

HT Saturday

LitStream

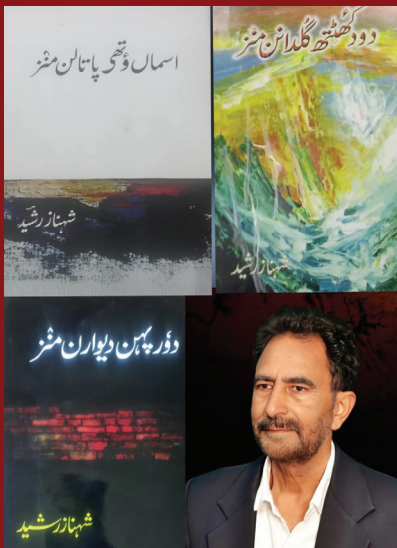
WEEKLY SUPPLEMENT OF DAILY HEADLINES TODAY

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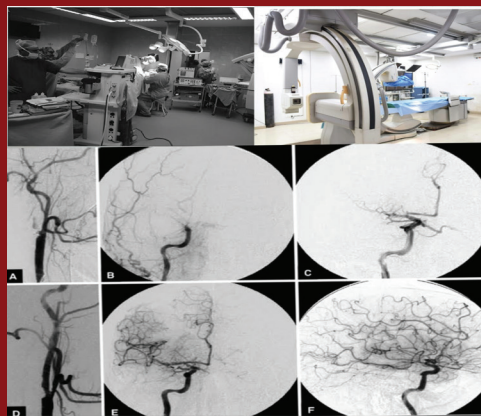
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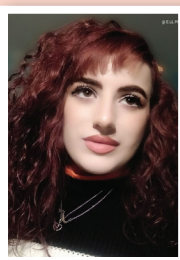
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Mohiuddin Reshi's Micro Fiction: Stories of Loss & Deprivation



Professor Muhammad Aslam

Mohiuddin Reshi is a prominent contemporary Kashmiri writer of short fiction who gained significant recognition with his debut collection of micro-stories, *Aena Aatish* (Bitter Reflections), which earned him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013. Born in 1951, Reshi retired as an assistant editor in the Information Department of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir and currently resides in Srinagar. His second collection, *Nethanaen* (Naked), appeared in 2020.

Both volumes foreground the social and moral crises afflicting Kashmiri society and trace the erosion of its long-standing pluralistic ethos for which the region had historically been renowned. Reshi's prose is marked by a lucid, unadorned style accessible to a wide readership, and he is widely acknowledged for his ability to articulate complex realities with brevity and force. A number of his stories have been translated into English by the present author. What follows is a sample of his microfiction (translated from Kashmiri).

1 Fiction
[Original: afsana]

"I like the house. Everything is well placed. Oh, the chandelier! I didn't notice it before. How elegant it is! Where did you get it from? Must be imported! But, I can't understand, in your library, there are innumerable books in different languages. I see more dictionaries here. What is the reason?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you some important things about my friends."

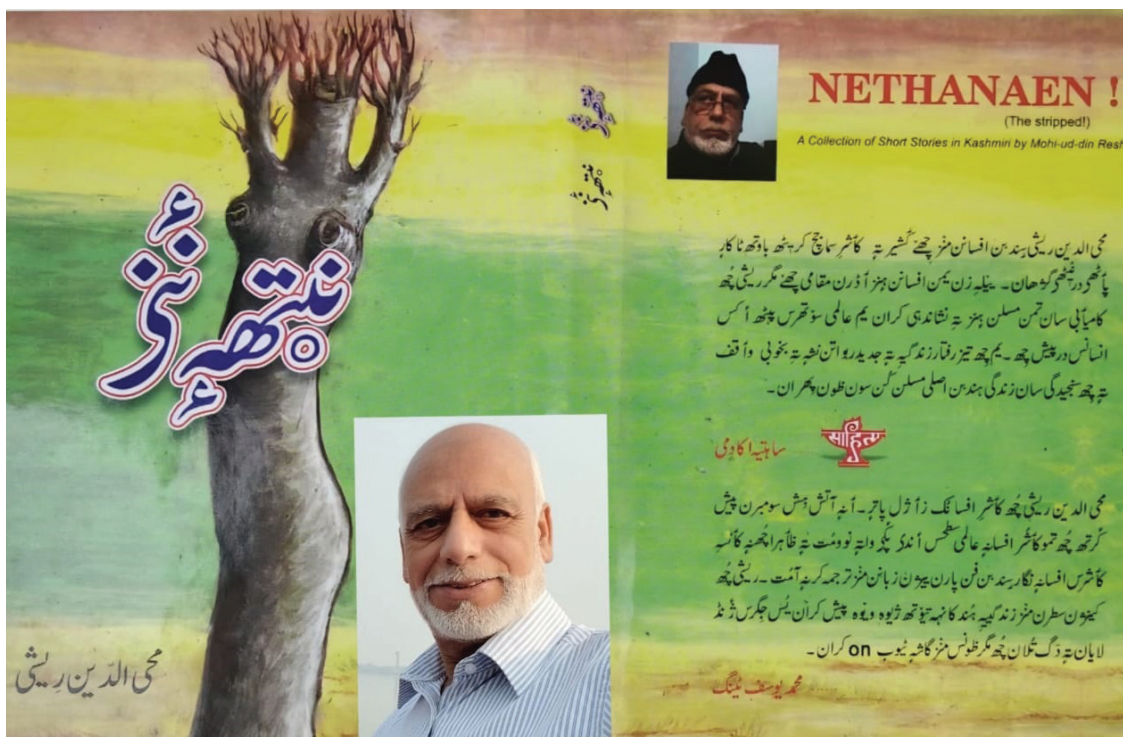
Ayan had told his newlywed wife everything about his family but forgot to introduce his friends in their absence.

"Although I have many friends, there are a few with whom I'm very close. Among them is Dr Prince Javed, who is a successful surgeon. Professor Aleem Ali is a famous Maths teacher.

Another is Salman Ahmad, who recently returned from abroad after doing a Diploma in hairdressing. But he is feeling sorry that he did it because his family taunts him by saying that people return as doctors or engineers from abroad, but he had come back as a barber."

"So, these are your close friends!"

“No, a closer and dearer friend is Marouf, who is also my mentor.”



“What’s he doing?”

"He is a great fiction writer." While he was saying this, the bell rang, and Marouf was standing there.

"Oh, you have a long life. You were being discussed."

"Prince Javed told me that Bhabi had returned. I thought about meeting her and also seeing the library. Did you get any new dictionary?" Saying this, he went into the library and began to turn the leaves of a new dictionary.

"Ok. Have you collected so many dictionaries for him only?" Abiya said to her husband. "I can't understand what he is looking for in these dictionaries."

“He’s looking for the meaning of the word ‘fiction’.”

"What?" Abiya was surprised and said to Ayan, "You were saying that he is a great fiction writer. He still doesn't know the meaning of fiction. What are you saying? I don't understand. I'd get crazy here."

“Listen! He knows the meaning of fiction. He knows that fiction is a short story or a tale, a structured thing or just a talk, false or mental disorder. However, he has apprehension that the fiction might be the truth or a fact!”

“Unh! Reason?”

"The reason is that whatever short stories he has written in the past, all of them have one by one proved true. Now, he is scared that he might confront what is written in one of his short stories, a masterpiece, "Deceit", that has been translated into many languages and in which a son is shown to shut his aged father in a dark room for good."

Listening to this, Abiya's face

changed colour, and she ran away.
Why?

2 Climax

[Original: Climax]

Every day, Dr Anees would enquire from Anjan about the progress in his latest novel. He would implore him to read it to him as he felt that the story of the novel and his life story were so identical, giving the impression that Anjan knew all his secrets. But, the relationship between them was simply that of a doctor and a patient. He, nonetheless, felt that every word of the novel was telling his tale.

How could it be?

He was perturbed and was curious to know what the climax of the novel was going to be. That is why, every evening, he called Anjan and, under the pretext of enquiring about his health, would ask about the climax of the story. But the response he got was that the canvas of the novel was getting larger, and the end was still not in sight. It had become a routine for Dr Anees to sit with Anjan before going to his home and listen to the new leaves of his novel. Whatever he did in twenty-four hours that he found reflected in the pages of the novel! He suspected that Anjan must have had a spy camera installed in his home, which was why he knew everything about him.

He got very worried and thought about the novel for the whole night. He got some bad ideas. He thought why he shouldn't short-circuit the switch of the pacemaker that he had fitted into Anjan recently. However, he wasn't ready to let him die before reading or listening to the climax of

the novel.

Today, when Anees reached Anjan's home, he found him lying on the bed in such a manner as if, after writing the climax, a burden of ages had lessened from him. Seeing this, Dr Anees, moving here and there, started looking for the scattered written leaves. He caught sight of a writing pad that had an open pen on it. He took the pad up and began reading.

While reading, his face was changing colours, and he was looking at Anjan with a frown. He tore the leaves into pieces and threw them at Anjan's face. When he didn't react, he collected all the pieces back, put them into his pocket, and looked into Anjan's eyes with a torch to find his own reflection.

He burst into laughter, closed his pen, and ran away!

3 Howzat

[Original: howz dat]

Whenever there was a protest or strike in the city, Rizwan got scared, stopped eating and cried. This worried Muneer's family, and they would find no peace until the situation got better again.

His family took him to saints, dervishes and doctors, but nobody could cure him.

He was a good cricket player. He had participated in national and international tournaments. However, as soon as he got admission in Class XII, he suffered from depression and left playing cricket. Getting a bat in hand or seeing a ball would give him blackouts.

They say that he had had a dream

The Winter of Our Minds: Shahnaz Rashid's Poetic Personification of Verses of December

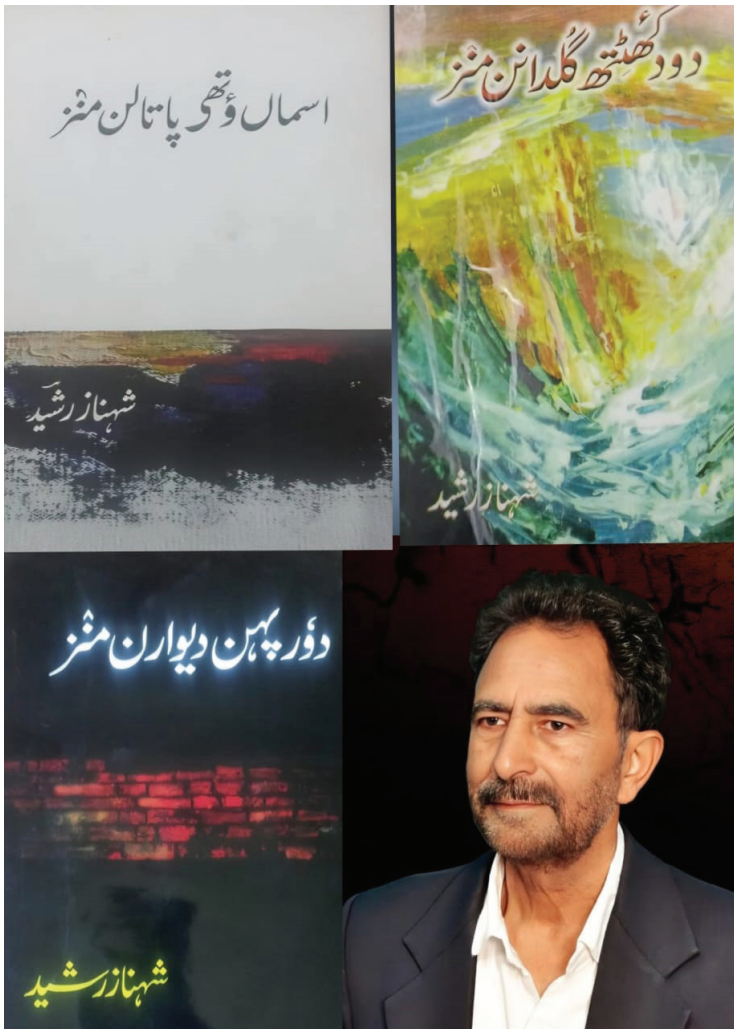


Mushtaque B Barq

Seasons have always lured the senses of the bards and, throughout literary history, seasons have carried the principal expression, acting as a natural wonder amidst emotional landscapes (Stewart, 2025). As Susan Stewart explains, “the human ability to notice seasonal patterns is reflected in the human ability to make poems, which have their own aural and formal patterns” (Stewart, 2025, p. 30), demonstrating how poets draw on nature’s cycles to shape emotional depth. Research on seasonal symbolism shows that winter is conventionally linked to “demise, loss, grief, and hardship” in poetry, illustrating how poets use cold seasons to mirror human suffering (Sa-ngiamwibool, 2025, p. 3).

In Verses of December, Shahnaz Rashid personifies December and uses vivid seasonal metaphors to explore human alienation, suffering, and eventual hope. Through these literary devices, he argues that human resilience and hope emerge from suffering, reflecting both the emotional and cultural landscape of Kashmir. In Verses of December, Shahnaz Rashid on one hand mentions that the season offers a natural invitation; on the other, it provides a stage where the agonised bard finds a match. He comes face to face with the canopy of seasons under which he unburdens his load of pain and pleasure. The mood, the gaiety, and the jollity of the convoluted glee of the bard take a route where he meets summer or spring to match his emotional state. The entrenched torment, the travails of people, and the discontent that he bears within his battered breast take him to the solitudes where he encounters autumn or winter as a cohort. Every season reads its own script to festoon human emotion, making the season closely aligned with the state of mind of the people.

The raspberry of the silence, its delicate whisper, takes the apt shape according to the emotional tone of the season and comforts the bard accordingly. The dazzling sun and the flora around sprout the latent seeds of joy and bring them onto the turf of delight. But the cactus of the inner violence slowly halts the steps of the bard till he finds his way through the barren jungles and ruins to unburden his heavy heart. The sigh in silence sheds the massive leaves under which he takes shelter, and the same sigh, as a wonder, elevates his state of ecstasy



beyond the castles of the blue vast.

Peeping down the poem of Shahnaz Rashid, his use of personification to represent December is a mindful work, allowing the season to speak for itself rather than being filtered through a narrator. December speaks like a human being, signifying the unrest and emotional state of humanity. December finds its way to the reader's mind as an alienated and rejected entity. The season mirrors human exclusiveness: frozen bodies, frozen wishes, spirits, and hearts. Shahnaz Rashid vividly symbolises emotional impartiality by underlining collective suffering during the harsh winter season in Kashmir. By closely analysing the season, the poet reveals its profound emotional and psychological effects on humanity.

I am December, the last month of the year; now I plan to leave Kashmir. The truth is that everyone is happy for my departure.

In Verses of December, the coldness of December exhibits hostility and collective suffering, in addition to emotional paralysis. The imagery of frozen bodies, frozen wishes, and spirits not only underscores physical cold but also the emotional desolation experienced by the dwellers of the valley, aligning with Sa-ngiamwibool's observation that

winter in poetry is conventionally associated with “demise, loss, grief, and hardship” (2025, p. 3). In contrast, Stewart (2025, p. 30) emphasizes that “the human ability to notice seasonal patterns is reflected in the human ability to make poems,” suggesting that Shahnaz Rashid’s seasonal contrasts are purposely organised to reflect shifts in the human psyche. By juxtaposing December’s cold alienation with the warmth of other seasons, Rashid underscores the cyclic nature of human emotion, illustrating how periods of suffering and isolation inevitably give way to hope and renewal. This poem stands as a balance between despair and hope. The poet derives hope from the chill, revealing the purpose of the harsh winter, which, in reciprocity, retreats into seclusion to return in March as a rejuvenating agent of nature.

The poem is rich in metaphors and imagery: "It bruised even my own breast... I must journey beyond the forests, stir the mirth of March..."

The “bruised breast” metaphor conveys December’s own state of emotional unrest. The succeeding phrase, “stir the mirth of March,” signals a transition toward hope and rejuvenation. The poet links the natural cycle to human resilience: the

emotional stagnation and hopelessness represented by winter eventually give way to the revitalisation of emotions.

The metaphoric beauty of the poem makes it a masterpiece. Several metaphors stand out for their emotional intensity: December acts as a pulsating embodiment of a miserable speaker. This is an example of personification, where an abstract entity is endowed with human qualities to deepen emotional impact. As Cook (2013, p. 27) notes, "Personification endows abstract concepts with human characteristics, allowing the reader to emotionally engage with otherwise inanimate phenomena." The departure of December signals the end of winter and hints at hope returning to the gardens; the season is depicted as having agency, reinforcing emotional transition through metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 5). As they explain, "Metaphors are not just linguistic expressions, but cognitive structures through which we understand one domain of experience in terms of another," reflecting how the months convey emotional states.

The line *Frozen bodies, wishes, spirits, and hearts* vividly depicts emotional barrenness and immobility, portraying inner lifelessness through figurative language rather than literal description. Leech (1969, p. 14) observes, “Figurative language such as metaphor and personification creates imagery that evokes mental and emotional responses beyond the literal meaning of words.” March is powerfully personified as the anticipated summer, reinforcing seasonal change through human traits and enhancing imagery and emotional resonance (Cook 2013, p. 32). Another striking metaphor is September, symbolizing human attempts to categorize time and its impact on the valley’s topography and picturesque quality. Abrams and Harpham (2015, p. 204) state, “A symbol in literature is an object, character, figure, or colour that is used to represent abstract ideas or concepts,” which aptly aligns with September’s role in the poem. The poet also celebrates his land, abundant with fruits: Peach, apricot, and almond buds, as if a beloved sends gifts to a tender heart. This metaphor likens buds to gifts, suggesting that nature’s blossoms carry emotional warmth, making the poem resonate with valley dwellers who cherish both the fragrance of fruits and the culture they embody (Abrams and Harpham 2015, p. 206).

For the people of the valley, fruits are not merely commodities or health prescriptions; they are integral to a rich cultural heritage, representing vegetative collectiveness and embodying the philosophy of

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KHAZIR MAGHRIBI

MY FATHER AS I REMEMBER HIM



By.Dr.Arif Maghribi Khan.

30th November 1999 is the day when he left this world after a brief illness at home, even before death he was as agile as ever, making people smile. Many people do not know his real name – Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din Khan. As a young child he visited a Hakeem sahib for severe respiratory infection, along with other advises, he was given ill advise of using hookah, to get sputum out.

After years, he gave it up in his late fifties by his will power. Anyway Hakeem sahib misheard his real name also and wrote Khizer Mhuhammed. Decades later, when he began writing humorous poetry in Kashmiri language, other poets gave him his pen name Khazir Maghribi as they thought humour is incompatible with Kashmiri language.

There are many dimensions to my father's personality. I hope I will be able to cover it all. Born in a humble family at Chotta Bazar Srinagar in late thirties, his other siblings also rose to higher positions like his elder brother Shehzore Kashmiri or Muhammed Shafi Khan known as a great administrative officer. My father was not initially sent to school but to a tailor shop. One day he was seen in this shop by authorities who wanted to promote education. My grandfather was asked to send him to school, which he reluctantly did. This shows how sincere the authorities were in promoting education. He learned some skills there and would sometimes sew his own clothes to our astonishment at home. When we asked him the reason he would talk about dignity of labour and Islam. Anyway after getting a scholarship for pursuing his school education, he passed 10th class examinations with merit from Lahore University. Among the Muslim students he secured the second highest marks, and would say that only a girl secured more marks than him. But my father would always say that passing examinations is not important, hard work is.

After graduation in Geography, Persian, Urdu he was struggling to get a job. He would always make us burst with laughter when we asked about his job search. He would recall, and say that he covered so much distance and climbed many mountains to get a job as a forester or a job in the police. But he was denied a job as he did not pay 5



rupees as bribe. And this attitude remained till death and became his brand. Finally, after much struggle he got a job as a teacher,

where he made his mark by unique style of teaching. He wrote many books on Geography, History, Maths and English; and Ali Mohamed and Sons was his publishing house. These books were sold like hot cakes, and till 1990 remained a big source for all students specially who struggled to pass 10th grade in JK. He would tell us that when he wrote a book on Mathematics for students in 10th grade, he would think like a student in 10th grade. His fight against nepotism and corruption led to his frequent transfers, prominent being the one to Rajori and Poonch, which he embraced with grace. During his stay there learned the Pahari language

Life story of my father is incomplete without my mother's mention. My father always told us how they fought battles of life together and remained steadfast during testing

times. My father got married to my mother namely Jawahar Un Nisa from the Khan Family of Gojwara, who also started her career as a teacher. Much to the discomfort of the society the marriage was held in a simple way. Actually my father had rented a car with a loyal Sikh driver who was told to be ready to go back if there are any signs of rituals; thankfully it was all simple. I do remember my relatives showing displeasure even after decades of marriage, but my father and my mother both stood their ground. And today when in 2020 I read about average boys and girls, I think of my father and talk with my mother on this. She smiles and says proudly how difficult it was then to persuade people in making marriage simple.

There were nationwide reforms in education that started in 2016 one of which is that no student will be declared as failed till 8th class examinations. My father initiated this way back in late seventies in Batmaloo school, where on the

result day it would be declared – AWLI PETH EETHMIS TAAM SAREY PASS [From Ist to 8th all are declared pass]. Whenever he was questioned, he would say, “show me even one student of mine who is not doing well in life. My pupils include doctors, engineers, researchers, bureaucrats, and businessmen”.

After getting married my father was briefly transferred to one end of Kashmir and my mother to another end. One day, much to the embarrassment of my parents, I discovered their love letters written after marriage and sent by mail or hand. One letter reads, "How I wish I became a singing bird and tell you about my love". We had preserved all these love letters till 2014 floods razed our house to ground, and nothing could be retrieved. 4 children were born in Balgarden where we lived till 2014 floods. I have two elder sisters who work in education sector and brother an experienced engineer of great repute, all children got education, no gender disparity.

My father had many books to his credit, one being “BAAGHI AROOZ”. It is the first book published of its kind which talks about writing poetry, correct usage of grammar in Kashmiri poetry. It was published way back in 1970, and sold at Ghulam Ahmed Booksellers, Zaina Kadal and Kapoor Brothers Lal-Chowk. His other books include MOTI-MAALA for children, and Gulshani Khazir. In my childhood in 1994 I saw many stalwarts of today getting their poetry checked and refined from him , I hope that some day they do pen down a few words for him.

By the way my mother reads all newspapers specially GK, Kashmir Uzma with great fervor and passion. Her favorite pages include "Senior citizens page" which is like a plethora of memories.

My father was known for his humorous poetry. When asked the reason he said "In Kashmiri poetry except for LADDI-SHAH we do not have humour. It is mostly sad. So I thought of including humour to make people laugh, as well as motivate them to do well instead of lamenting them about the past". My father regularly featured on radio and TV shows including NATIYA MUSHAIRA [Poetic tribute to Prophet Muhammed – peace be upon him].

Most people do not know that my father has written a series of books on Sir Muhammed Iqbal – the series is known as GUFTO-SHINEED'. I end with the hope that the state cultural academy takes up further publication and circulation of his books. Some of them are already in libraries, but now with internet and digital formats, we need to move in that direction.

**Author is the youngest son of
Khazir Maghribi and can be mailed at
arifmaghribi@yahoo.com**

Dr. Anil Kumar

Ascension



Nayeema Ahmad Mahjoor

That light... was not from the sky.
It was sneaking in from the sun.
And that sun... was not in the sky;
It was hanging over the earth.
On the land... There was no Rumi,
There was Tabriz,
Sitting and sinking.
Something was slipping through
his hands.

Some creature had emerged from
the sea,
And he was speaking to the sun.
"That is the food of my life.
Turn up the heat.
Burn up my throat
And cause my body to melt.
Then, silence my voice.
This isn't actual food.
It won't satisfy my hunger.
Or make me swallow my pride.
Give me swan's wings to fly.
Take me to the sky?
Return me to Rumi
And bless me with another ascent.

(Nayeema Ahmad Mahjoor is a renowned Kashmiri Journalist and a Penguin Author She Is a Former Senior Editor with BBC WORLD SERVICE)

English translation By Suvir Kaul

This death , how pitiless?
 How many children it renders
 orphans
 And , without fear , takes sons
 from mothers
 From so many sisters it takes
 brothers
 Without sympathy it devastates
 homes .
 Sleeping in this soil
 Is that valorous young one too .
 Whose ambitions where high
 A white shroud wraps around
 him today
 And dreams are now as if forgot-
 ten by him
 All desires and wishes left here
 and he now distant .
 The day he called the day , called
 dark clouds dark clouds .
 He was tutored at length to call
 the hours of the night the day .
 But speaking the truth he went .

(Rukhsana Jabeen is a former Director of Radio Kashmir Srinagar, Rukhsana Jabeen, known by her pen name Jabeen, is a luminous voice in Kashmiri and Urdu poetry, whose verses weave the rich cultural tapestry of Kashmir with universal human experiences)



Rukhiana Jabeen

یہ موت کو تھامے ہے
 کائناتیں شریں تیمیں ڈھان
 تہ ماجیں پوتھر نوان تہ کھوڑاں
 بینیں یہ کاڈن نوان بآیی
 بے واہہ پآئھن گرے وچاراں ۔
 کمں جوانن یہ موت پنہ نبین پکھن اندر نتھ
 مزاری میڈ تِل ہمیشہ ہاتھہ نیندر چھ پاواں ۔
 شوگتگھہ چھ یتھی میڈ اندر سے رائل جواں تہ
 پیمی سندی ارادہ تھدی آسی
 سفید زادر ولتھ امس از
 تہ خواب ووننی مستھہ گمٹھہ از
 تمام حسرت تہ آرزو یھن یتھن تہ درایاؤ
 دوہس ونان دودھ تہ کالہ اوہرس سے کالہ اوہرے
 ونان روزیاؤ
 سینٹھاہ پریویس ز راڈ پھرن ژ وں دہل
 پوڑ سے پوڑ ونان گو ۔۔۔۔۔۔

Introspection on the New Year



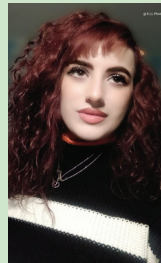
Zulfiqar Naqvi

Time came,
Time passed,
Time hastened on—
Carrying success and joy,
Bitterness and defeat;
Ease and toil, loss and gain;
Poverty and plenty, name and
rank;
Knowledge and wisdom, that it
yields.
What, then, slipped free
From Time's unfolding hem?
The Lord of all worlds,
Master of Time and Space,
Bestowed it all.
Yet tell me—
What have we truly gathered
From hours and nights,
From months dissolving into
years?
Did we ask what Time took from
us,

And what it returned in grace?
Did our hands remain folded,
Or did they labor and build?
Did we face Time—and ourselves,
Or drift through borrowed anxieties
And hollow pursuits?
Now, at the year's final threshold,
Let us weigh what we so carefully
count—
For within these numbered days
Our whole existence lies.
All questions are here;
All answers, too.
If we fail to see them,
Can Time be blamed?
The year will change—
We may not.
And if we do not,
Time will deliver its verdict:
We shall pass unnamed,
Unmarked,
Without echo.
Come—let us make a covenant:
With ourselves, with Time, with
the coming year and say—
“O Time! If you change,
We shall too, we shall too.”

(Zulfiqar Naqvi a prolific Urdu poet, a former announcer with All India Radio, Poonch (J&K), and a retired Principal of the School Education Department, Jammu and Kashmir)

"The Importance Of Girls Education"



Elpiola Lluka

Girls are the air of life,
take care of them all the time.
To have as well a good wife,
education is the first prime!
Little girls are so innocent,

treat them well and be tolerant...
Freedom stays underneath our
world,
covers our feelings with shining
gold.
Let little girls to read more books,
it's the most beautiful look!
A good behaviour has no price,
so let them learn to break the ice!

(Elipiola Lluka is a worldwide poetess, writer, songwriter and singer. She was born in Korca city of Albania and is grown up in an intellectual family. She has studied for English Language and Literature in the "Fan.S.Noli" University. She has written her first poem since she was 8 years old. She is a regular writer and poetess and her poems are published in many international newspapers, magazines and anthologies books.)

Women



Eva Petropoulou Lianou
Greece

I was wondering if I am free?
Do u feel free?
Nooo
Every day I walk in a street of possibilities and opportunities..
But nobody look at me
As i am a woman..
It is unspeakable how much a woman is used..
From day one
A woman needed to educate the child
To cook for a child
To learn him how to think..

Speak..
Act..
A lot for a woman to do
But what happens after..
A woman need
A woman wish
A woman word
Inexistent person
Until one day
U will look at the mirror
U see your face
U will see your heart
U will see your body
And u will not recognize it
Because u will be so used
Used from the rejection
Used from the loneliness
Used from the fake people
Used from the bad decisions
Without faith!!!

**(Eva Petropoulou Lianou
Greece is a multi awardee author
and poet of children literature and
editor Greek Magazine. Her works
are translated and published all
over the world)**

DANCING IN YELLOW



Dibang Mary

Dancing in yellow,
the calendula stretches toward
the sun,
each petal a quiet reminder of
days unfolding like a golden calendar.

The light catches on the edges of the flowers, painting shadows that shift slowly across the earth. Time moves gently here, mea-

sured not in hours

but in the sway of stems, the
whisper of wind through petals,
the soft hum of a season that refus-
es to hurry.

I sink into a warm bath, petals of calendula floating around me, their scent rising like sunlight through water.

I sip the quiet, letting it settle in my chest, feeling the warmth seep into my skin and memory alike.

For a while, I am no longer separate from the blooms.

I am a part of their dance, their
quiet insistence that beauty is
made of simple moments.

and that even as days fold and
fade,
some light lingers—bright,
tender, yellow.

(Dibang Mary's is an international Nigerian awardee writer, and her recent literary work, "The Children Are Ours," has been featured in a Barcelona literary magazine in Spain.)

Dr Tanmoy Bhattacharjee is Assistant Professor of English at Women's Christian College, Kolkata, and a Postdoctoral Fellow at Lincoln University College, Malaysia. He is the author of *Sarojini Naidu: Sufi and Bhakti Influence*, editor of *Understanding Environment and Eco-Tales of India*, and is currently translating *SabarKatha* under the *Rupkatha Project* in collaboration with ULB, Belgium. He also co-edits *As Leaves Rustle for Spadina Literary Review*. Canada.

The Darkest Cold Night on Horseback at Sonamarg



Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The last daylight withdrew from Sonamarg as if the mountains themselves were pulling a dark shawl over the valley. Snow clouds pressed low, smothering the sky, and the air grew so sharp that every breath seemed to cut the lungs before filling them. Sonamarg—the meadow of gold—had lost its colour by dusk. What remained was a silvered silence, a vastness of white broken only by the black ribs of pine forests and the frozen Lashpathri stream, lying like a sleeping serpent under glass. I had not planned to ride at night. No sensible traveller did. The locals had warned me in voices that carried both kindness and fear: Night comes early here. Horses know the paths, but the cold knows you better. Yet circumstances, as they often do in Kashmir, had conspired against reason. The road to Srinagar had been blocked by an unexpected snowfall, the small lodge where I stayed had run out of fuel, and a message—cryptic, urgent—had arrived just before dusk, asking me to come to a shepherd's hut near the Thajiwas glacier. It spoke of something found, something that “remembered” me, though I had never been to Sonamarg before.

By the time I saddled the horse, the cold had already sharpened into a presence. The animal was a sturdy snow mountain mare, dark as the night she would carry me into. Her breath rose in clouds, and her eyes reflected the fading light with an unsettling intelligence. When I touched her neck, her skin trembled, not from fear, but from the cold that had begun to dominate the valley like a tyrant. We left the last scattered lights of Sonamarg behind. The path narrowed, swallowed by snowdrifts, and the wind gathered its strength, hurling ice crystals that stung the face and numbed the hands. The bells tied to the mare's bridle chimed softly, the only sound puncturing the immense silence. Each step felt amplified, as if the mountains were listening. Night arrived fully, suddenly, without ceremony. The darkness in Sonamarg was not merely the absence of light; it was a substance, thick and heavy, pressing against the eyes. Even the snow seemed to absorb sound. The cold deepened, burrowing into bones, slowing thought. I wrapped my shawl tighter, but it offered little comfort. The mare walked steadily, her hooves finding a path that my eyes could not see. I trusted her because there was nothing else to trust.

It was then that I heard the first voice.

It did not come from any direction. It rose from the ground itself.



a low murmur that blended with the wind. At first, I thought it was my own blood rushing in my ears, the body's response to the cold. But the sound gathered shape, syllables forming slowly, deliberately, as if the night was learning how to speak.

"Turn back," it said.

I froze. The mare stopped as well, her ears twitching. The words were not carried by air; they seemed to exist inside my head, echoing against memories I had not yet made. I spoke aloud, my voice sounding alien in the darkness.

"Who's there?" The valley answered with silence. Then, faintly, I heard the rush of water beneath ice, the Lashpathri reminding me that it still lived. I urged the mare forward, telling myself that cold and fear could play tricks on the mind. Yet something had changed. The darkness felt closer, more intimate, as though it leaned in to watch.

The path climbed gradually. The forest thickened, trees rising like sentinels, their branches bent under snow. Occasionally, the moon fought through the clouds, revealing a world bleached and unreal. In those moments, Sonamarg looked ancient, untouched by time, as if it had been waiting for centuries for this particular night.

Halfway up the slope, the cold reached a depth I had never known. It was no longer merely painful; it was seductive, whispering promises of rest, of sleep, of surrender. My fingers stiffened, my legs ached, and a dull heaviness settled behind my eyes. The mare slowed, and I leaned forward instinctively, pressing my face into her mane for warmth.

That was when I felt it—the shift.

The air thickened, and the sound of hooves changed, as though we had stepped onto a different ground altogether. The snow beneath us was unmarked, pristine, yet I sensed movement around us, shapes sliding just beyond vision. The bells on the bridle fell silent. Even the wind seemed to hold its breath. Ahead, a faint glow appeared, pulsing like a dying ember. It should not have been there. There were no lamps.

no huts this far into the forest. The glow hovered at eye level, neither approaching nor retreating. The mare hesitated, then moved toward it, drawn by some instinct older than fear. As we neared, the glow resolved into a figure—a man wrapped in a long, old-fashioned cloak, his face hidden by a hood rimed with frost. He stood in the middle of the path, untouched by snow, as though the cold itself respected him.

"You are late," he said.

His voice was calm, but it carried the weight of the mountains. I could not see his eyes, yet I felt his gaze pierce through layers of clothing and skin, into thoughts I had never voiced.

"I didn't know I was expected," I replied, my teeth chattering despite myself. He laughed softly, a sound like ice cracking. "Sonamarg expects everyone eventually." The mare stamped the ground, uneasy. I should have turned back then, should have fled, but the cold had already wrapped its fingers around my will. I dismounted, my legs nearly giving way, and faced the man.

“What is this place?” I asked. He gestured around us. “A crossing. On nights like this, the valley remembers what it has buried.” Before I could ask more, he turned and began to walk, the glow dimming with each step. Against every instinct, I followed, leading the mare by the reins. The forest opened into a clearing I had not seen on any map. At its centre stood a stone structure half-buried in snow, its walls etched with symbols worn smooth by time. It looked like a shrine, or perhaps a watchtower from some forgotten war.

Inside, the cold was deeper, sharper, as if the stones had been hoarding it for centuries. The man stopped beside a slab of rock and brushed away the snow. Beneath it lay a metal box, rusted and scarred.

"This was found in the glacier today," he said. "It does not belong to this time." He opened the box. Inside lay a photograph, its edges curled but its image disturbingly

clear. It showed a group of men on horseback, standing in this very clearing. At the centre was one face I recognised instantly—my own.

"That's impossible," I whispered.

"Is it?" the man asked. "Cold preserves many things. Flesh. Bone. Memory."

A wave of dizziness swept over me. Fragments of sensation flooded my mind: the sting of cold air, the weight of a rifle, the sound of bells in the dark. I saw myself riding through Sonamarg, not as a traveller, but as something else, something harder. I felt the fear of being hunted, the desperation of hiding something precious in the ice.

"You were here before," the man continued. "On a night colder than this one. You left something behind."

The mare whinnied, a sound edged with panic. Outside, the wind returned, howling now, furious, as if angered by what had been uncovered. The symbols on the stone walls seemed to shift in the flickering light, aligning into patterns that hurt the eyes to follow.

"What did I leave?" I asked.

The man's hood slipped back slightly, revealing a face pale and lined, eyes dark as unfrozen water. "Your end," he said. "And your beginning." The cold surged, no longer merely physical. It clawed at memory, at identity, threatening to strip everything down to its frozen core. I stumbled backward, knocking against the stone wall. The photograph in the box began to frost over, my face disappearing beneath a veil of white.

“Leave,” the man said softly. “The valley has shown you enough.”

I did not argue. I ran. The mare followed, somehow finding me in the darkness, her body a solid, living warmth against the cold that pursued us. We galloped blindly through the forest, branches whipping past, the sound of hooves thunderous now, echoing off unseen slopes. The darkness chased us, voices rising in a chorus of whispers, not angry, but regretful.

When the lights of Sonamarg finally appeared, faint and trembling, the cold loosened its grip. I collapsed in the snow, breath tearing from my chest in ragged gasps. The mare stood over me, her breath warm, her presence grounding.

Morning found me there, half-buried, alive. The villagers said I had ridden out alone and returned without explanation, my horse lathered and shaking. They found no photograph, no box, no shrine in the forest when they searched. But sometimes, on the coldest nights, when the wind drops and the snow listens, I feel Sonamarg remembering. And I know that somewhere, beneath the glacier, the darkest cold night is still waiting—on horseback—for me to return.

(Author of "Twilight Of Love "Professor Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee writes poetry (multilingual) and prose features globally and is a Retired Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond)

In Search of Roots

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FROM PAGE 7...

Recap 2025-2026: LitStream Moves...

tone. It focused mainly on Kashmiri language writers, especially those working in fiction and poetry. Critical essays on their work were placed alongside poems, short stories, and translations. Even writers from outside of Kashmir felt encouraged to write on Kashmir and its literature and culture.

Professor Mohammad Aslam is a regular writer and steals the lime-light of many issues by discussing on varied topics namely on 'Politics and Poetry: A Case of Mahjoor and Azad' or 'Social Consciousness in Faiz's Mujuh Se Pehli Si Mohabbat' in some other issues. Along with this we got the English translation of stories like 'Performance' of Raja Yusuf or, Dr. Reyaz Tawheedi's Urdu Story 'Never Say Good Bye', and review of Ayaz Rasool Nazki's "Bebooi Nama" by Showkat Shafi.

That was a real breakthrough with short fiction 'At the zebra Crossing' from Deepak Budki along with poems from Akram Siddiqui and Ali Shaida. The second Issue on 30 August was a master blaster with cover story by Shahnawaz Nazir on A Parent's Guide: Dr. M.Y Tak focused on a new horizon in Health Management by writing on Ozone Therapy in Kashmir, Dr. Sameer Ul Haq dealt with Telemedicine and AI role, Translated story of Tariq Shabnum by Imran Rather, Mir Yasirul Ameen's non fictional writing The Subtle Path to Modern Slavery. Review of Graham Fuller's Book A World Without Islam done by Nazir Wani, and the big question raised by Dr Muhammad Maroof Shah about Rotten Marriages.

Third Issue of 6th Sept accommodates local with the national writers. Translation of the heart touching Urdu story 'Mother' of D Reyaz Tawheedi Kashmiri or story like Dry Leaf and others in varied issues from Professor Ratan Bhat-tacharjee from Kolkata enriched the literary section. While Akram Siddiqui dealt with a sensational issue of patients trapped in a market maze, and Wani Nazir contributed a book review (Khaled Abou El Fadl's book The Great Theft), while Dr. Tasaduk Hussain Itoo wrote on Health issues (Managing Obesity). Professor Mohammad Aslam made a wonderful discussion on the select Flash fiction of Dr. Nazir Mushtaq' (Oozing Wounds).

From fourth Issue more writers from outside of Kashmir were introduced by LitStream. Professor Mohammad Aslam's musings on Athar Nafees and Poetics of Creative Paralysis in 'Woh Ishq' did the cover story. Dr. Sameer Ul Haq dealt with health issues related to PCOS and PCOD, while Raheel Rasheed Wani focused on Education in Kashmir, Shah Nawaz Nazir focused on White Coats and fewer jobs. Deepak Budki writes wonderful stories for many other issues. Lily Swarn's musings

on her own battle as a Beat Poet Laureate comes along with translated Urdu story of Tariq Shabnam by Imran Rather. The Fifth Issue came with Professor Muhammad Aslam's review of Snow Flames of Majrooh Rashid and his two poems and his brilliant musings on Kashmiri literature in other issues are the gems of literature. Akram Siddiqui focused on SKIMS as a Healing Horizon, Nasir Ali focused on Hamlet's Eternal Question 'To be or not to be', Dr. Arif Maghribi Khan dealt with Rabies, while Nazir Wani reviewed the book of Lily Swarn A Drop of Cosmos and Mushtaq B Barq wrote a non fictional autobiographical piece 'The Success Story of My Failure'.

Sixth Issue onward Litstream got its own link and a new group of writers joined including Dr. Supriya Shukla and the board is formed for LitStream with members like Professor Mohammad Aslam, Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee, Professor Shad Ramzan, Professor Majrooh Rashid, Nayeema Ahmad Mahjoor, Lily Swarn, Dr. Nazir Mushtaq, Dr. Reyaz Tawheedi, Dr. Supriya Shukla, Dr. Tasaduk Hussain Itoo, Dr Muhammad Yousuf Tak and Tarique Raheem and others were invited to join. Translation of Urdu story of Dr. Reyaz Tawheedi Kashmiri Gulla Qasai enhances the literary flavour along with Professor Mohammad Aslam's discussion on Shafaq Sopori's Poetics as a literary critic. Book review was done by Shafi Ahmad and he reviewed the novel of Mushtaque B Barq The Hood. Lily Swarn and Dr. Supriya Shukla contributed personal essays, and Akram Siddiqui focused on SKIMS and its healing magic. Dr. Tasaduk Hussain Itoo focused on Teens and Technology. One great feature of the seventh issue is the introduction of a Poetry Page. Poems came almost regularly from Elpiola Lluca, Eva Lianou Petropoulou, Dr. Ramakrishna Peregu, Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee, Dr. Pravita Tripathi, Elmaya Cabbarova, Dustin Pickering, Ali Shaida, Wani Nazir, Mandira Ghosh, Dr. Purnima Singh, Dr. Sarita Chauhan, Akram Siddiqui, Dr. Dipika Bhatt, and others in different issues highlight the diverse area of life.

On Oct 11 the 8th Issue came with flying colours of creativity. LitStream is a full fledged literary magazine with poetry, non fiction, fiction and book reviews. ShahNawaz Nazir claimed the limelight with the cover story article on Zahid Mukhtar. Professor Muhammad Aslam discussed on Zahid Mukhtar and also on Alienation and Existential Dismay in Hosh's poetry. The book reviews by Mushtaque B Barq and Wani Nazir enrich the literary horizon of LitStream. Mujtaba Farooq came out with his new genre of fiction with stories like 'A Dog

Got Scared of...'. Translation of Urdu poetry by Professor Sayyed Ahmad and others focused on Kashmiri Ghazal of Rukhsana Jabeen. Wari Nazir reviewed the book of Nobel Laureate 2025 Krasznahorkai's *The Melancholy of Resistance* and the *Frailty of Being*. Nayeema Ahmad Mahjood contributes brilliant non fictional pieces namely on marriage experience and other topics. Health concern was an important topic and LitStream publishes a lot of them to address ailments like Cancer, Diabetes, and PCO. Akram Siddiqui for example wrote on State Cancer Institute and Dr. Tasaduk Hussain Itoo focused on mental health.

Another important genre Travelogue was introduced in this issue. The poetry corner of this issue is becoming global with contributions from poets of Europe like Eva Petropoulou Lianou, and other Indian poets of global reckoning, Majrooh Rashid, Mallika Tripathi, Ali Shaida, Rafiya Sayeed, Dr. Purnima Singh, PV Laxmiprasad, gave the poetry corner a national colour along with the Kashmiri touch.

The Tenth Issue is simply a perfect picture of local and the global. The Literary Magazine is enriched with contributions from varied parts of India and Europe. LitStream literary desk focused on Noor-e Nooran which made the cover story. Professor Muhammad Aslam began a series of writing on Habba Khatoon which enchanted the readers. Wani Nazir's book review this time Kavya Sharma's book To Nadiyaa is excellent. Eminent short story writer Vandana Kumari Jena who is also a retired IAS officer, wrote a short story 'The Lost Childhood'. Manshi Tiwari a young teacher wrote the nice story 'The Light'.

Among non fictional writings Prof Dr. Shiv Sethi's literary critique on P.V Laxmiprasad's From Epidemic to Pandemic, and Iftikhar Imran's translated story Chochikatur (The Frenzy) written by Mushtaq Ahmad Mushtaq, and Rahil Rasheed Wani's musing on The Real Purpose of Education are all thought stirring. The poetry corner was more enriched by eminent poets from all over Europe, Asia and Egypt, and Dr. Perwaiz Shahiariyar, Angela Kosta, Elpiola Luka, Franco Colozzo, Abdul Latif Moubarak, Sushant Thapa, Maria Kolovou Roumelioti, Steffen Horstmann, Elisabetta Bonaparte, Amoranth Coylle

These issues show the constancy of contributors to the LitStream and also introduction of a new group of writers and poets. Translation of Urdu and Kashmiri poems along with ghazals and short Urdu gave the magazine a unique status. Eleventh Issue continues the Noor-I-Nooran and Habba Kahtoon articles, and short stories *The Weird Mountains*.

by myself, and 'The Silent Poet' by ShahNawaz Nazir and the translated story of Tariq Shabnam 'Chaand Aur Baadal' by Imran Rather and Mujtaba Farooq's trendy fiction Timeless Time a new genre of psychological fiction along with musings from Dr. Supriya Shukla and non fiction article Dreams and Literature by Dr. Rayees Ahmad Bhat. Poetry corner accommodates Anna Keiko of China, Eminent French teacher poet Vandana Kumar, Ali Shaida, Wani Nazir, and Dr. Mallika Tripathi.

Issues from 12 to 19 will be discussed in details in the next article.

From the very beginning, LitStream aimed to respect local literary traditions while also opening its pages to national and global writers writing in different genres. Over the weeks, LitStream grew steadily. Each issue carried poetry, short stories, literary criticism, book reviews, and reflective essays. Writers from Kashmir, across India, and from outside the country are constantly contributing their work.

By the end of 2025, LitStream had published its 19th issue, establishing itself as a regular weekly literary supplement. This journey would not have been possible without the contributors who regard LitStream as a family. The literary bonding of the creative souls is built through their words, ideas, and trust. Poets, storytellers, critics, academicians, and authors have reposed their firm faith in this platform and shared their work with confidence. Their faith in the editorial vision of LitStream gave it strength and direction. Without their support and participation, LitStream could not have survived, or improved so rapidly.

The editor's role has been supported and strengthened by this trust. The relationship between contributors and the editorial desk has been one of mutual respect, where quality and sincerity have always come first. LitStream has focused on literature and culture studies alone. It has stayed away from controversy and chaos, choosing instead to give space to creative writing and thoughtful criticism. Its aim has been to encourage serious reading and honest literary engagement.

As 2025 comes to an end, Lit-Stream stands as a collective effort. It is not just a supplement, but a shared literary space created by writers, shaped by readers, and sustained by trust. The journey from the first issue to the nineteenth has shown that literature still matters when it is handled with care and commitment. The stream continues to flow, carrying voices from Kashmir to the wider world, and bringing the wider world back to our readers one piece of writing at a time.

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