

Habba
Khatoon:
Deconstructing
History



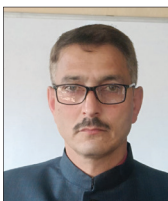
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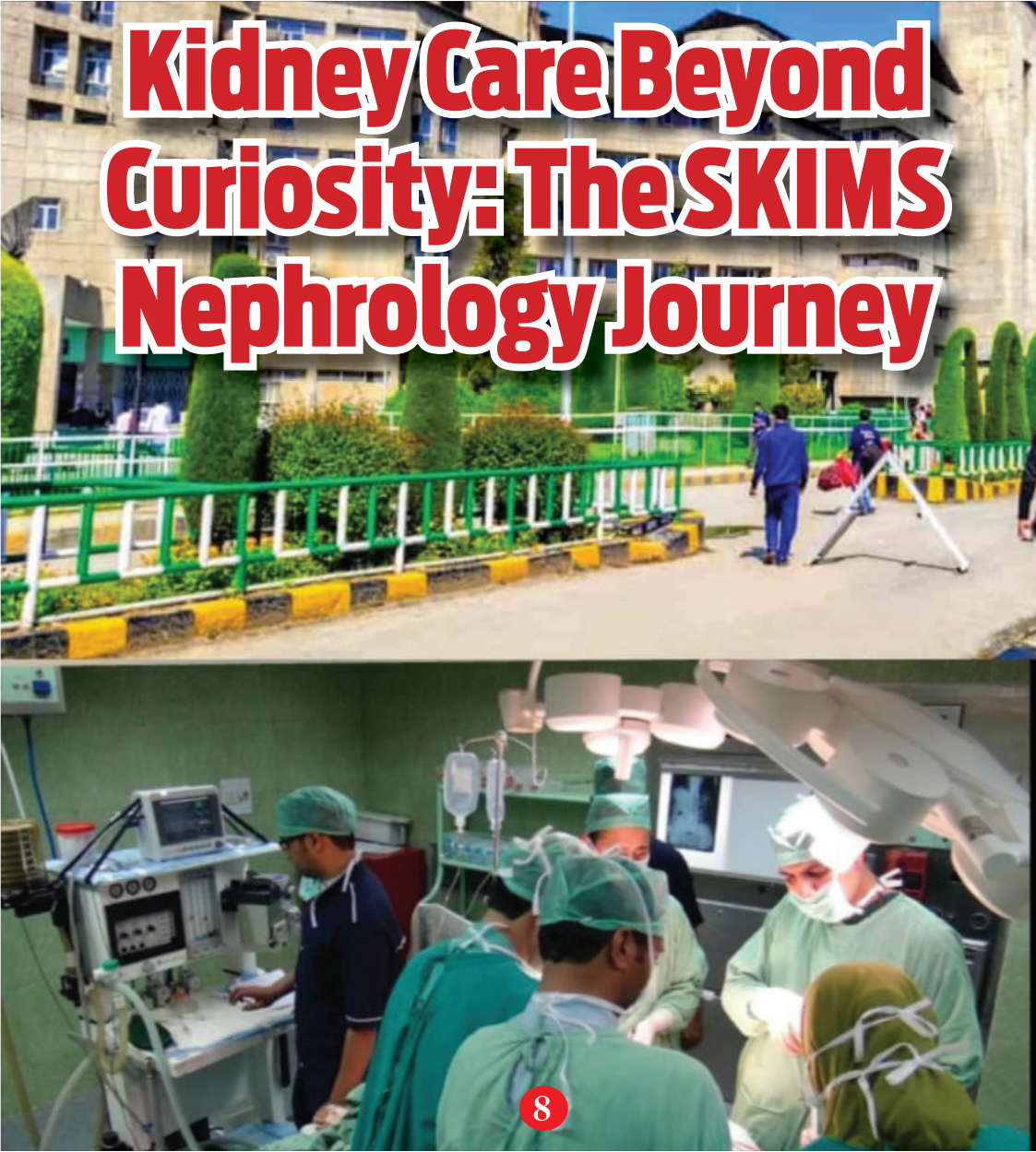
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Srinagar • Saturday, November 15, 2025 • Issue No: 13 • Volume: 1 • Pages: 12



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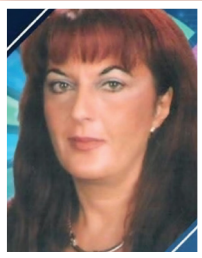
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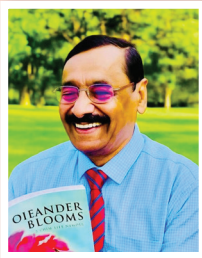
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Habba Khatoon: Deconstructing History



Professor Muhammad Aslam
[In continuation of the previous]

We have seen that the old chronicles fail to give any clue that A Habba Khatoon or A Zoon was there in Yousuf Shah Chak's palace. Shayiq tells us that there was some Habeeba in Yousuf's court, who was a pious lady: chu budah ast khatun HHabibah ba-nam/yaki 'arifah bud saHHib-i maqam ("There was a lady named Habiba; she was a mystic, a woman of spiritual rank"). Kachroo tells us that Yousuf Shah's men spotted Zoon, and she was honoured to share his bed. Baharitan-e-Shahi (no author; no publication date) doesn't talk about any woman in the palace except that Akbar had gifted Yousuf Shah two mistresses. Obviously, Akbar wouldn't know Zoon or Habba Khatoon; she couldn't be the one among the two mistresses. Despite devoting two chapters to the rise and fall of Yousuf Shah Chak and minutely detailing intrigues/wars against him, the author chose to remain silent about the king's personal life.

Hassan Khoiyami talks about Yousuf Shah Chak's amorous life: "Because of his excessive youthful thoughts and indulgence in sensual matters, he could not pay attention to the affairs of governance. Day and night, he lived a life of pleasure and luxury, absorbed in worldly desires, gatherings of joy and merriment, music and song, and the company of singers and dancing women. He had a natural poetic temperament; therefore, he could compose verses in Persian, Hindi, and Kashmiri extemporaneously" (Tareekh-e-Hassan, vol. 2, 2013, Srinagar: Ali Mohammad & Sons. Trans. Professor (Dr) Sharief Hussain Qasmi, p. 266). Khoiyami also briefly talks about Habba Khatoon and says that Yousuf Khan (Yousuf Shah Chak) met Habba by chance, and listening to her notes in the maqam-e-Iraq, he was captivated. After paying handsomely to her parents, he honoured her by sharing his bed. He says that "Habba Khatoon was unmatched in beauty, charm, melodious voice, and graceful manners. The notes of her songs in the 'maqam-e-Iraq' could leave listeners spellbound and unconscious" (ibid.). In her company, he would wander in meadows and scenic resorts, especially Gulmarg, Sona Marg, Ahrabal, and Achabal (ibid.).

Amin Kamil (1995) tells us that Mohammad Din Fauq had benefited from Mahjoor's views on Habba Khatoon. So had Professor Mujeeb read Mahjoor's biography of Habba Khatoon while writing a play in Urdu,



Habba Khatoon. Kamil's Habba Khatoon (1959 and 1995) is a comprehensive analysis of the old chronicles and their failure in solving the riddle surrounding Habba Khatoon. Providing a brief assessment of the various sources of Habba Khatoon, Kamil (1995: 52-58) concludes by saying that "many aspects can come to light through discussions if, along with considering what others have said, one also applies one's own analytical thinking". Nobody has heeded his suggestion.

Walkhu's (1994) Habba Khatoon appears to me more like Arabian Nights than a factual history. Wakhlu's assertion about Zoon being named Habba Khatoon not in the court of Yousuf Shah Chak but by a saint, much before she became the queen, is in contradiction to the tradition. Wakhlu has given a detailed account of how Habba Khatoon would advise Yousuf Shah Chak in administrative matters and actively participate in the affairs of the court: "Day by day Yusuf loved an easy and care-free life and allowed her to give orders. He found her wise and sought her advice. The love and concord of Yusuf and Habba were as close as nut-kernels in one shell" (p. 185). Following Khoyhami (p. 267), he has related an incident which, to me, is no less than a fairy tale. Khoyhami hasn't given any characters to the story, but Wakhlu has mentioned

four main characters, excluding the maids and servants in the palace. The story (pp. 200-203) is that of Gaffara, his wife, Zubeda, Habba Khatoon, and Yousuf Shah Chak. The story begins with Gaffara's wife preparing her bed, and her husband, feeling sick and mentally perturbed. He had seen a magnificent beauty at a window. He was sleepless and ran in fever. His wife, Zubeda, Habba Khatoon's personal maid, who lay by his side, enquired of him the reason for his suffering. Gaffara told her that he was mentally restless. He wouldn't give any reasons for his "mental restlessness", though his wife tried her best. When his condition deteriorated, a hakim was called. On seeing the patient, he laughed and told his wife that Gaffara was in love. Zubeda was stunned. She loved her husband and insisted that he should divulge the name of the dame who he had fallen in love with. After much persuasion, Gaffara told her that it was Habba Khatoon. One day, Habba Khatoon found her maid ill and haggard. She asked her about her ailment. After great insistence, Zubeda informed her about the reason. Habba told her not to worry and thought about a plan which she shared with her husband, Yousuf Shah Chak. Habba wrote the 'drama' and directed it herself. A room in the palace was well decorated and lit with fantastic lighting, giving it an aura of a

magical room—I was reminded of a language-teaching method developed by Georgi Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychologist and educator, called Suggestopedia. The servants and maids were strictly ordered not to disclose anything about the room to anybody. Gaffara was given the assurance that Habba had been contacted and informed about his love for her—Khoyhami (267) says that Habba Khatoon herself talked to the man. He was happy, took a bath and was led to the magical room where everything seemed like Alice's Wonderland. In the magical room, Gaffara spent three nights enjoying the bed with Habba Khatoon (that is what he was made to believe). Gaffara was completely cured. After three days, Zubeda told him that it was she and not Habba who he had spent the three nights with. Gaffara was astonished and felt ashamed that he had made a wish that could never be fulfilled. He apologized to Habba Khatoon. At the conclusion of the drama, Yousuf Shah was told about it, and he felt very happy and proud that his wife had managed the show very skillfully. This is how Wakhlu seems to have fantasized the whole life of Zoon aka Habba Khatoon

GMD Sufi (Kashmir: Being a History of Kashmir From the Earliest Times to Our Own. 2018. 3rd Ed. Sri-

CONT. ON PAGE 11

The Last Cigarette

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When I saw him pouring the ashes from the tip of his cigarette into a small steel bowl — fair enough to call an ashtray — my mind didn't just see a mere act.

I could see his index finger patting the cigarette's neck, just a few centimetres away from the red end, and how softly the butt was held between the thumb and middle finger.

I stared into his good eye — the one that didn't stare back.

From this distance, i could sniff and see that it wasn't him who was sitting and smoking, but rather a corpse — still beating, still inhaling smoke in exchange for memories that had devastated his consciousness.

Everyone around him was staring too. some had already built their first impressions — cruel, judgmental — they must have assassinated his character and labelled him immoral.

I was sure this was happening. i
could see it in their eyes.

A mother was making sure her son wouldn't catch the odour of smoke, whispering warnings in his ear — perhaps guiding him on what not to do, or simply, what a bad man looks like.

Some men, seated on chairs, wore navy-blue suits and dark-brown shoes pointed enough to dig the earth — yet not grounded. Their wrists held rolexes that ticked silently, but still could be heard. Their eyes revealed something: pity mixed with satisfaction. Somewhere, they were happy they weren't him.

College girls held their scarves close to their nostrils, as if there were rotten meat near their feet.

I must say — a silent man is nothing but rotten: his dreams gulped by insomnia, his desires trapped in the thorns of livelihood, his strength betrayed. The odour was not him — it was the fragrance of sweat evaporating in unconscious puffs.

There were schoolboys too, different ages, mostly teenagers, staring at the cigarette butt clenched between his fingers — just to catch the name of the brand. Perhaps these kids were already victims of modern classism, and would calculate how much respect they could rent from their decency.

He took puffs with his eyes closed, lips pressed — his breath sounded like grief finding its way through the nostrils. I wasn't sure if he heard the whispers, but if he had, he might've pressed the cigarette against anything — perhaps even his own skin — just to silence them.

He was bizarre, hardly caring for his own existence. He barely knew where he was sitting — or perhaps he wasn't sitting anywhere. I must say — he was the ghost he was only thinking about.

He choked several times, dry coughs, but his eyes were not dry — they were dark red, as if a war was



**Any depiction of smoking
in this image is purely for
representational purposes.
LitStream and the author
do not promote or endorse
the use of tobacco.**

being fought inside them,

with bodies lying everywhere, drenched in blood, without hope of anyone coming to take them away.

On his face were marks — scars — imprints of slaps, the slaps of life. Yet there he was, holding his breath, breaths that did more damage than the smoke itself.

What could have been the tragedy with him? Or was he the tragedy himself? I could do nothing except stare.

I wanted to look away — to see anything but him — but the odour kept hitting my reflexes. This time, I looked away from his hands and towards his feet.

He wore black boots with wired laces, tied in a hurry — or simply with carelessness. A few steps would unlace them, and he might fall. I guess he already did — his knees were covered in sand-dust arcs. I was sure he was bleeding beneath the pants. Yet he was committing the same mistake again — he must fall again.

His ignorance to everything was attractive. I'm sure he was bleeding beneath the skin, but all he did was take another puff — no other gesture, no other cry. This was the only cry.

There was mud around his boots, as if he had travelled across wet graves and slipped there several times. But I couldn't bet on it — even in a grave full of dead bodies, he would have been the most dead. Maybe he came after burying himself.

On his right side was an umbrella. On his left, a sunflower wrapped in black paper. And outside — it wasn't raining. Was he mad? or was he seeing something we couldn't — a hope?

His cigarette was nearly finished. He crushed it in the ashtray softly, as if he wanted to be kind to the memories that were now ashes.

I could see a sense of relief on every face around, but his wrinkles stayed the same. He reached for his chest pocket, took out the cigarette

box. When he opened it — there was just one last cigarette left.

He smiled - perhaps because it was the last of his grief.

A bad man was about to die — a man judged for his wounds, his courage, his grief.

He didn't pull it out. He saved this rebirth for another moment, for different people — perhaps for himself.

The last cigarette would kill an identity he was not.

After it, he would be someone else — unjudged, unknown.

He got up and left few biscuits on the floor. He was staring at me too.

I don't know where we were, or who he was, or who all these people were. But i knew the moment — not the man.

I'm glad I was a dog.

(Disclaimer: The act of smoking in this short story serves as a literary metaphor for compulsion and helplessness. It does not promote or romanticise smoking.)

The Cup of Tea



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It was a quiet afternoon when Mr. Rahman, a wealthy businessman, was driving through a small town with his driver, Asif. As they passed a roadside tea stall, Mr. Rahman suddenly said, "Stop the car, Asif. Let's have some tea. I've heard the old man here makes good chai."

Asif parked beside the dusty road. An old man, Chacha Karim, stood near a steaming kettle, his wrinkled hands moving with the ease of long habit. Within moments, two small glasses of hot tea were served.

Mr. Rahman took a sip and smiled.

“Hmm... simple, but full of heart,” he murmured.

Chacha Karim's face tightened.
"Beta, if your wife's tea is so good, why did you stop here then?" he snapped.

Sensing the tension, Mr. Rahman quickly handed Asif a note.

"Pay him quickly before he eats you alive," he joked, lightening the moment.

Asif chuckled awkwardly, paid the old man, and they got back into the car. As they drove away, Mr. Rahman looked in the mirror and saw Chacha Karim still watching them. He smiled warmly and mouthed, "Nice tea."

The old man's frown softened into a proud smile.

After a short silence, Asif asked, "Sir, where to now? The office?"

Mr. Rahman shook his head. "No, let's go to your house."

Asif blinked in surprise. "My house? But, sir—"

"Yes," Mr. Rahman interrupted with a grin. "You said your wife makes better tea. I'd like to try it myself."

Asif hesitated. "At least let me call her to tell—"

"No calls," said Mr. Rahman.
"Let's surprise her."

A few minutes later, Asif stopped by a flower vendor.

"Just a moment, sir," he said, stepping out. He bought a small jas-

mine garland for twenty rupees.

Mr. Rahman raised an eyebrow.
“A garland?”

Asif chuckled. "Every day I bring one for my wife. If I forget, she'll scold me to death!"

Mr. Rahman smiled quietly, touched by the small ritual of love.

When they reached Asif's modest home, his wife Saira opened the door. She was neatly dressed, her eyes lighting up when she saw her husband. The room was humble but filled with warmth.

A little girl played in the corner—a cheerful child of about six.

Asif bent down and asked affectionately, "How's my princess today?"

She giggled and proudly showed him the chocolate he had bought her the day before.

Mr. Rahman smiled. "She's adorable. Your daughter. I assume?"

Asif shook his head gently. "No, sir. She's not my daughter. Her father died when she was just one. Her mother was thrown out of her in-laws' home. They blamed her for his death. I couldn't bear to see them suffer... so I took them in. I've raised the girl as my own ever since."

Mr. Rahman was speechless. He looked at Asif, a humble man with a heart far greater than his means.

Just then, Saira brought in two steaming cups of tea. The aroma filled the room, rich and comforting. Mr. Rahman took a sip and smiled.

"Asif, you were right," he said softly. "This really is better than Chacha Karim's tea."

The couple exchanged shy smiles, their affection shining in every glance.

Moments later, Mr. Rahman's phone rang—it was his wife.

"Rahman! You remembered today?" she said, half surprised, half amused.

"Of course," he replied gently. "It's our son's birthday."

Her tone softened. "You rarely have time for us... but thank you. It means a lot."

After ending the call, Mr. Rahman stood up.

"Asif," he said warmly, "I must go now. But before I do—get this little one admitted to a good school. The company will cover all her expenses."

Asif's eyes filled with tears.
"Sir... I don't know what to say."

Mr. Rahman placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't say anything. Sometimes, a cup of tea can teach you more about life than all the meetings in the world."

Reviving the Legacy of Education in Jammu and Kashmir: Progress, Challenges, and the Way Forward



“learning gives creativity, creativity leads to thinking, thinking provides knowledge, knowledge makes you great”

- APJ Abdul Kalam

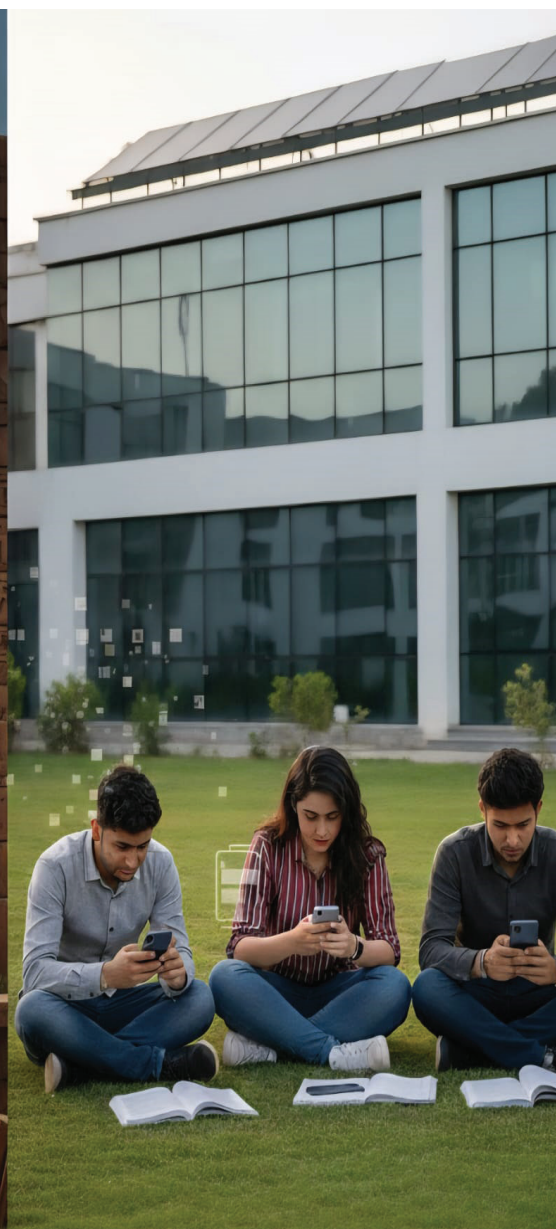
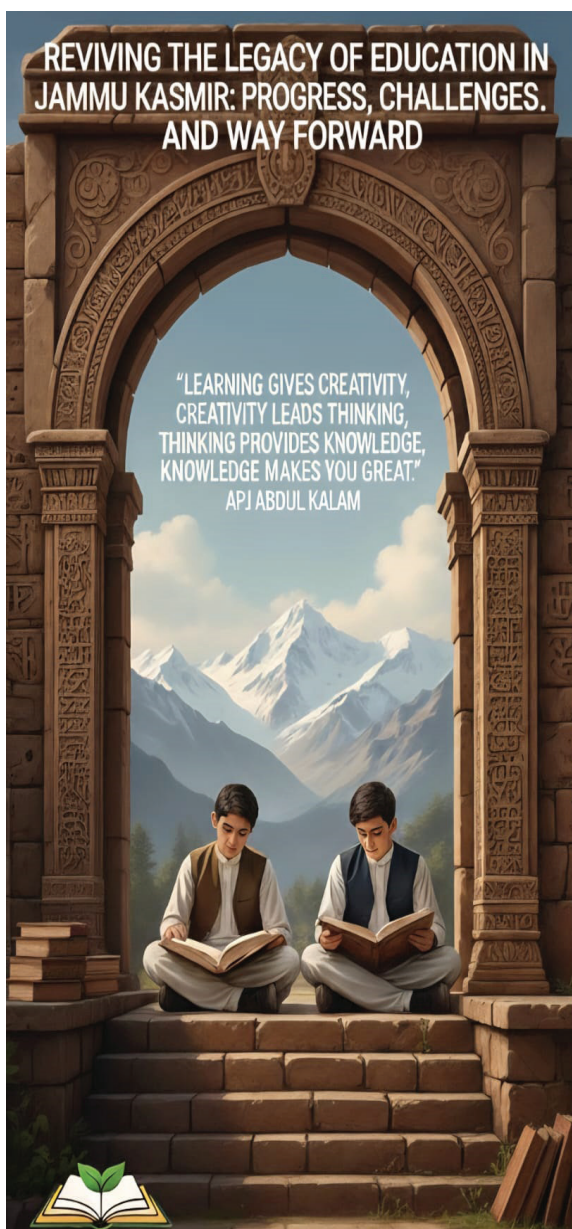
Jammu and Kashmir is not only celebrated worldwide for its scenic beauty and cultural richness but has also been a historic hub of knowledge, wisdom, and literature for centuries. This fertile land has produced many distinguished scholars and intellectuals. While Jammu is known as the “City of Temples,” Ladakh (now a separate Union Territory) is famed as the “Land of Lamas,” and Kashmir is revered as the “Valley of Saints and Sufis,” often described as “Paradise on Earth.”

Historically, before modern institutions like Oxford, Harvard and Al-Azhar came into existence, the region was home to Sharda Peeth—a world-renowned ancient university and Buddhist centre of learning. Located today in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Sharda Peeth played a vital role in shaping early intellectual traditions.

Jammu and Kashmir has made significant contributions to global literature, generating nearly 70% of Sanskrit and 30% of Persian literature in India. It has also stood as a major centre for Urdu literature, alongside Delhi, Lucknow, Dakhin, and Lahore.

Despite facing severe conflict and unrest since 1990, the focus on education in the region has remained strong. Both government and private sectors have worked hard to improve the education system. Students from the region continue to excel in national-level exams and higher studies, showing resilience and dedication.

After the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, and even through the COVID-19 pandemic, education reforms accelerated. Online learning became necessary during lockdowns, and educational institutions gradually reopened in digital mode. In the post-pandemic era, several positive steps have been taken:



New schools, colleges, and universities have been established or upgraded.

Teaching posts have been created and filled, with remaining gaps covered by contractual appointments.

Infrastructure has been improved.

Students now receive better academic support and facilities.

The New Education Policy 2020 was first introduced and implemented in Jammu and Kashmir.

Teachers are trained regularly and provided with modern teaching tools.

Academic and technical syllabi are being revised to meet present-day needs.

However, a worrying trend has emerged among students after the

pandemic. Many have grown too reliant on digital resources and have neglected the traditional classroom environment. The following issues have been observed:

1. Students often remain absent despite teachers being available.
2. Discipline has declined.
3. There's an overdependence on shortcuts and brief notes.
4. Many rely solely on mobile screen materials.
5. Textbooks are being ignored.
6. Parents interfere unnecessarily in academic matters.
7. Examination malpractice is on the rise.
8. Students are engaging in part-time or full-time businesses.
9. Unhealthy social relationships are growing within campuses.

10. Disrespect towards teachers and elders is increasing.

11. A large number of students prefer enrolling in IGNOU and other distance education universities. Consequently, many seats in conventional higher education institutions remain unfilled, which affects the optimal use of resources and contributes to a decline in the standard of education.

These behaviours are contributing to a decline in real learning, lack of maturity, and poor job readiness. Despite massive efforts from the government, institutions, and educators, the responsibility also lies with students, parents, and society to make the most of these opportunities and preserve the legacy of learning that this land is so deeply rooted in.

From Smoking to Pills: The Silent Epidemic of Drug Addiction Among Youth



Dr Sameer Ul Haq

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In the scenic valleys of Kashmir, known for its centuries-old culture and hospitality, snow-covered peaks and lush green meadows, a quieter, darker story is unfolding in this “Pir Vaer” or “The Land of Saints”. The journey from smoking a casual cigarette, to cannabis (Charas), to a full-blown prescription-pill such as Tapentadol an opioids is becoming more common among young adults with majority of whom are in school or attending college. According to a recent report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment, over 13.5 lakh individuals in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) used drugs, with around 1.68 lakh being minors aged 10-17 years. A recent study from IMHANS and GMC Srinagar, revealed 1232 new patients, 104 of them reported using Tapentadol, a painkiller with the majority of them being young adults under the age of 30. Experts warn that easily availability of prescription-pills adds to the challenge. Today, the transition from smoking to experimental use of a prescription-pill is becoming faster and more insidious. The “progression” includes gluing inhalants, mixing cough syrups with sedatives, and swapping easily accessible tablets for heroin. The switch from smoking (nicotine or cannabis) to pills (sedatives or opioids) emerges when the desire is not just to “feel good” but to escape a deeper malaise of hopelessness, anxiety, or chronic stress. For many young people in Kashmir, vulnerability to addiction is shaped by years of conflict and trauma, unemployment, and the creeping idea that “everyone is doing it, so let me try also”. It is also linked to region-specific dynamics. Kashmir’s proximity to Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran), which is known for its opium cultivation, provides traffickers with easier pathways for illegal drugs. Decades of insurgency have left many people depressed and bearing trauma.

The Changing face; From cigarettes to pills

Historically, drug addiction in the region was thought to be limited to cannabis use, particularly among unemployed youth. Today, the shift has become more complicated and challenging. Teenagers, primarily from schools and colleges are experimenting with tablets, pills, and alcohol. The phenomenon of "poly-



drug use” is becoming increasingly common among youngsters, who mix cannabis with sleeping pills, or switch between drugs to avoid withdrawal symptoms. The notion that addiction is only for under-privileged is a myth. Students, drivers, and even employed youth are among the users. As a result, the transition from causal smoking to use a pill is less about class and more about access, and underlying vulnerabilities.

The Human Cost, Families and Future

Families are often the first victims of this "Silent Epidemic" after the user. The human cost is replaceable, as are familial and future costs. At the user level, it has the significant impact on the physical, mental and emotional health. On the other side, families of users experience immense emotional distress, remorse, helplessness, relationship disintegration, and social stigmatisation. Financially, families may first face the cost for drugs because most users pressurize their families for money, followed by the burden of treatment costs, a literal double burden. The future costs far outweigh the current effects on the individual. It has irrevocable consequences on individual's future, stopping them from realizing their full potential and making meaningful contributions to the society and nation. Disrupted education, loss of career opportunities and chronic physical and mental problems limit their ability to compete with the rest of the society, increasing the likelihood of social neglect. It only not robs the individual of a promising future, but also deprives a society

form a valuable asset.

What is still missing and what needs to be done

The government of J&K has implemented many measures to tackle drug addiction, including the state-level "Nasha Mukht Abhiyan". Efforts have also included establishing de-addiction centres throughout the state. However, there are substantial gaps and challenges in early identification and prevention. Early detection in schools and colleges is limited, due to shortage of trained staff who can recognize early signs of substance abuse. Community involvement is limited and requires active engagement. Access to rehabilitation might be hindered by financial constraints, and social stigma. Prevention efforts are insufficient, particularly in educating youth about how experimenting things can lead to dependence. Finally inadequate drug regulation, easy access, smuggling, and pharmaceutical diversion require stronger enforcement. A multi-dimensional approach to curb the menace of drug addiction requires coordinated action across healthcare, education, community, policy, and law-enforcement sectors. Strengthening healthcare system by equipping with screening tools for early detection and integrating addiction treatment with mental health services. Introducing drug education and life skills courses into schools and colleges, as well as organizing awareness workshops and peer-led events can help youth engage proactively. Involving local community leaders, and parent groups to create a supportive environment and raise awareness about changing trends

of substance abuse. Using support models such as youth survivors of drug use as mentors can be powerful and motivating. Enforcement of strict regulations and monitoring of hotspots for substance abuse, as well as promotion of state-level campaigns. Multistakeholder collaboration can provide a comprehensive approach to prevent, manage, and reduce the burden of drug addiction.

A light of Hope

Despite the concerning situation, all is not lost. There are many success stories of recovered young people, healed families, and lightened futures. Early identification is important, and one must recognize it before it's too late. The onus is on parents and caregivers to stay vigilant, maintain open and appropriate communication, and create an environment of trust, support, and friendship rather than fear or punishment. Equally important is the role of educators and teachers, who can provide a supportive and friendly environment and guidance. With significant challenges, these combined efforts offer a ray of hope for a brighter future for the youth. From the cigarette smoked at a wedding to the drug taken in despair, the path to addiction is shorter, faster, and lonelier than many realize. With parents and teachers to play a key role, awareness, early action and sustained support, the cycle of addiction can be broken, and the promise of a productive future can be reclaimed.

"To all readers, parents, teachers, and others: from the smallest act of care, listening, guiding, and supporting - a brighter future for our youth can emerge."

THROW OVERLOAD OF YOUR MIND



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Kidney Care Beyond Curiosity: The SKIMS Nephrology Journey



Akram Siddiqui..

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) has emerged as one of the most pressing health challenges in Kashmir, silently gripping thousands across both rural and urban communities.

Recent studies reveal alarming trends, in a regional screening of 2,222 individuals (mean age 44.5 years), 2.2 % were found to have CKD, while nearly 8 % had a glomerular filtration rate below 60 ml/min, signalling compromised kidney function. Nationally too, the age-standardised prevalence of CKD in India has risen by 5.6 % between 1990 and 2017, with Kashmir showing an even sharper local surge.

Rising hypertension, diabetes, recurrent infections, and unsafe analgesic use remain key drivers. At the heart of the region's response stands the Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Soura, which provides advanced dialysis, transplant services, and extensive screening and awareness programs, becoming a lifeline for thousands and a beacon of hope in countering this mounting nephrological crisis in the Himalayan region.

In a region where distance can mean death and snowstorms can delay ambulances by days, the emergence of a full-fledged nephrology department at SKIMS is not just a medical development, it is a moral imperative.

Before its rise, patients with kidney failure or severe renal disorders faced a cruel choice: travel hundreds of miles to Delhi or Chandigarh, or slowly fade at home. Dialysis was scarce, nephrologists fewer still, and transplant options, almost nonexistent.

Then SKIMS, with its academic foresight, kindled the flame of change. A team of dedicated physicians, nurses, and technicians began building the department brick by brick, establishing regular dialysis schedules, creating specialized renal units, and introducing advanced diagnostic facilities. Slowly but decisively, the department became the only tertiary referral centre for kidney diseases in Jammu & Kashmir, commanding respect across northern India by performing almost 335 transplants from 2015 to 2024. While as the landmark swap kidney transplant add many more feathers to the glaring cap of SKIMS.

First Swap Transplant: SKIMS performed its first swap kidney transplant in December 2023.

Second Swap Transplant: A



second swap kidney transplant was successfully performed in August 2024.

This procedure involved two incompatible pairs of donors and recipients who exchanged kidneys.

It was a dream come true as the first of its kind dialysis center (peritoneal dialysis) in SKIMS was established in late eighties. Now the rhythmic hum of dialysis machines is almost symphonic, a music of life returning drop by drop. The department's acute and maintenance dialysis units now function round the clock, providing thousands of sessions each month.

Patients with acute renal failure caused by infections, postpartum

complications, or metabolic disorders are managed with immediacy that rivals any metropolitan centre.

Behind this efficiency lies an unsung network, sterile water treatment plants, trained technicians, dedicated nursing cadres, and vigilant infection control. The department's dialysis facilities adhere to the same protocols used at premier national institutions, ensuring both safety and sustainability.

For the common Kashmiri patient, a farmer, a labourer, a teacher from Kupwara or Pahalgam, this access has meant something profound.

No doubt dialysis sustains life but transplantation the final option in hand, transforms a limping life to

normal levels.

A decade ago, renal transplantation in the valley was spoken of with reverence and fear, a near-mythical medical event only few could access. But the last ten years at SKIMS have rewritten that narrative into a story of triumph.

Between 2014 and 2024, SKIMS has carried out hundreds of kidney transplants each one a testament to surgical brilliance, patient faith, and institutional will.

In December 2023, SKIMS performed its first swap (paired-donor) kidney transplant, a landmark achievement that required sophisticated immunological matching, ethical clearance, and multidisciplinary orchestration.

The feat placed SKIMS among the select few Indian institutions capable of conducting such complex procedures, a milestone that glittered not just on hospital records but in the hearts of all who had laboured for it.

The transplant program today boasts state-of-the-art theatres, immunology laboratories, post-transplant ICUs, and a regimented follow-up system. Donors and recipients are evaluated through advanced cross-matching techniques, and post-operative care is handled with precision that reflects global best practices.

Numbers alone tell only part of the story. Each transplant is a parable of courage.

A mother donating to her son from Baramulla; a brother giving life to a sister from Pulwama; a husband repaying love through sacrifice, these are the everyday epics that unfold quietly at SKIMS.

"The most sacred moment," says a transplant surgeon, "is not when the new kidney begins to function, but when hope itself begins to flow again."

The Nephrology Department at SKIMS is more than a centre of treatment; it is a living laboratory of learning. Research here reflects both local reality and global relevance.

From studies on infection patterns in transplant recipients to analyses of chronic kidney disease linked to lifestyle and altitude, SKIMS's nephrology research is carving a distinctive niche.

The institute's Journal of Medical Sciences (JMS SKIMS) regularly features work from the department, highlighting findings that resonate beyond Kashmir, such as the prevalence of glomerulonephritis, biochemical predictors of graft survival, and the unique challenges of dialysis in high-altitude climates.

By engaging in these studies, SKIMS offers the medical community data from a population often absent in mainstream literature, those living between mountains, where healthcare delivery dances

CONT. ON PAGE 09

for the world that cradles him?
Remember my words —
one day, I shall rise,
not with tears,
but with resistance.
And then you will recall
me.”
Saleem turned once,
glanced at the dying water,
and scoffed:
“A wetland full of trash
giving me lectures.
Soon, there’ll be a house
here —
not this stink of death.”
He left in haste,
his footsteps fading,
while the Wetland whis-
pered beneath the sunset:
“Soon... you will know.”
(Abid Ali Mir is the author
of *A War Already Lost* and
several micro fictions.
He is a columnist, occasion-
al poet, hosts podcasts, and
environmental advocate
focusing on social issues and
Islamic finance.
Padma Shree Nominated,
2023.)

And as the evening light fades over Soura's skyline, SKIMS Nephrology department remains abuzz with activities of attendants of patients along with workholc doctors preparing for the dawn of next day so that one more agonised soul afflicted with kidney disease is relieved off and given a new lease of life

DUST AND DOVE



Dibang Mary

I am a human
formed from the dust,
breathed into by mercy.
I walk the earth with trembling
feet,
still learning how to be clay and
spirit at once.
And you
you are dove,
descended from heavens torn
open,
a whisper of peace
after the flood of fear.
You carry the olive branch in
your mouth
a promise that the waters will not
always rise.
Between us, the wind moves
holy, unseen,
sometimes storm,
sometimes still.
It is the same wind that hovered
over the waters
when the world was newborn,
the same breath that turned dust
into man.
You rest upon me,
like on the shoulder of the Son
not as burden,
but as blessing.
And in that moment,
heaven and earth remember each
other.
I am human
heart heavy with history,
hands full of questions.
You are dove
pure, patient,
messenger of God's gentleness.
You teach me that peace is not
escape;
it is presence.
It is a voice in the wilderness
saying, be still.
It is the ark after the storm,
the grace that lands on open
palms.
In you, I see what love looks like
when it forgives.
In me, you see what faith looks
like when it falls and still rises.
And maybe that's what God
intended
that the human and the dove
should meet halfway between
earth and sky,
between sin and salvation,
between what we are
and what we are called to be.
For love, when it is divine,
does not lift us away
it teaches us to walk light,
to rise without leaving,
to be of dust
and still of heaven.

(Dibang Mary is a Nigerian writer and journalist whose work captures the intricate pulse of human emotion — love, betrayal, and the quiet endurance that binds Mary's writing has appeared in *Brittle Paper*, *The Global Times*, *Kalahari Review*, *Hello Poetry*, and other notable literary platforms)

SPARROW

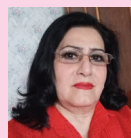


Dr Rosie Patangia

Sparrow, little sparrow
Will you will stay with me today
and every tomorrow?
I will feed you some wads of
sticky boiled rice, a cup of organ-
ic oats and finest corn,
Will you sit in my grassy lawn
Every sunrise after dawn?
I will linger beside you
And watch you run nimbly, chir-
rup, chomp and chew.
Sparrow, little sparrow
Will be sit on my friendly lap
And take your afternoon nap?
And as you snuggle
I will cuddle
And hug you tight
And see you shine like the golden
sunlight.
Sparrow, little sparrow
Why do you leave me alone in
sorrow?
Why do you fly away towards the
verdant meadow?
And make your nest on that bush
with twigs, threads and strings
that look radiant and yellow?
Sparrow, little sparrow
Without you my heart bleeds like
a sharp arrow.
Dear little sparrow, I know you
will come again
And my heart will be green and
golden once again.

(Dr. Rosie Pantangia, Assistant Professor and Head of English at Narangi Anchalik Mahavidyalaya, Guwahati, is a bilingual poet and co-author of several anthologies. Author of 200 Life Changing Quotes, she has received the ZIIET Teacher Innovation Award (2019), Knight Riders Creative Writing Award (2022), and AIM Outstanding Education Award (2025). She is a lifelong member of AIAER, INTACH, and Assam Sahitya Sabha.)

I LOVED HIS LOVE FOR ME



Elmava Cabbarova

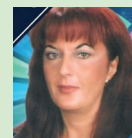
elmaya.cabbarova@gmail.com

The silent love that has been nurtured for years,
I suddenly understood one day of the days.
The sweet melody of his gaze,
I felt it in my chest for the first time and understood it.
We said goodbye to months and years,
We were held hostage in the hands of longing,
We learned a bad lesson from the school of life,
Fate rules without warning, I understood.
Your goal is unknown, oh crazy cycle,
You destroy loving hearts,
Can't everyone live prosperously,
You create chaos, I already understood.
Age comes upon age, it doesn't make any difference,
The heart always loves, it doesn't cause pain and sorrow,
Two people who are separated don't make a whole,
Separation is sweeter than reunion, I understood.
(Multi awardee writer Elmaya Cabbarova a poet, writer, translator and an academician. She is an international peace ambassador. She was elected Global World Poet Laureate in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

She was awarded the title of World Poet Laureate from Azerbaijan as one of the 55 poets selected for 2025 by Pentasi B Friendship Poetry.

She is represented in the book MultiArt -5 and MultiArt-20 Famous Personalities published in Argentina.)

STONE THRONE



Dr Franca Colozzo

From my stone throne
Thou chimera now appear to me
Fairy Morgana or Sorceress
Circe
On Ulysses' Riviera
Perfume of myrtles comes from
afar.
Merciless the time, solar clock,
Between Max Planck and Ein-
stein seems
perpetually oscillating.
Wavers the quantum between
opposing theories
Micro or macro tastes of salt
hours.
From my stone throne I turn my
gaze to the sea
Floating on nothingness, coun-
terbalance of human madness.
Undisputed queen, I cloak myself
in greenery
And crown myself with heaven
in the silence of the hour
That slips away in the shadows
of the evening.
(Dr. Arch. FRANCA COLOZZO
(ITALY):

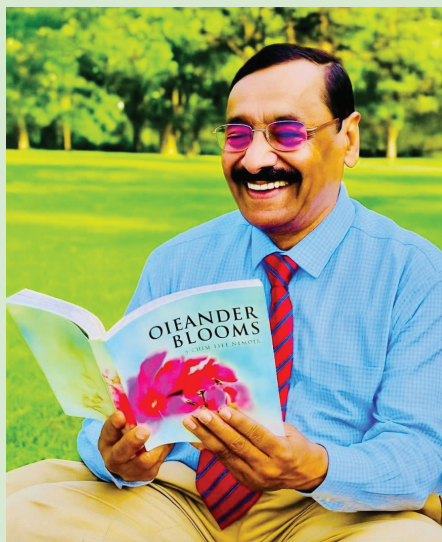
Architect | Poet | writer | multilingual author | highly awarded | freelancer | UN SDGs / ECOSOC | GGAF (USA) | WEF | GPLT-UK Executive Director | member of the IAE (INDIA) | CEO of RRM3 (EGYPT) | www.academia.edu Researcher)

Waiting For Spring



Lily Swarn

You could have waited for spring
With its showers of perfumed
confetti
I stood in statuesque inebriation
Under the tiara of blossoms
Velvety orchids entwined with
pinkish white lilies
Every evening strummed the
veena
Every sunset simmered in flames
I let my veil slide down to my
sloping shoulders
And breathed in my fragrant
tresses
The wait was not for Godot
Though Beckett crossed my
mind
It was the silence of quantum
leaps
Each cell shattered to smithereens
Each atom in a tremulous tizzy
**(Lily Swarn, is an acclaimed
multilingual poet and author,
Chandigarh Sahitya Akademi
awardee, International Beat Poet
Laureate (India) 2023-2924 and
Cesar Vallejo Award Winner**



Winter in Kashmir

Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

Snow hushes the
vale—
Chinars hold their
breath at dusk,
Jhelum sleeps in
white.
Frozen almond
bloom
Gulmarg drifts in
silent clouds—
Winter dreams in
blue.

(Professor Ratan Bhattacharjee is a senior academician and known as “Oleander Poet” for his best seller ‘Oleander Blooms’)

FROM PAGE 2...

Habba Khatoon: Deconstructing...

nagar: Ali Mohammad & Sons) talks about Zoon becoming Habba Khatoon when “[o]ne day, while singing in a saffron field, her melodies reached Yusuf Shah who happened to pass by. The Prince was captivated. This was a turning point in the life of Habba. She was henceforth a queen and was called the Nur Jahan of Kashmir” (p. 47). However, he says that after the king was exiled “Habba forsook the world and became a hermitess” (ibid). According to Sufi, Habba lived in a small cottage and “passed the rest of her life in contemplation and is believed to be buried[sic] there, though the exact grave cannot be definitely recognized” (p. 48).

Abdul Ahad Azad, the most revered literary historian and poet, has also failed to provide any authentic view of Zoon, who he says had become Habba Khatoon, a queen of Yousuf Shah Chak—It is important to note that Azad and Mahjoor were friends. Mahjoor must have shared his findings with Azad. As mentioned elsewhere, Azad had travelled extensively collecting information about the various old and new poets of his time; he seems to have concentrated more on their kalam (poetry) than their life sketches. Building his short narrative on oral tradition, he has added nothing to what the popular belief has been. I wonder on what basis Gunjoo equated Azad's poor history with Browne's *A Literary History of Persia* and Maulana Shibli Nomani's *She'r-ul-'Ajam*, which are widely considered the best literary ventures because of their depth and comprehensive research.

Avtar Krishan Rehbar's (1965) and Naji Munawar and Shafi Shauq (2014) too haven't gone beyond the beaten track. Munawar & Shauq's *Kaeshir Zaban ta Adbuk Tawareekh*, though written almost five decades after Rehbar's *Kaeshri Adbaech Taereekh* leaves the reader wanting in unlocking the identity of Zoon aka Habba Khatoon. To me, the book seems to have been written with virtually no research done in identifying the real Habba Khatoon.

Is there a way to resolve this issue and let Kashmiris know who this woman with three names—Habeeba, Habba Khatoon and Zoon—was actually? Written records given us three different personas:

1Habeeba: The royal court's beautiful lady with a mesmerizing voice. She was pious, an 'arifa' (ascetic). No 'arifa' would like to be a concubine, however great a man might be. Therefore, Kamil's (1995. Footnote 1, p. 34) assertion that this name was used to suit the Persian diction seems far-fetched. Since there is no poetry of Habeeba available, she can't be taken as Habba Khatoon who has remained a household name in Kashmir for centuries.

2Zoon: Two different Zoons: One born to Bota Raj and sold to Kashmiri shawl vendors. THE Zoon born

to some Bota Raj appears to be a false narrative to justify the name of a mountain peak in Gurez. To my mind, Kashmiris, in general, and Kashmiri shawl vendors, in particular, have never been so inhuman as to accept (or ask for) a child, especially if it is a girl, in place of money. Therefore, this narrative must be rejected outright. The second one, born to Abdi Rather and married to Aziz Lone and thereafter to Yousuf Shah Chak. This seems simply an imaginary creation of Mohammad Din Fauq. Abdi Rather, Aziz Lone, and Zoon, first the village woman and then a queen of Kashmir, appear fictitious to me.

3Habba Khatoon: Born in a rich and noble family in Shehar (I am assuming that Shehar meant Srinagar, though Pandrethan could have been a city in those days), married to her cousin before becoming one of the queens of Yousuf Shah. How did she reach Chandahar, Pampore? Unless we establish a relationship between Srinagar's rich family and Abdi Rather of Chandahar, there is no way to believe that after her divorce from her cousin, Habba Khatoon had Aziz Lone as her second husband. Maybe she was remarried somewhere else and made her first love a permanent theme of her poetry! We will explore this later when I discuss her poetry.

The Zoon of Chandahar has reigned over the psyche of the Kashmiri ethos for centuries. Even though her life has remained a mystery, she has continued to enjoy popularity because of the socially relevant songs attributed to her. The question arises that if Zoon, as claimed by Wakhlu, had burnt all her work before she died, whose vatsan (a form of poetry) and vaakhs do Kashmiris sing? Nobody seems to have refuted Wakhlu so far. Moreover, tradition has it that Zoon was a village girl, married to a village boy and, much later, went into the harem of Yousuf Shah Chak either as a queen or a concubine. SL Sadhu (Habba Khatoon. 1999. 2nd Ed. Trans. Professor Mohammad Zaman Azur-dah. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi) doesn't have any definite answer to whether she was a queen or a keep (p. 30). However, Khoyhami (2013) says that she became a concubine, which is carried forward by Wakhlu and others. Whether a queen or a keep, the fact remains that Zoon of Chandahar continues to be an important figure in our folklore—it need not be true also.

The Habba Khatoon of Shehr-e-Khas, Sringar, is present in poems where she gives her family background—parents, husband, and the place where she was married, and her upbringing. There is no proof of her having been married to either Aziz Lone or Yousuf Shah Chak. As we will see, in her poems, THE Habba Khatoon of Srinagar tells us

more about her life than people have really paid attention to.

Is it possible to know who Habba Khatoon was? Yes, it is. Modern science has a solution. Centuries-old bones can often tell us quite a lot about the identity of the person buried in a grave. Forensic anthropologists and bioarcheologists can help us estimate (1) a biological profile and (2) DNA and genetic identity that would identify the person. But will this be allowed? Given our conservative outlook and lack of a scientific bent of mind, this seems an uphill, if not an impossible, task. In the absence of such a scientific investigation, Habeeba, Habba Khatoon, or Zoon will remain a mystery.

Burial Place
A scientific approach would also solve the riddle of whether Habeeba in Biswak is the real Habba Khatoon and/or if the grave at Pantachowk is that of Zoon, aka Habba Khatoon. Otherwise, claims made by Professor Shad Ramzan and Mr Abdal Mahjoor cannot be verified. According to Kamil (1995), Mr Yousuf Teng had claimed in one of his write-ups that Habba Khatoon's grave was at Biswak. Lately, Mr Taing, in conversation with a friend of mine, quoted Mahjoor's following as proof of Habba Khatoon's burial place at Biswak:

Born in a farmer's home in Chandahar.

Fate made me queen.

Even in that splendour, I feared
God.

My beloved—ah, he loves me not.
In no way do these lines relate to the burial place. Also, these lines are autobiographical in nature. The last line is elegiac because the poet says that her lover doesn't love her. Had Yousuf abandoned her? Moreover, the Kashmiri expression 'padsha bhai' (queen) need not be taken in its literal meaning only. Figuratively, Kashmiris still use the expression for a married woman who is living like a queen (a comfortable life) with her in-laws—soa che vaervir padsha bhai (She is a queen at her in-laws).

Mr Taing should know that Abdul Ahad Azad had much before Mahjoor, in 1945, said this about Habba Khatoon in vign-i-vanvun ('Sweet Melody'. See Padam Nath Gunjoo. Kuliya-t-e-Azad . 1967. J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. Pp. 424-25): A peasant maiden she was from Chandhar. Zoon by name

King Yousuf's beloved Habba
Khatoon.

My friend, her wisdom crowned
her with fame

Come, my friend, let us stroll
amidst the garden of flowers.

Mahjoor had chided Rasul Mir of Shahabad for ignoring the Moon (Zoon) of Chandahar:

Why was Shah Abadi Mir seeking
Qandahar's Moon?

Why didn't he remember Chandrahar's Moon?

Rasul Mir (kuliyyat-e-Rasul Mir. 2001. J&K Academy of Art, Culture & Languages, P. 150) had said:

You have shamed even Qandahar's Moon, my Sun.

Beneath your burning gaze, I
fade unmoving, undone, and far too
young.

INTERPOLATION: What was special about the Qandahar Moon? Kamil (1995, p. 61) takes it in the sense of ‘mah-e-nakhshab’. Nakhshab is an ancient name for the modern city of Qarshi in southern Uzbekistan, where Ibn Ata aka Ibn Muqanna had created an artificial moon (between 775 and 783 AD) that rose every evening from a well in the foothills of Mount Siyam near Nakhshab. This moon illuminated an area of twelve miles with its light. Hence, a symbol for extreme beauty.

Mirza Ghalib had said:
chhorra mah-e nakhshab ki tarah
dast-e qaza ne
khoshid hanuz us ke barabar na
hua tha

*Fate cast him aside like the Moon
of Nakhshab,*

And even the sun had not yet risen to match his brilliance.

Anyways, the above discussion in no way tells us about the burial

in his way, tens as about the burial place of Habba as Mr. Taing claimed. Kamil (1995), referring to an article by S Razi (in Shiraza, May-June 1989: 60), wherein he had quoted a 19th-century Kashmiri poet, Wahab Lone, who said:

He docked the boat in Pandrethan.
At Pantha Chowk, he sat down in
front of the Khatoon.

He was talking in Athwajan.
Since then, I've been waiting for
him.

“Khatoon” is obviously Habba Khatoon, but it doesn’t say that she was buried there.

As mentioned earlier, the Zoon of Chandahar was CREATED by Mohammad Din Fauq out of his own imagination. He seems to be a good storyteller, and His-Story went into our folklore. He must have the cue from Mahjoor's biography.. Unfortunately, the latter's biography isn't available, and we have no way to confirm that Zoon really existed. Yousuf Shah Chak lived a very amorous life. Maybe some concubine was there of this name. This GHOST will haunt Kashmiris till doomsday. Since nobody seems to have refuted Wakhlu's assertion that Zoon aka Habba Khatoon, burnt all her work before she died, we have to believe that the poetry that we listen to and/or read is that of THE Habba Khatoon of Shehr-e-Khas, which I am going to prove by textual analyses of her poems as I find them very informative about who this Habba Khatoon was. Whether or not this Habba Khatoon became the queen of Yousuf Shah Chak will remain a mystery, though. Let us see how poems help us in identifying this enigmatic poet.

(Historical discussion concluded)

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