselves? The only person, who

might truly love us. Our minds are shrieking in agony, they want to be heard in their real colours. The mind should not need fashions, for fashions are adopted by those who do not know who they really are. Alas, this tirade means nothing at all for I plan to live the rest of my life conforming. I hate the guts that I lack.

Lily Swarn is an internationally acclaimed poet, novelist, and essayist, author of A Drop of Cosmos. She is the 2023-24 International Beat Poet Laureate India and a Peace and Humanity ambassador. She can be reached at sukhish83@gmail.com

FROM PAGE 3...

Habba Khatoon: A Ghost...

time, Yousuf Shah's age was 28, while Habba was 19. She lived a royal life for fourteen years (see Amin Kamil, *kuliyat-e-Habba Khatoon* 1995; Habba Khatoon 1959). If Yousuf Shah Chak had married Zoon who became Habba Khatoon, why are the chronicles silent about it? If Zoon was born in Chandahar, who was Habeeba believed to be from the city and a 'sayyad kuur' (a high caste Muslim girl)? As has been related above, there is no proof of Yousuf Shah Chak having any queen by the name of Habeeba or Habba Khatoon, or even Zoon. "No historical chronicle before the 19th century refers to Habba Khatoon. Many legends about her are prevalent in Kashmir. From these, and from her poetry, scholars have tried to reconstruct the details of her life", writes Ram Chandrakausika ('The Lady of Love: The Life and Works of Habba Khatoon', retrieved).

Another legend is that Habba Khatoon was born in Gurez to Bota Raj who had fallen in debt to shawl vendors—Khoja Hayaband and Habba Lala. He wasn't able to clear the debt. He gave them his daughter instead of the debt. This girl became Habba Khatoon later on. One day, she was singing in the field when Yousuf Shah Chak

passed by (we will talk about it later with reference to her poetry). He was stunned to see such a beautiful lady with a captivating voice. He fell in love with her at first sight and married her after some time. They say that a mountain peak in her name is a testimony to this 'fact'. However, another legend refutes this whole idea and says that Habba Khatoon once visited Gurez Valley and sat at the foothills of this mountain that is named after her. In short, there is no dearth of unauthentic stories there about the lady who remains a mystery till date. Interestingly, all these legends have one thing in common and that is, there did exist a poet by the name of Habba Khatoon, but who she was and from where she was remains a puzzle.

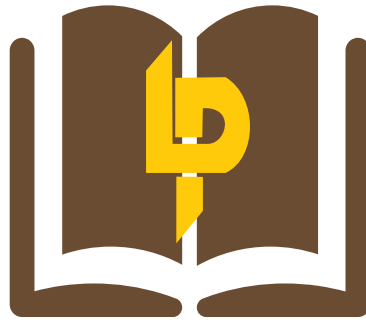
Amin Kamil (1995) mentions Bashir Bashar (in Shiraza 19, 4), having referred to Anis Kazmi's statement that in Gulistan-e-Shahi, Habba Khatoon is described as the daughter of Sayyad Bahar Shah and Bibi Badval Jamal. After her mother's death, she went into the care of Abdi Rather of Chandahar. Abdi Rather married her off to Kamaluddin of Jamalata, Srinagar who was a maternal cousin (mamtur boay) of Habba Kha-

toon (We will discuss this in detail later on). But why was Habba Khatoon handed over to Abdi Rather after her mother's death? What relationship was there between Abdi Rather and Bahar Shah or his wife? Was there nobody from the parental side who could take care of Habba Khatoon? Why didn't her mother's parental home take her into their care since Habba Khatoon had been married there? Kamil (1995) does ask these questions, which need to be answered. As we will see later, Habba Khatoon does mention her Jamalata marriage in her verse, but she also says that she was a high caste (Sayyad) girl. This claim nullifies the popular narrative that Habba Khatoon was the Zoon of Chandahar and/or daughter of Abdi Rather.

One of the most important historical accounts of Kashmiri literature and language is that of Abdul Ahad Azad, a renowned poet and, perhaps, the first person who wrote a detailed account of the Kashmiri poets. His book, *kashmiri zaban aur shayri* (Kashmiri Language and Poetry) was posthumously published by the Jammu and Kashmir Academy, Art and Culture in three volumes in 1959. ... (to continue)

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