شعرى مجموعه

HT Saturday

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Catastrophe and Dawn: Krasznahorkai's "The Melancholy of Resistance" and the Fragility of Being











How married am I



A Roar Against the Dark: The Rise and Resilience of State Cancer **Institute SKIMS**







An Expedition to Shahadra, a **Border Village** in Uri



Access to **Services: Mental Health** in Catastrophes and Emergencies



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POETRY CORNER

ween Wound and Word: The



P.V. Laxmiprasad



Eva Petropoulou Lianou

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Dr Purnima Singh

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Dr Mallika Tripathi

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HT Saturday - LitStream

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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Between Wound and Word: The Poetic Vision of Zahid Mukhtar



Professor Muhammad Aslam

The Poet

Zahid Mukhtar, a multifaceted writer, poet, playwright, and broadcaster, passed away a few days back. Born in Anantnag (also called Islamabad), Kashmir (incidentally, rekhta.org shows him from 'Islamabad, Pakistan'), in 1952, Zahid (he used it as a nom de plume) had an illustrious career with the Doordarshan and All India Radio. People knew him more as a broadcaster than a writer. Zahid wrote in Urdu and Kashmiri and carved a niche in the literary circles here and in India. Some of his Urdu writings are: tishnagi (Thirst), tahreerain (Writings). sulagte chinar (Blazing Chinars), and Ajnabi shehar ke Ajnabi raaste (Alien Roads in an Alien City). His Kashmiri collection of poetry is titled tenbri halam (Lapful of Sparks, 2009). Although he is no more with us, he has left an indelible mark on the literary world.

I have chosen three ghazals of Zahid from his Urdu collection, tishnagi (Thirst), as a tribute to this great son of the soil.

Disclaimer: I do not claim to be a scholar of Urdu poetry. I am only a learner, sharing my understanding and interpretations as a student of the art.

Ghazal 1

Transliteration

larazti raat baaqi hai abhi tum saath mat choro abhi to baat baaqi hai abhi tum saath mat choro yeh maana subah se pehle bikharna hai tasavur ko ajal ki maat baaqi hai abhi tum saath mat choro abhi to maine khanjar ka kiya ek raaz hai afsha lahoo ki zaat baaqi hai abhi tum saath mat choro teri raahon ke bakhshé aable phooté nahin ab tak abhi saughaat baaqi hai abhi tum saath mat choro main ab bhi teri palkon par wahi thehra sa aansu han

meri barsaat baaqi hai abhi tum saath mat choro junoon dil ki waadi se sukoon dil ki sarhad tak abhi sakraat baaqi hai abhi tum saath mat choro

Translation

The trembling night still lingers — don't leave me yet,

Our conversation isn't over — don't leave me yet. Yes, I know that before dawn, imagination must

> لرزتی رات باقی ہے ابھی تم ساتھ مت چھوڑو ابھی تو بات باقی ہے ابھی تم ساتھ مت چھوڑو

یہ مانا صبح سے پہلے بکھرنا ہے تصور کو اجل کی مات باقی ہے ابھی تم ساتھ مت چھوڑو

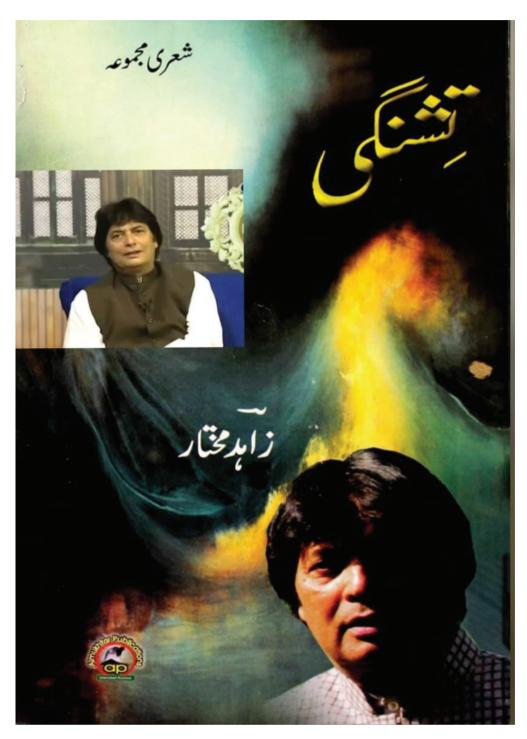
ابھی تو میں نے خنجر کا کیا اک راز ہے افشا لہو کی ذات باقی ہے ابھی تم ساتھ مت چھوڑو

تری رابوں کے بخشے آبلے پھوٹے نہیں اب تک ابھی سوغات باقی ہے ابھی تم ساتھ مت چھوڑو

میں اب بھی تیری پلکوں پر وہی تُھہرا سا آنسو ہوں مری برسات باقی ہے ابھی تم ساتھ مت چھوڑو

جنون دل کی وادی سے سکون دل کی سرحد تک ابھی سکرات باقی ہے ابھی تم ساتھ مت چھوڑو

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Death's final defeat still awaits — don't leave me vet.

I have only just revealed one secret of the dagger, The essence of blood still remains — don't leave me yet.

The blisters gifted by your paths haven't burst yet, The pain's final gift still remains — don't leave me yet.

I am still that tear resting upon your eyelashes, My rain hasn't ended yet — don't leave me yet. From the valley of passion to the borders of calm, The last agony still remains — don't leave me yet.

Critical Evaluation

This ghazal is about longing, parting, and resistance against final separation. To me, it seems to be a love poem, and a contemplation on mortality,

memory, and living emotion. The poet seems to be in utter desperation, for he repeatedly asks, "abhi tum saath mat choro" ("don't leave me yet"). He shows his despair by using contrasting images and symbols: raat vs subuh (night vs dawn), khanjar vs lahoo (dagger vs blood), aable vs saughat (blisters vs gift), aansu vs barsaat (tears vs rain), and junoon vs sukoon (madness vs peace). Each of these images gives a sense of some unfinished thing. It could be love, a confession, a transformation, or life itself. The refrain abhi tum saath mate choro is a heartbeat and manifests the deep emotional crisis that the poet is passing through. The plea becomes universal. moving from romantic to existential. The use of abhi (still/yet) seems to be a lover's hoping against hope. Zahid's diction is traditional yet vivid. Words like

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Between Catastrophe and Dawn: Krasznahorkai's "The Melancholy of Resistance" and the Fragility of Being



Wani Nazir

he Melancholy of Resistance (1989) by László Kraszna-horkai (2025 Nobel Prize Winner) is a book about a world that is both familiar and scary. The story takes place in a community that is about to fall down, where turmoil, public displays, and decay disrupt the normal flow of life. The writing style sets a pattern of excess and intensity from the start, as shown by the word "Catastrophe! Of course! Last judgement! Horseshit! ... you can only mew and caterwaul ..." This angry criticism of flowery language shows that words have lost their relation to reality in society, making it hard for everyone to understand. There are short moments of clarity that help balance out the novel's overpowering nature. For example, "everything about him regained its original significance... the window became a window you could look out again." These times show that the human mind can still feel amazement, even while things are falling apart.

Krasznahorkai's narrative is based on 20th-century literature and philosophy. The town in the book reminds me of the bizarre places in Kafka's stories, where bureaucratic systems, secret powers, and creepy people rule the lives of normal people. The big, still whale in the town square reminds me of Kafka's strange machines, which are constantly there but never fully understood and change people's behaviour just by being there. Like in The Trial, it's not clear who is in charge. It looks like Mrs. Eszter's bureaucratic actions are a reaction to a state of disorder that comes from both inside and outside the organisation.

The way the work is written, its syntax, is comparable to Thomas Bernhard's, with a persistent sense of repetition and a deep, compulsive awareness that runs through one's thoughts. Krasznahorkai uses long, continuous paragraphs to collect pictures, thoughts, and feelings in a smooth, almost musical style. One character is so fascinated that he can't do anything else: "He gained height, grew thin, the hair on his temples had begun to grey ... trapped him in a bubble of time, in one eternal, impenetrable and transparent

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'One of the great novels of the last quarter-century ... a mitteleuropean Moby Dick' Garth Risk Hallberg MELANCHOLY RESISTANCE LÁSZLÓ KRASZNAHORKAI Winner of the Man Booker International Prize

moment." Time becomes a space between worlds, both close and far away, which is similar to Proust's work on duration and Bergson's thoughts on inner time.

The story deals with existential problems from a philosophical point of view, such as how individuals feel lost in a world where nothing is certain, how morality is shaky, and how societal institutions are always changing. Krasznahorkai addresses these worries in the context of the breakdown of society, politics, and the body. The references to "the last judgement" and "catastrophe" are both real and metaphorical, and they make people feel true fear. When he writes, "Everything was there ... but the realm that existed once ... had disappeared for ever, ground into infinitesimal pieces by the endless momentum of chaos", you can see how history and society are always falling apart. This reminds me of Walter Benjamin's "angel of histo-

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ry," who is pushed back by forces that can't be understood, while people try to grasp on to bits and pieces of real life.

The book is also a study of political allegory. The narrative is written around the end of the Eastern Bloc and is about how ideologies are uncertain and institutions are unstable. The circus and its dead whale stand for things that come from outside and cause dread, mockery, and instability. Mrs. Eszter's strictness shows how society reacts to what it thinks is disorder. There is still a chance of resistance, though it may be minimal. This can happen through thoughts, perceptions, or small moral actions. "All normal expectations went by the board ... there was nothing anyone could do except to get a tenacious grip on anything that was still tangible." These actions, no matter how tiny, show that you are making moral choices that go against the disintegration

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around vou.

In the book, language is both a source of tyranny and a way to be saved. Krasznahorkai says that people shouldn't use inflated rhetoric when they write, like when he says "you don't talk, you 'whisper' or 'expostulate'; you don't walk down the street but 'proceed feverishly'; you don't enter a place but 'cross its threshold' ..." Still, language lets us see, wonder, and connect with each other when "he would discover the hidden depths of human existence ... the enormous joys of mutuality .. threading the planets and the stars." Words can be used as weapons and instruments for spying and lying, as well as techniques to reach a higher state of being. Attention, contemplation, and moral perception are little actions of resistance that bring people and the vastness of space closer together.

The body and the apocalypse are linked in Krasznahorkai's story. When he says, "The unchained workers of decay were waiting ... to dismantle whatever had been alive once and once only ... under the eternally silent cover of death," death, decay, and decline are all around and clear. Even with all the damage. people may still sense beauty and connection. A fire that keeps you warm and a window that you can see through both show the need for grounding and moral attentiveness. Everything about him regained its original significance ... the window became a window you could look out again." When things are going wrong, perception becomes a way to fight against destruction and confirm what you see.

In Krasznahorkai's book, time doesn't move in a straight line. When he says, "he would finally know that our every moment is passed in a procession across dawns and day's-ends ... threading the planets and stars, time is stuck, repeating, and cosmic. Human experience is restricted and sensitive, yet it touches on greater patterns of time. This suggests a sense of something beyond individual misery, but it doesn't promise escape. It's just as vital to know that there is order in the universe as it is to know how weak people are.

The book has philosophical ties to prior works. Krasznahorkai's work combines Kafka's sense of being disconnected, Beckett's basic and sparse style, Camus's sense of absurdity, and Bernhard's repetitious writing. Despair is something that affects us physically, morally, and socially. With understanding giving only a few points of view. This is where the issues with morals

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The Bicycle



Dr Ratan Bhattachariee profratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com

n those days, the roads were quieter. The air carried the scent of ripe mangoes in summer and the smoky chill of winter evenings. Motorbikes were rare, cars even rarer. But bicycles—ah, bicycles were everywhere. They were not just modes of transport; they were companions, confidants, and sometimes, silent witnesses to the rhythm of life.

My father had one. A black Hercules, sturdy and proud, with a silver bell that chimed like a temple ghanta. It stood by the veranda wall. leaning slightly, as if resting after a long journey. That bicycle was more than metal and rubber—it was my father's shadow on wheels.

He rode it every day. In sun and shower, through muddy lanes and dusty alleys, his bicycle was his constant companion. Whether he was going to the post office, the market, or the school where he taught, the bicycle carried him faithfully

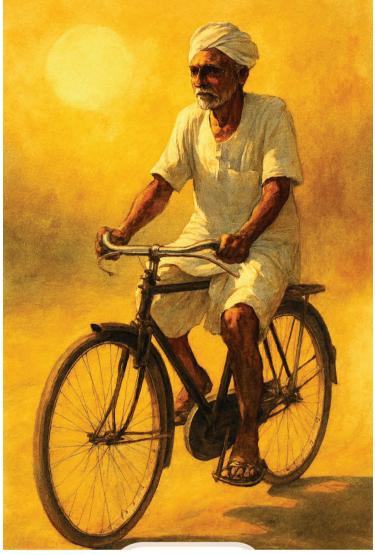
I remember watching him from the gate, his dhoti tucked up, his shirt fluttering in the breeze, pedaling with a rhythm that seemed to match the heartbeat of our home.

There was something poetic about the way he rode. He never rushed. His bicycle never groaned under haste. It moved like a thoughtsteady, deliberate, and full of purpose. I was a child then, curious and mischievous. The bicycle fascinated me. Its curved handlebars, the rubber grips worn smooth by years of use, the way the pedals turned like clockwork—it was a machine of magic. But it was also forbidden. My father was possessive about it, not out of pride, but out of necessity. It was his daily bread .His routine was predictable. Lunch was at one. Puja at one-thirty. A short nap followed. That was my window. I would tiptoe to the veranda, gently lift the bicycle, and wheel it out to the lane. The first few times, I only sat on it, feet barely reaching the pedals.

Later, I learned to balance, to push, to glide. The lane was narrow, flanked by hibiscus bushes and the occasional barking dog. I would ride in loops, imagining I was flying, the wind in my hair, the world blurring past. The bicycle creaked under my weight, but it never complained. It was as if it knew I was my father's son.Sometimes, I would hear the temple bell ring, signaling the end of puja. I would rush back, park the bicycle exactly as it was, and run inside, pretending to read. My father never said anything. But I suspect he knew. Perhaps he smiled inwardly, remembering his own

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It was a Sunday. The sky was clear, the birds unusually quiet. My father sat at the lunch table, his plate untouched. He looked tired, not physically, but in a way that words cannot describe. After puja, he lay down for his nap. I went out, as usual, to take the bicycle for a ride. The handlebars were cold. The seat felt unfamiliar. I rode slowly, unsure. The lane seemed longer, the hibiscus dull. I returned early, parked the bicycle, and went inside.My father was still lying down. His eyes were open, staring at the ceiling. I called him. He didn't respond. My mother rushed in. There was panic, then silence, then the sound of a phone call.

childhood, his own first ride. One monsoon afternoon, the sky broke open. Rain lashed the earth like a thousand drums. The lane turned into a stream, the hibiscus bowed under the weight of water. I stood by the window, watching my father return from the market, drenched but smiling. His bicycle glistened, water dripping from the spokes like silver threads. He parked it, wiped it gently with an old towel, and placed a small packet of sweets on the table. "For you," he said. "You've been good this week." I looked at the sweets, then at the bicycle. I wanted to ask him-why do you ride in the rain? Why not wait? But I didn't. I knew the answer. The bicycle was not just transport. It was his resolve, his rhythm, his smiles.

Years passed. I grew taller. The bicycle grew older. Its bell lost its chime, the paint chipped, the tires wore thin. But it still stood by the veranda wall, proud and patient.

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He was gone.Just like that.No warning, no farewell. The bicycle stood outside, unaware. Or perhaps it knew. Perhaps it had carried him through life, and now, it stood still, waiting for a rider who would never return. We didn't move the bicycle for days. It stood there, like a monument. Neighbors came, offered condolences, shared stories. Many remembered seeing him ride through the village, waving, smiling, always on time.I couldn't look at it. It felt too heavy with memory. One evening, I went out. The sun was setting, casting long shadows. I touched the bicycle. The rubber grips were still smooth. The pedals still turned. I sat on it, not to ride. but to remember. Sometimes we feel good to have a window view of our past. I recalled Robert Lynd's essay Window View" and now feel the inner meaning of what Lynd says of the value of memory. The painful event of the past seems sweeter when recalled later . It is like a man reaching the other shore after overcoming the danger of drowning. My father was not a philosopher. His bicycle was his message. Simple living and high thinking can make one happy. My grand daughter who lives in America is a girl of six year. She misses her father when he goes to office. She asks why he stays in office fo long. Her father says, to earn money. She says, Dad you say money cannot bring all happiness. Why then do you stay so long outside? To make you happy my daughter . She replies curtly, I do not get all I want . But I am happy . You need not stay so long outside. The boy in D.H.Lawrence's story used to hear all day the sound of dollars around him. But dollars could not make him happy. My father;'s bicycle taught me many lessons.

When I walk on the street alone I feel I see him again—his dhoti tucked, his shirt fluttering, pedaling with purpose. I hear the bell chime. the temple ghanta echo, the rain tapping on the spokes. I feel the wind, the rhythm, the resolve. And tears come to my eyes. Not because he was gone, but because he had left behind something so simple, so profound. Today, the roads are crowded. Motorbikes roar, cars honk, buses groan. But sometimes, I see an old man on a bicycle, pedaling slowly, deliberately. And I smile. Somewhere, in some quiet lane, my father is still riding. In memory, in rhythm, in the silent turning of wheels. And the bicycle waits.

(International Tagore Awardee writer Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee is a Former Affiliate Faculty of English Virginia Commonwealth University USA and a multilingual poet cum columnist)



How married am I

Short Story



Naveema Ahmad Mahioor Author and Senior Journalist

he day was designated initially solely for reading, with no plans for conversation, meetings, or gossip. However, it was later reorganised by a group of marching women, who arrived with the urgency and determination reminiscent of a Salvation Army unit, aiming to address the disturbances caused by wartime soldiers.

Their intervention transformed the day into an active effort to restore order and discipline among those affected by the war's chaos, emphasising a collective commitment to recovery and stability. But it was somewhat different with the fair sex.

Women, with their laughter, smiles, and elaborate layered attire, appeared to be on a specific mission, with me seemingly their target today. I prepared myself mentally for their probing questions and observations.

It was not an easy task to avoid their gestures or the mind games they had played with other women.

I found myself unable to move or protest, perhaps because the audience was unaware of my discomfort. They might have perceived me as one of them, all engaged in deciphering the complexities of married life. While listening to others' struggles often seemed straightforward, introspection within proved more chal-

These women were not ordinary; they were extraordinary-intelligent, perceptive, and challenging to outwit. I couldn't determine which among them was the most remarkable, as their curiosity led them to explore the lives of every woman within their circle. Their community was large, yet the stories of its members were remarkably similar, passed down through generations over five thousand years, with minor modifications along the way.

We often hear discussions about breaking the glass ceiling in conversations or seminars. It was a moment to discover and explore the most influential and empowered women.

This discussion was unconventional, akin to peeling an onioneach layer revealing more profound truths, often bringing tears. Such tears, whether genuine or feigned, flowed effortlessly, reminiscent of scenes from Bollywood films. It was impossible to distinguish authentic emotion from pretence, as women often carried an abundance of tears-an emotional reservoir that seemed endless.

I was informed that they had

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already spoken to dozens of women, some of whom laughed at the absurdity of it all, while others felt embarrassed to discuss it.

Those with covered faces giggled, and those in denim jeans raised their eyebrows. They still inquired about the challenges of being single, whether before or after marriage.

Despite our advancements in digital technology, increasing purchasing power, and our ability to reach great heights, we still hesitate to discuss women's issues openly in public forums. Such conversations could empower women to embrace their freedom of being single and even celebrate it. Society perceived

Marriage remains a sacred institution in our society, even as we have undermined it from within.

The intention was not to advocate for singlehood; instead, they aimed to reveal the hidden stories behind marriages or broken marriages. One older woman, abandoned by her husband in the early years of marriage, snubbed them, saying, 'Have some mercy on our society. Do not try to ruin our culture. We are a value-based community. Avoid this rubbish of free womanhood; this is not our cup of tea." This did not deter their mission.

Having them around my coffee table felt ominous-not because I didn't enjoy their company, but because I didn't want to discuss my life, which had many grey shades hidden within vibrant colours. They seemed determined to peel away my

I offered them tea and biscuits. Most of them didn't like tea; instead, they requested black coffee or some hot drink, which my cupboards lacked. My faith proved helpful, and they didn't ridicule me.

The lady in the yellow sari, Lata, asked me to close all doors and win-

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dows so we could have a private all-girl talk without interference from my domestic maids, who were clearly curious to join. I had to ask them to leave and stand at the gate to avoid visitors, as I didn't expect anyone that day.

After sipping their tea or black coffee, they all turned to me and delivered a challenge that had been posed to dozens of women before. I was ranked number 220 in the survey. The question? Yes—the question?

It was not the question. It was a bullet coming straight out of the AK-47 that pierced my heart and created a big hole.

I started to feel blood oozing from the internal organs of the body. The pain was so intense that I did not dare to sigh. The wetness of my bones made me shiver. I could sense the deregulation of my body temperature.

Maybe they noticed the wrinkles getting into dark circles on my face for the first time.

They all fell silent. Their eyes turned to stone. Either they were staring at me, or I was staring at them; who could tell? Both sides were testing each other's patience, waiting to see who would speak first. Was a speech therapist needed?

Was the question too heavy? Or was it that I couldn't find the words to answer, or perhaps the courage to delve into the past? I felt that if I responded to this question, it would erupt like a volcano in my heart and destroy everything that was left. But they were waiting.

'How married am I?" What kind of question was that? Lasked myself. Was I married one hundred per cent. fifty per cent, or five per cent? How could I measure it on a scale?

My heart started pumping too much blood to my brain. Perhaps I was losing myself.

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The burden on my mind felt heavy and unshakeable. I looked at Maya, whose eyes were fixed on me, sunken and pale, devoid of life. Every time I glanced at her, my heart felt lighter, as if the lava had retreated into the core of my being, leaving behind the destruction and silt caused by flooding.

I had turned into a still sea. The turnoil had calmed. She wanted to respond to the question, but they were waiting for me to answer. The silt had settled.

Maya let out a laboured breath and said, "This question has defined my last thirty years of marriage, during which thousands of stories have been created and hundreds of poems recited every minute of every day. Yet, I left it untitled, untold, and buried. Perhaps I didn't want to expose myself. How can I possibly summarise thirty years of my life in thirty words in thirty seconds, a journey that has been etched into the vast landscape of my soul? I never had the chance to express it, so it remained shrouded in darkness.

My gaze unsettled her. She sighed deeply and began to murmur, "I was my Baba's doll, never having seen my father's eyebrows rise; that doll was ultimately trampled. Baba invested his fortune in my education, which cost him family, their connections and support.'

She looked at me intently and said, "I dared to step outside the house, but I had to prepare myself for being labelled a 'market woman.' a title bestowed upon me by every family member.'

Her eyes filled with tears as she covered her face with her hands.

"I was a mother, very delicate and fragile. My motherhood was tarnished when I was accused of having an illicit relationship with my son. I was a faithful wife, but over time, I became nothing more than an ATM.'

I passed her a napkin to wipe her face, but she seemed lost in her despair. "I'm not even sure if there were any celebrations thirty vears ago that I mistakenly believed were for my wedding. A few people attended, wrote up the papers, gave a sermon, and then left me with the document in hand. What was written on this paper? I didn't bother to read it; it wasn't our custom to do so. I followed the customs, but I was criticised for my ignorance. I was kicked out of the house. I became like a leaf on a poplar tree, constantly falling in the wind and turning to dust after every rain.'

Lata took her hand and squeezed it gently.

'Had I ever been a bride? Did I misbehave? Or did I believe in consent before stripping off?

Didn't I try to fix myself or improve myself? Her questions bombarded me with so many ifs, and I had no memory of anything. We were exchanging looks, consid-

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A Roar Against the Dark

The Rise and Resilience of State Cancer Institute SKIMS



Akram Sidiqui sidiquirayan@gmail.com

n the doors of the State Cancer Institute SKIMS , an attendant was calling his acquaintance in a state of awe and disbelief,

"Bhaijaan, yeh dekho, poora naya block ban gaya hai, sab kuch badal gaya hai."

His trembling voice carried both fatigue and faith. Behind him, the newly risen façade of the Regional Cancer Institute at SKIMS Soura shimmered under open blue sky. The air was heavy with the sterile scent of antiseptic mingled with the unspoken fragrance of resilience. Here, life and death are next-door neighbors, conversing quietly in the corridors of courage.

Nestled in the Himalayan cradle of Kashmir, SKIMS Soura has long been the Valley's health citadel and the bastion of healing. Within its sprawling precincts, the Cancer Institute has evolved from a struggling wing to a commanding regional powerhouse, a crucible where science confronts suffering, and compassion becomes an everyday discipline. Over the last few years, its transformation has been nothing short of tectonic, in its walls, its will, and its unwavering vision. Itz evolution has been examplry.

From its inception, Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences carried within its blueprint a promise, to become the region's apex of specialized care, a fortress against disease and despair. Among its noblest missions stood the fight against cancer, a silent adversary that had unrelentingly been hitting very hard to this region for past many decades.

From Kupwara to Kishtwar, from Leh to Rajouri, men and women made their arduous pilgrimages to Soura. By the late 2010s, nearly ninety-five percent of the cancer burden of Jammu and Kashmir had converged on SKIMS, making it the Valley's lone care giver against this deadly disease.

By 2017, internal reviews revealed the magnitude of crisis: thousands of new cases each year, tens of thousands of follow-ups, and a skeletal medical force struggling heroically against impossible odds. The verdict was clear that the old walls could no longer contain the rising storm and in order to stand firm agnist this ever rising toll of patients, plans to expand, modernize, and redefine this guarding force was taken into

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hand by the then adminstration.

A bold vision took roots. The new multi-storey block began to rise beside the main hospital, its foundation stone laid with equal parts grit and gratitude. The expansion was not merely architectural, it was philosophical too, it was a reaffirmation that the people of this valley deserved care equal to any metropolitan standard in the rest of India.

The real transformation begain in 2024 .when new Director Prof Mohmad Ashraf Ganie ,who besides being an acclaimed endocrinologist is a great phlintheope, embarked upon a misssion for converging the whole cancer care under this one roof. He without loosing time shifted Medical Oncology wards and Day Care Chemotherapy Units, that were housed in the main building of SKIMS to dedicated floors IN State Cancer institute with monitored infusion bays, isolation chambers, and digitally controlled nursing stations.

Clinical Hematology found its rightful home, managing leukemia, bone marrow procedures, transfusion protocols, and complex hematological malignancies with renewed precision.

Pediatric Oncology emerged as a child-friendly sanctity, bright with murals, laughter, and specialized nurses who treat with both syringe and smile. Surgical Oncology was relocated adjacent to modular operating theatres, cutting down critical transition time for high-risk postoperative cases.

Outpatient Clinics for medical, surgical, and radiation oncology were redesigned for fluid patient movement, where multidisciplinary tumor boards now meet in seamless coordination. Day Care Bays for chemotherapy, hydration, and blood product infusion were multiplied, enabling more cycles per day and reducing hospitalization.

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This reorganization was not without pain, shifting wards meant shifting memories, dismantling old routines, and building new discipline. Yet the outcome happenes to be very transformative: what was once a chaotic confluence of inpatients and outpatients now beats with rhythm, order, and quiet efficiency.

While adding impetus to the already sophosticated care In the past two years, Director SKIMS armed this institute with state of art medical marvels. Foremost among them is the Linear Accelerator (LINAC), a technological juggernaut worth nearly twenty-nine crore rupees. This machine does not merely deliver radiation; it delivers accuracy. Capable of image-guided radiotherapy, conformal dose distribution, and dynamic beam sculpting, the LINAC represents the Valley's leap into the global league of precision oncology. No longer must patients travel to Delhi or Chandigarh in desperate search of advanced radiotherapy, SKIMS has brought that miracle home.

Parallelly, the installation of the Liquid Chromatography–Mass Spectrometry (LC-MS) facility has elevated the Institute into the domain of cutting-edge cancer research. With it, scientists can now trace molecular biomarkers, analyze pharmacokinetics, and decode proteomic signatures that may one day rewrite cancer therapeutics for this unique population.

These instruments are not mere gadgets, they are weapons of mercy. They mark SKIMS's transition from a beleaguered referral center to a self-reliant, research-driven powerhouse of modern oncology.

On the other hand a cancer institute's worth is measured not by its marble but by its metrics.

Between 2019 and 2024, SKIMS recorded a staggering 28,457 new cancer registrations, an unrelent-

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ing upward climb that mirrors both improved diagnosis and escalating incidence.

and by 2024 the figure breached the 5,200 mark, the highest in the Institute's history.

Looking back a decade, the numbers are even more sobering. Between 2013 and 2023, over 44,000 cases were registered at SKIMS. In 2017 alone, internal audits recorded 2,368 radiotherapy sessions, 4,500 fresh registrations, and more than 15,700 inpatient admissions ,this prrof is enough to show that the institute was already carrying a mountain on its back.

The daily chemotherapy load often exceeds one hundred cycles. The dominant cancers , stomach, lung, esophagus, breast, colorectal, and ovarian, sketch the Valley's epidemiological fingerprint. Kashmir's distinct dietary patterns, cold-storage food habits, and genetic factors have contributed to an unusually high prevalence of gastrointestinal malignancies, an area in which SKIMS continues to conduct vital research.

On the other hand, the vortex of overcrowding that had remained an enduring enemy was seen thining out day in and day out. There were nights when attendants slept on cold tiles, clutching hope like a relic. Beds were fewer than bodies that needed them, but 2024-2025 saw a revolutionary reforms and everything that was proving inconvenient to patients as well as attends was improvised by adding latest beds in wards and benches in the waiting halls.

Peripheral inertia has been one of the pestering problems that compounds the pressure on SKIMS, district cancer units, though planned, remain underdeveloped thereby pushing every advanced case toward

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An Expedition to Shahadra, a Border Village in Uri

Travelogue



Mohammad Akram akramiiim@gmail.com

n a hot, humid July morning, I received an unexpected call offering a daylong trip, which left me perplexed. My drenched, sweaty body wanted to refuse, but my adventurous spirit eagerly accepted. A call from an old acquaintance rekindled my passion for exploration and gave me a reason to escape the intense heat. I quickly grabbed my goggles, water, and cap and rushed outside to catch the car. Initially, three of us planned the day, but two more joined us at Uri and Salamabad. One, an army officer, led us through the sites, managed security checks, and explained the rules. While travelling, I could not fully enjoy the sights, even though I was familiar with the route. After two hours of climbing and descending, we reached the Sultandaki RR post. During registration, we enjoyed tea and snacks, took photographs, and proceeded to Shadrara village.

Within twenty minutes, we arrived at the shrine of Hazrat Imam Syed Rangiya Shah Bukhari, RA. The bumpy 3-4 km road was exhausting; however, the warm welcomes from Lieutenant Murli of the RR, JKP SI Ajaz Ahmad, and local shrine members helped assuage the fatigue. A large congregation of devotees was present. Notably, every last Thursday of the month, the army hosts a langar (feast) for visitors, which includes participation from children of nearby schools. The local chefs prepare the vegetarian dishes served to the devotees. After drinking sharbat, we engaged with locals, acquiring knowledge about the shrine, the saint, and the region's history.

Shahadra (SHAH DARR: meaning 'door' or 'entrance' to enlightenment) is a scenic border village in Tehsil Uri, renowned for Hazrat Imam Sved Rangiva Shah Bukhari. a 16th-century Sufi saint believed to have been a contemporary of Guru Hargobind. He arrived here during the reign of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, He was descended from the scholar Syed Jalal ud Din Gasht Makhdoom from Uch, Bahawalpur. Local traditions recount that Imam came seeking his infant brother, Syed Masoom Shah Gazi, who was said to have greeted his parents immediately after birth and was hidden to prevent public attention.

He remains in a cave at Qazinag, five kilometres away, which now attracts thousands of visitors daily. His elder brother, Syed Murad Shah Bukhari, RA, is buried in Kreeri. This shrine was initially built during Shah Jahan's reign using the same materials as used in building Lal Qila: however, it was destroyed multiple times, most recently in the late 20th century, Local efforts, supported by the Indian Army, led to its reconstruction in 2001.

According to local tales, Shah Baa'dshah was a contemporary of Hazrat Baba Gafoor ud Din Sahab, RA. It is said that Baba Gafoor intended to migrate to Punjab, but Imam Rangiya, fearing the heat, wished against it. When Baba Gafoor asked Imam to fetch water for ablution, Imam collected it and returned it with his stick rather than personally taking it, which enraged Baba Gafoor, prompting him to curse Imam, declaring that he would never find peace and his abode would be consumed by fire or destroyed.

Additional structures, including a kitchen shed, resting areas, huts, and toilets, have been developed over time by local army units. Near the shrine stands an ancient, sturdy olive tree where the Imam used to meditate. The Throne of the Imam is preserved within the kitchen shed.

The nearby historic Mughal Cart Road, also known as the Jehlum Valley Cart Road, was once essential for trade before partition but has since fallen into disrepair following the construction of the modern highway. The region is abundant in wild olives, pomegranates, pears, lemons, and oranges. The olive varieties cultivated here have the potential to significantly boost the local economy if grown commercially, especially for oil production. Wild pomegranate is used locally for the treatment of jaundice. The main crops cultivated are wheat and

As a key border village, Shahdra has experienced substantial infrastructural development to support military needs. While the army provides essential defence and disaster relief, the advent of modern technology and military advancements necessitate civil efforts to foster sustainable development. Promoting agriculture, establishing tourism facilities, banking, healthcare, and agro-horticultural centres could considerably bolster the local economy. Improving shrine and road infrastructure, alongside promoting border and religious tourism, remains vital. Residents aspire for the shrine to be managed under WAKF properties to attract increased visitation and devotion.

FROM PAGE 6...

A Roar Against...

this institution lakdiascally.

On the cost effective front, economic fragility of patients had remained the most tragic subplot. Even subsidized treatment becomes unaffordable when travel, lodging, and livelihood costs are added. Many families pawn memories to buy survival. But Drug and Pharmacy SKIMS equipped with almost every drug and formulation at very subsidized rates has always proved a hope in the hours of crisis.

The leadership of its present incumbent Prof Mohmad Ashraf Ganie, SKIMS now envisions a huband-spoke model of cancer care. The Institute will remain the command centre, while the new tertiary units in peripheral districts will function as satellites, diagnosing, treating, and referring only the complex cases that demand advanced interventions.

This structural philosophy ensures that SKIMS evolves not as a burdened behemoth but as a balanced beacon, guiding, training, and sustaining a network of coordinated cancer care across the Union Territory

The LINAC now brings precision to the doorstep of the Valley, the LC-MS empowers local research, the new cancer block optimizes patient flow and infection control, and a modernized digital registry is

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being sculpted to bring transparency and data-driven decision-making to the forefront. This metamorphosis is not cosmetic, it is conceptual, a revolution in the very grammar of healthcare delivery.

True, India's oncology landscape is dotted with sixty-plus Regional Cancer Centres, each a story of regional resilience, from Tata Memorial in Mumbai to the Regional Cancer Centre in Thiruvananthapuram, from Kidwai in Bengaluru to AIIMS in Delhi. Many of them enjoy decades of legacy and layered funding.

But, by contrast, SKIMS is a young gladiator, emerging late but fighting harder, serving a population far larger than its infrastructure was ever designed to bear.

Geography too makes its challenge unique. The harsh winters, mountainous terrain, and fragmented connectivity render every referral a pilgrimage. Yet despite these odds, SKIMS now stands among India's busiest oncology hubs in perbed patient load.

Its research potential is exceptional. The distinct genetic pool. unique food habits, and high gastrointestinal cancer incidence in the region offer rare insights for national studies. With continued consolidation, SKIMS could soon evolve into India's premier Himalayan

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Cancer Research Node, offering data and discoveries of continental significance.

What it now need of the hour and what has present dispensations already taken into its hands, is integration institutional bridges with AIIMS, PGIMER, and Tata Memorial, academic exchanges, and clinical trials that transcend geography. When that happens, SKIMS will no longer be described as a "regional institute," but as an indispensable limb of India's national cancer grid.

There are stories, pledges, hopes sighs that flow to the fore when any patients gets a new lease of life. He keeps looking with pride and onec he leaves the last stair on this institute he turns ,outstreches hai hand and offers benedictions galore.

These moments never make it to reports, yet they are the very essence of SKIMS, compassion under strain, science under fire, humanity undefeated.

At dawn, when mist hangs low over Anchar lake and the muezzin's call ripples through the air, a softer hum rises from the hills of shankaracharva and even Koh-i-maraan. the whir of ventilators, the shuffle of nurses, the low hum of the LINAC awakening to another day of battle. Within those walls, the Valley finds its voice of defiance.

Here, healing is not passive; it

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is a daily act of rebellion against despair. The new block of the State Cancer Institute stands not just as concrete and glass, but as a living declaration that science and soul can cohabit, that hope can be engineered and maintained like light in

In the grand theatre of survival, the state Cancer Institute at SKIMS Soura stands today as both shield and spear. It has risen from administrative fatigue to architectural grace. from scarcity to self-sufficiencv. from chaos to choreography .but challenges still loom ,manpower, maintenance, transparent data, and sustainable funding but the direction is luminous and irreversible.

If the saga of SKIMS were written as verse, it would end not in lament but in roar ,a roar of defiance against disease, a roar of compassion echoing through the Valley's autumn clad silence, a roar that proclaims: even in pain, we persevere.

And somewhere beyond its luminous doors, that same attendant will again whisper into his phone, "Bhaijaan, dekhna, yeh Kashmir

ka Tata banega.

Indeed, SKIMS Soura no longer merely treats cancer, it transforms destinies and travels too far to turn hopelessness into honour and that honour is what patients affilicted with dreaded diseases deserve.





WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY, 2025

Access to Services: Mental Health in Catastrophes and Emergencies



Dr. Tasaduk Hussain Itoo Physician/Public Health Expert

ental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. However in the current times, there is a huge surge in mental health problems across the globe among people and is becoming an issue of concern. Therefore, it becomes necessary to raise awareness of mental health illnesses while educating the population and mobilizing efforts to support mental health.

The theme for World Mental Health Day 2025, announced by the World Federation for Mental Health, is "Access to Services: Mental Health in Catastrophes and Emergencies." It focuses on the urgent need to make mental health support available during times of crisis, including natural disasters, conflicts, and other emergencies.

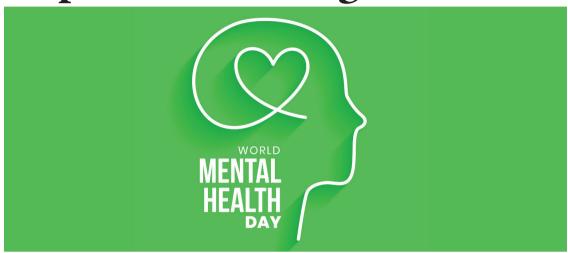
Burden of mental disorders had risen over last few decades. WHO estimated that globally over 450 million people suffer from mental disorders. Currently mental and behavioural disorders account for about 15 percent of the global burden of diseases. Major proportions of mental disorders come from low and middle income countries. In India, the burden of mental and behavioural disorders ranged from 9.5 to 102 per 1000 population.

As per a recent research study, most strongly associated factors with mental disorders are deprivation. Lifetime risk of affective disorders, panic disorders, generalized anxiety disorder, specific phobia and substance use disorders are thought to be other factors. Psychological factors such as headache and body ache, sensory symptoms and nonspecific symptoms such as tiredness and weakness also makes people vulnerable to mental disorders. Biological factors affecting mental disorders are genetic origin, abnormal physiology and congenital defect.

Disasters are potentially traumatic events which impose massive collective stress consequent to violent encounters with nature, technology or mankind. A meta-analysis showed that post-traumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder were

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common among disaster victims. As per WHO estimates, 10 percent of the people who experience traumatic events will have serious mental health problems and another 10 percent will develop behaviour that will hinder their ability to function effectively, in the situations of conflicts.

Drug abuse is becoming a serious issue of social concern during current times and the percentage of indulgence is witnessing an upsurge since last many years. Young population in particular are indulged into various kinds of social evils -- prominent being drug and substance abuse -- a way towards ruining a purposeful life and career. Drug abuse has been a factor in creating violations of multiple -- from domestic violence, sexual violence, violence of the community to violence of personal ambitions including emergence of suicidal thoughts, besides posing multiple health risks. One of the direct or indirect manifestation's of drug abuse is the rising incidence of suicides among people in general and youth in particular -- which is emerging as a grievous public health cum mental health concern.

Suicidal behaviour is found to have more predilection with female gender, working condition, improper decision making, premarital sex, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Ongoing stress and chronic pain heightened the risk of suicide. Living alone and a break in a steady relationship are also significantly associated with suicide. Work environment, school environment and family environment plays important role in pathogenesis of mental disorders.

Suicidal ideation has been shown to be linked to a higher risk of death by suicide, and openly disclosing suicidal thoughts or plans to friends and family or through social media platforms -- is becoming a serious social challenge since last few years.

Therefore, there is a serious need

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to track suicide risk in real time together with a better understanding of the ways in which people communicate or express their suicidality. Recognizing the warning signs in people who have suicidal thoughts and ensuring to them help in the form of positive support networking is the moral responsibility of everyone of us.

Moreover, stigma related to mental disorders, lack of awareness in common people, delayed treatment seeking behaviour, lack of low cost diagnostic test and lack of easily available treatment are the main hurdles in combating the problem of mental health issues. In addition factors pertaining to traditional medicine and beliefs in supernatural powers in community delays diagnosis and treatment. Lack of political commitment to non communicable diseases, further aggravates the load of mental disorders.

RECOMMENDATIONS (THE WAY FORWARD)

Burden of mental disorders seen by the world is only a tip of iceberg. While going through a recent research study I acknowledged that the authors have validated and enormously worked on mental health. To promote mental health, there is a need to create such living conditions and environment that support mental health and allow people to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyle. A society that respects and protects basic, civil, political, and cultural rights is needed to be built to promote mental health.

Mental health policies should not be solely concerned with mental disorders, but should also recognize and address the broader issues which promote mental health. This includes education, labour, justice, transport, environment, housing, and health sector. For attaining this, inter-sectoral coordination is a mainstream.

There is a need to aim at improving child development by early

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childhood interventions like preschool psychosocial activities, nutritional and psycho-social help to give roots for a healthy community. Presently, the community is also demanding the skills building programme and child and youth development programmes.

Moreover, there is a need to do socioeconomic empowerment by improving access to education and employment opportunities. Social initiatives should be taken to bring people together for social, health and educational reasons as well as income generation activities. Society needs to be free of discrimination and violence. Reducing discrimination against sex, caste, disability and socioeconomic status is an important aspect to reduce mental disorders. Social support for elderly people needs to be strengthened. Programmes targeting towards indigenous people, migrants and people affected by disasters and armed -related violence need to be established.

Another key to reduce mental morbidity is to strengthen the treatment of mental disorders at the level of primary health care. There are multiple interventions needed to prevent the progression of mental disorders from early manifestations to more serious and chronic cases. There is a need of simple, easily available diagnostic test and low cost treatment to provide better primary health care.

Reluctance to drug abuse could be a reforming initial step to change its course for the benefit of society. Besides working on thoughts of people addicted to drug abuse, positive motivation, vocational guidance, educational-deaddiction counselling could be revolutionary steps to alleviate them from such abuse.

Inclusive and accountable institutions of social justice, health and social reformation need to work hand in hand to provide integrated

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FROM PAGE 8...

Access to Services : Mental...

and highly intellectualized solutions for eliminating drug abuse from the society. Every sector of the society has a crucial role to play in addressing the rising incidence of social evils -- including Government, civil society, NGO's, religious scholars, teaching community among others.

Moreover, social stigma associated with mental health issues is unfortunately a big challenge and we need to put our efforts best in breaking this stigma so that people who suffer -- shall reveal their illnesses and ensure help.

More to say, psychiatric spe-

cialists, clinical psychologists and epidemiologists need to reorient their research in such a way that true burden of mental disorders are estimated at community level. This would provide true situation of the mental health problem. Secondary prevention must focus on strengthening the ability of primary care services to provide effective treatment.

The author is a distinguished Kashmiri doctor, public health expert, medical writer, and researcher He can be reached at drtasadukitoo@ gmail.com

FROM PAGE 5...

How married...

ering exposing ourselves, but Maya had struck a nerve and unleashed a flood of emotions.

"How were my babies born? That must be the joyous memory every mother treasures in her heart. Was I hospitalised, or did I endure labour at home? What a fool I had been—not keeping a record of my children's birthdays, their first smiles, their first steps, or their first days of school. I had some diaries stored in the attic, but I was told they had turned to dust. I knew those diaries had been burned when I was declared an ashtray."

She lost her balance on the chair. "Have I lost my memory, or have I killed my sense of feeling? I think the memory loss began the day I fell down the stairs, or maybe I was knocked down by some invisible force. Baba would say that my mother died of a ruptured vein in her brain. I'm not sure if she was also pushed down the stairs."

She wept bitterly, calling for her mother through her sobs. "Your question has buried me deep under the debris of thirty years."

All twelve eyes were fixed on her, probably regretting or questioning why they had asked me such a thoughtless question that had touched a deep chord in her heart.

She had miserably failed to hide

her inner turmoil. As for me, I was an actor, skilled at concealing my own struggles. But she couldn't manage it; she laid her life bare and exposed.

Lata handed her another cup of tea to help bring her back from her trauma. I shrugged and stepped closer to her, noticing tears falling like a torrential rain.

It was challenging to find the courage to say anything to her. Finally, she spoke in a broken voice, "How can I answer a question I haven't even considered in the last thirty years? Have I truly not considered it, or have I just not had the time?"

The other women were scanning her every feature, as if probing for signs of her marital status or, if she was married, the extent of her obligations.

Her fingers were bare; she wore no ring, which in many cultures signifies a married woman. Yet, our society had no such custom.

I never considered buying jewellery like the other women in my family. I wore no earrings in my ears, nor did I have a golden chain gracing my earlobes. I am not a Kashmiri Pandit like Girija, who followed the custom of wearing a long gold chain (Deja hour) around her ears. That chain announced her

marital status, signalling to others that she was unavailable. Yet, men still pursued her regardless.

I looked at Lata's finger, wondering if wearing a golden ring was truly enough to showcase the joy of marriage. Lata's golden ring seemed to cover the shame of revealing her husband's mischief and extra-marital affairs.

Girija never removed her gold chain after getting married, even though she had made several unsuccessful suicide attempts due to her husband's infidelity and indifference. Sitting in the courtyard in the dark of night had become her routine, counting the stars and asking the moon why it seemed to dim more each night. The doctor had advised her on multiple occasions to seek proper medical help.

It's said that the shimmer of a ring can measure the degree of happiness in a marriage. Lata kept staring at me in silence, rolling her eyes and aligning them with my broken expressions and the ups and downs of my dark circles.

Her gaze made my breathing shallow, the pressure building in my veins as if I had just run a marathon. Sometimes I have seizures, and I've learned to manage them, just as I've become skilled at hiding everything from everyone.

Lata stood up from her chair, approached me, and started caressing my chest. I gestured for her to sit down. She held my hands; strangely, I was not the one shedding tears. Those tears, perhaps, had left a crying woman to caress me instead.

Rita, Atiqa, and Girija felt remorseful for creating a sombre atmosphere by asking questions that women could hardly answer. I regained my composure, yet I couldn't shake the guilt of being so gullible in front of these women, who had supported me through every situation since I moved into this neighbourhood.

My mental struggle to answer their question was daunting: "If marriage is meant to advance one's generation, then I have achieved that. If it is about establishing closeness, respect, and love between two families, then I have erased my existence to allow this seed to grow into a mighty tree."

Rita muttered, "I was never considered a woman, let alone a wife, but I've always been projected as a superwoman." Her words resonated deeply with me, moistening my eyes as well as those of the women around me, perhaps all of us searching for answers to questions we had grappled with throughout our lives.

FROM PAGE 3...

Between Catastrophe and...

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after the "death of God" come into play. Even when historic buildings are crumbling apart, people still talk about judgement and tragedy. ancient structures are "a burden of legacy even as the old structures fall apart." Arendt's studies of dictatorship can be seen in the bureaucratic displays and mass panic, while McCarthy's dark surroundings are similar to decay.

Krasznahorkai's story is quite expressive, full of moments of amazement and important truths. The main character's realisation of connectedness is nearly spiritual as he says, "he would discover the enormous joys of mutuality ...

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threading the planets and the stars." These times of insight are fragile and depend on somebody else. They do show that people can concentrate, recognise things, and make moral choices. When you experience the warmth of a fire or see how important a window is, things become clear like "everything about him regained its original significance ... the window became a window you could look out again."

The book doesn't try to make complicated decisions easier. People often feel stuck and try to make sense of things when progress slows down. The main character sees their life as a series of escapes, going

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"from meaninglessness into music, from music to guilt, from guilt and self-punishment into pure ratiocination." Finally, the main character starts to accept a simpler view of life, one that is basic and real, when he realises that "it was enough to notice and observe that which he actually possessed."

Existential needs including moments of amazement, moral awareness, and being present, which demonstrate little acts of affirmation in the midst of deterioration. The Melancholy of Resistance by Krasznahorkai is a deep look at how we see things, what is right and wrong, and how people keep

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going. The book raises questions about how we comprehend things, from the heated criticism of excessive language to the bright epiphany of cosmic interconnection. People can fight against chaos and decay by paying attention, observing, and being aware of what is right and wrong. The Melancholy of Resistance is a deep look at what it means to be human. Does human meaning last, even if it's weak, in a world that is always falling apart? Krasznahorkai sounds like a real person who is attentive and insistent to confirm existence itself is as easy as perceiving, attending, or resisting.



Poetry Corner



Dreams of Tomorrow



Dr Mallika Tripathi

Loften dream about the future not as a place I must reach but as a quiet unfolding of light after the long patience of night. The dawn does not rush; it arrives with purpose, painting the sky in gold as if reminding me that renewal is the nature of all things. I move through life surrounded by people, not to possess their love but to awaken their smilesfor in their joy, I find my reason to be. The darkness of the past follows at a distance

powerless against the light I now carry. Each step forward is an act of defiance, a choice to live without fear. And when I sing, it is not merely a songbut a quiet offering to the vastness that listens, a melody that touches hearts, and in its echo, purifies the soul.

(Dr. Mallika Tripathi is Professor and **Head, Department of Applied Science & Humanities at Feroze Gandhi Institute of** Engineering & Technology, Raebareli. A celebrated poet and author of Whispers of the Soul, she is the Founder & President of Anjani Welfare Society. Recipient of the Best Language Teacher of the Year and the Emily Dickinson Award, Dr. Tripathi's works beautifully blend intellect, emotion, and spirituality.)

Poems are poems

Rafiya Sayeed

Poems are poems no poem is a lesser poem. No poem is bad no poem is gratuitous; yes, it can be raw like a foetus in womb, it can be crude like rough-hewn stones. No poem is silly no poem is a prank; yes, it can be hilarious like gestures of clown, it can be abstruse like first words of a toddler. Poems are frames of ink and silence. Poems are tapestries of the poet, weaved with his chest beats, with flashes of his thoughts. Poems are poems

no poem is a lesser poem.

(Rafiya Sayeed is a writer and educator.

She writes English poetry and also composes lullabies and children poems in regional languages. Her work has been featured on various online literary platforms and magazines, reflecting her deep love for poetry.)

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Pollution And Poison



Eva Petropoulou Lianou

Eva Petropoulou Lianou Water, Air. Pollution everywhere We breathe the plastic People are swimming among the garbage

We expect to have a clean atmosphere and

But people are bombing citizens and coun-

tries with Poison We are taking for environmental health

But we humans

We poluate We don't respect our selves

We don't respect nature We play God

We create earthquakes We create rain

We create typhoon

One day Earth

Will say enough

and human will be rejected

For his bad behaviour

(Eva Petropoulou Lianou is a Multi Awarded Author of Greece Children Literateur International poet and official nomination for Nobel Peace prize 2024)

Sunday Bonanza



Dr Purnima Singh

The world exhales in soft zephyr Temple bells and Azan ring soft in the air, tea curls steam into sunlight, a sparrow rehearses her hymn on the edge of my balcony. Time forgets to hurry. Red chilies glisten, oranges glow like lanterns, the air tastes of coriander and dust. Children chase kites over stalls and vendors and bargains are sung louder than prayers. Sunday smells of earth and laughter. Golden hours slip into a blue silence of Gangesshadows lean longer, dreams of Monday tap at the closed window. But for one last moment, the heart rests in stillness. Let the week's burdens be folded like laundry, neatly tucked away. Let silence mend the frayed threads. Let love walk barefoot, slow and unashamed. Let this Sunday be enough.

(Dr Purnima Singh is a Assistant Professor at Vasant Kanya College Varanasi)

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Garden of Dreams

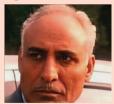


P.V.Laxmiprasad

In the world seized of dreams A gardener of dreams That germinate and melt chain of mountains She's the beauty of rainbow That mesmerize the sky of hearts Like a swimmer on lakes of full-moon body Like a player in the ground to standing ovation being cheered Down her cheeks the river of love betokens royal honour the sprouting twigs smile Upon Her majesty
Like chirping birds that greet every dawn Like million sun beams that radiate the garden of greens She hosts dazzling exhibition In the charming display of footsteps Like a tune smith to compose hits of Loving butterflies A captive of love In the empire of bewitching queen Like waves of whirlpools That Bay of Bengal kisses A bubbling soul awaits to invoke her garden.

Dr. P.V. Laxmiprasad is an eminent academician, erudite scholar, and senior editor. He has published 44 books in English and approximately 300 publications overall, including 120 poems and 40 book reviews. A strong contributor to literature, his expertise includes Indian Writing in English and **English Language Teaching. His research** papers are preserved by E-Harvard University Library, USA.

A Gossip With The Dead



Ali Shaida

We won't meet again, For, you left for an unknown bay, Beyond the reach of my sigh, Let's gossip the unspoken silence, Your grave is yet to be finished, Prayers to wait, Cries unsoftened, And the silence unanswered, So enough time we have to whisper, The pain and agony we shared till now, Were our mutual bonds,

Betrayed by the Angel of Death.

(Hailing from Nepora, Qazigund, Ali Shaida is a retired banker and an accomplished writer who weaves prose and poetry in Urdu, Kashmiri, and English with equal grace. The author of eleven books—six in Kashmiri, four in Urdu, and one in English—he has carved a distinct place in contemporary regional literature. He also led the Maraaz Adbee Sangam as its President from 2022 to 2025)

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FROM PAGE 2...

Between Wound...

tasavur (imagination), ajal (death), saughat (gifts) and sakraat (last agony) are drawn from classical Urdu lexicon, which give the poem a mystical aura.

Ghazal 2

Transliteration

woh ab bhi aaine se lar raha hai musal-sal apne andar sar raha hai vahan har shehar main hai raas-e-hismil woh phir bhi jhoota qissa garh raha hai meri tahreer par sad yureshain hain takhayyul shaakh se kyun jhar raha hai kitaab-e-zeest ke har ek waraq par koi keera ibarat parh raha hai ae zaahid, door rehna kaj-kulah se woh apne sar pe khud hi cha h raha hai

Translation

He is still fighting with the mirror, Constantly burning within himself.

وہ اب بھی آئینے سے لڑ رہا ہے مسلسل اپنے اندر سڑ رہا ہے

یہاں ہر شہر میں ہے رقص بسمل وہ پھر بھی جھوٹا قصہ گڑھ رہا ہے

میری تحریر پر صد یورشیں ہیں تخیل شاخ سے کیوں جھڑ رہا ہے

کتاب زیست کے ہر اک ورق پر كوئى كيڑا عبارت يڑھ رہا ہے

اے زاہد دور رہنا کج کلہ سے وہ اپنے سر پہ خود ہی چڑھ رہا ہے

In every city, there is a dance of the wounded, Yet he keeps fabricating false stories. My writings are attacked a hundred times, Why then is imagination falling off the branch? On every page of the book of life, Some worm is reading the text. O Zahid, stay away from the crooked one, He is climbing on his own head.

Critical Evaluation

This ghazal depicts inner conflict, societal hypocrisy, and the corruption of thought and creation. Here, the artist seems to comment on his own condition in a decaying world. "He is still fighting with the mirror" foregrounds both personal and universal emotions—it is an image of confrontation from within and from without, existential struggle. In Couplet 1, the poet uses the image of a "mirror" as a metaphor for truth, conscience, and self-awareness. He is burning/rotting from within— "apne andar sar raha hai"-maybe because of some guilt or frustration. There seems to be chaos and pain all around as the whole city is in "raqs-ebismil". The "who" in "woh phir bhi jhoota qissa garh raha hai" seems to be a scathing critique of the society where people die in agony, yet the storyteller goes on with his false narrative of having comfort everywhere. I find it a reflection of what Zahid, the poet, was experiencing in his real life—hypocritical media, corrupt politics, and artistic pretence—which is further elaborated in the third couplet. Zahid says that there are a hundred assaults (sad shureshain) on his writings that have brought autumn to his creativity. Zahid seems to be referring to censor-

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ship, criticism, or misunderstanding. The falling off imagination from the branch appears to me as a metaphor for hostility and decline in art, as is related again in the fourth couplet. His life's book ("kitab-e-zeest") is being eaten by worms who pretend to read. The worms seem to be a reference to those readers/critics who distort meaning, or who act as parasites on literature. This is a very personal experience that Zahid is sharing with his readers. Generally speaking, people don't recognise their own writers in their lifetime, though after their death. they shower profuse praise on them. John Keats, the famous Romantic Poet, didn't receive any attention in his lifetime, so much so that he got his epitaph written just before he died in Rome (in 1821), which goes like this: HERE LIES ONE WHOSE NAME WAS WRIT IN WATER. However, after his death, he got the recognition that he had deserved in his lifetime.

Literature

In the same way, Zahid seems to have experienced this about his writing, or art, in general. In sulagte chinar (Blazing Chinars), Zahid tells us about his literary journey, and about a time when people didn't even read him, though they did recognise him as a broadcaster. In this ghazal, he is like Robert Browning's Pictor Ignotus (see the poem with the same title) who got frustrated because his art wasn't appreciated the way it should have been.

In the last couplet, Zahid warns himself to stay away from the corrupt or arrogant ones—people wearing a "kaj kullah" (a cap worn at an angle) as a symbol of power, arrogance, and false leadership. People in power live in ego, pride, and self-idolatry-"woh apne sar pe khud hi charh raha hai". This is a final punch on a society where morality, reason, and truth have fallen apart. Symbols like 'mirror', 'dance of the wounded', 'dagger', 'worm', 'branch', and 'angled cap' have been used very skilfully to heighten the effect of societal degradation.

Transliteration

hijaab daastaan mein hum ne kuch kirdaar rakhe hain

labon ki muskurahat main kai aazaar rakhe hain main aksar raaste main dhoondhta hoon harf-e-pareena

bacha kar dil mein hum ne ab bhi kuch aazaar rakhe hain

chale aao ke dhadkan saans se sakraat maangti hai wasiyat mein tumhare naam kuch ash'aar rakhe hain bahut itraata hai zahid bina ye jaan ke ab bhi zamane ne qafas main bhi kai mukhtaar rakhe hain

Translation

In the veiled tale, I have kept a few characters, Within the smile of my lips, I've hidden many sorrows.

I often search along the road for forgotten words, For in my heart, I've still preserved a few old wounds.

Come back — for my heartbeat pleads with breath for life,

In my will, I've left behind a few poems in your name.

He struts around proudly, calling himself the pious one,

Unaware — the world has in cages even many free souls.

Critical Evaluation

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Like the earlier two ghazals, this one also speaks about pain, wounds, and suppressed truths.

The hijab suggests that behind appearances lie false narratives/stories. He has himself hidden many sorrows behind his smiles. He is a smiling sufferer whose muskurahat (smile) conceals many aazaar (pain, affliction) from his daastaan (life itself). The poet feels no talgic about the past (harf-e-pareen). He wanders in search of 'kuch aazaar' that seem to have حجاب داستاں میں ہم نے کچھ کرداررکھے ہیں لبوں کی مسکراہٹ میں کئی آزار رکھے ہیں

میں اکثر راستے میں ڈھونڈھتا ہوں حرف یارینه بچا کردل میں ہم نے اب بھی کچھ آزار رکھے ہیں

چلے آؤ کہ دھڑکن سانس سے سکرات مانگے ہے وصیت میں تمہارے نام کچھ اشعار رکھے ہیں

بہت اتراتا سے زاہد بنا یہ جان کے اب بھی زمانے نے قفس میں بھی کئی مختار رکھے ہیں

been lost. It appears to be an image of intellectual and emotional longing. The pain seems to be unending.

The third couple is very touching. Life is at its edge. His heartbeat begs for breath for survival, even just before death—what is called sakraat-ulmaut. He is still remembering his beloved and begs her to come back. As a testament to his love, he has left a will of verses in her name, thus making her immortal through WORD, as did Shakespeare "Fair Youth" in 'Sonnet 60':

And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand, Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

The closing couplet of the ghazal has a profound meaning. The poet seems to be shaking off inertia or submissiveness, fighting for freedom that exists even within confinement. The world has in cages even many free souls is a statement of inner liberty, spiritual defiance, and the futility of moral posturing. He appears like the 'mard-e-momin' (of Allama Iqbal) whose one gaze changes the fate, provided he has the enthusiasm to fight back.

Zahid has beautifully blended Urdu and Persian vocabulary, giving the poem grace and depth -hijaab, daastaan, harf-e-pareena, sakraat, wasiyat, and mukhaar manifest Zahid's hold over Persian-Urdu classical diction and his ability to use it in modern Urdu poetry.

Conclusion

Zahid's poetry manifests his artistic skills in weaving pain, wounds, separation, mortality, falsehood, and self-deception through WORD. He shines as a master craftsman, using classical Persian-Urdu expressions that suit his thematic concerns. All three poems given above share a deep emotional core, bound by a tone of introspection, loss, and subtle defiance. Although the ghazals are very personal, they touch upon universal themes, compelling the readers to appreciate and recognise the poetic capabilities of Zahid Mukhtar.

Their tone is restrained, elegant, yet emotionally charged — turning pain into a poetic testament. These and other ghazals of Zahid trace a spiritual journey: from the cry of longing, through the crisis of truth and identity, to a quiet reconciliation through memory and poetry. They reveal a poet deeply aware of time's decay and the self's frailty, yet unwilling to surrender meaning — transforming despair into reflection, and sorrow into enduring art as John Keats does in 'Grecian Urn':

When old age shall this generation waste.

Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe

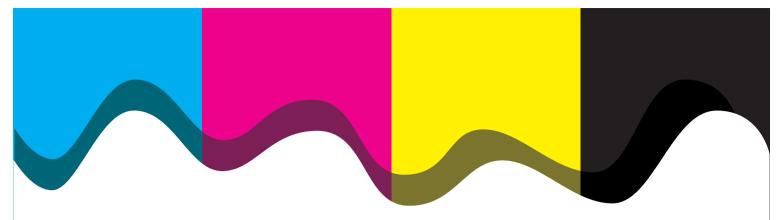
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, -that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

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