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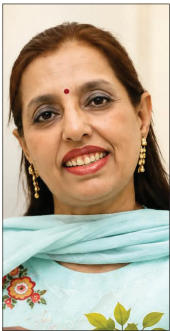
BILINGUAL WEEKLY LITERARY SUPPLEMENT OF DAILY HEADLINES TODAY

Srinagar • Saturday , September 05, 2026 • Issue No: 36 • Volume: 02 • Pages: 16

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Short Stories



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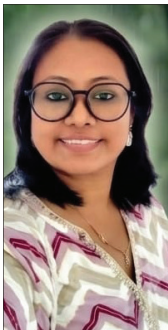
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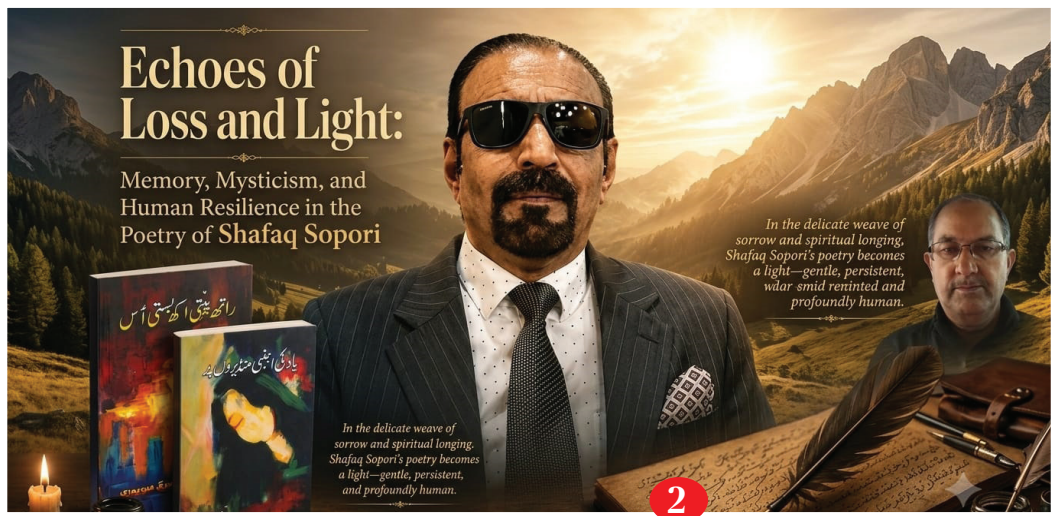


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The Poet
Who Crosses
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Professor Aslam sahib

I. Introduction

Shafaq Sopori (uses Shafaq as a pen name) is a contemporary Urdu poet, fiction writer, critic, and linguist from Kashmir. Born in 1959, Shafaq holds an MA and a PhD in Urdu. For his doctoral research, he chose an unexplored field of study: Elements of Indian Music in the Urdu Ghazal. To ensure the authenticity of his research, he spent five years studying Hindustani classical music and earned a Senior Diploma. Shafaq tells me:

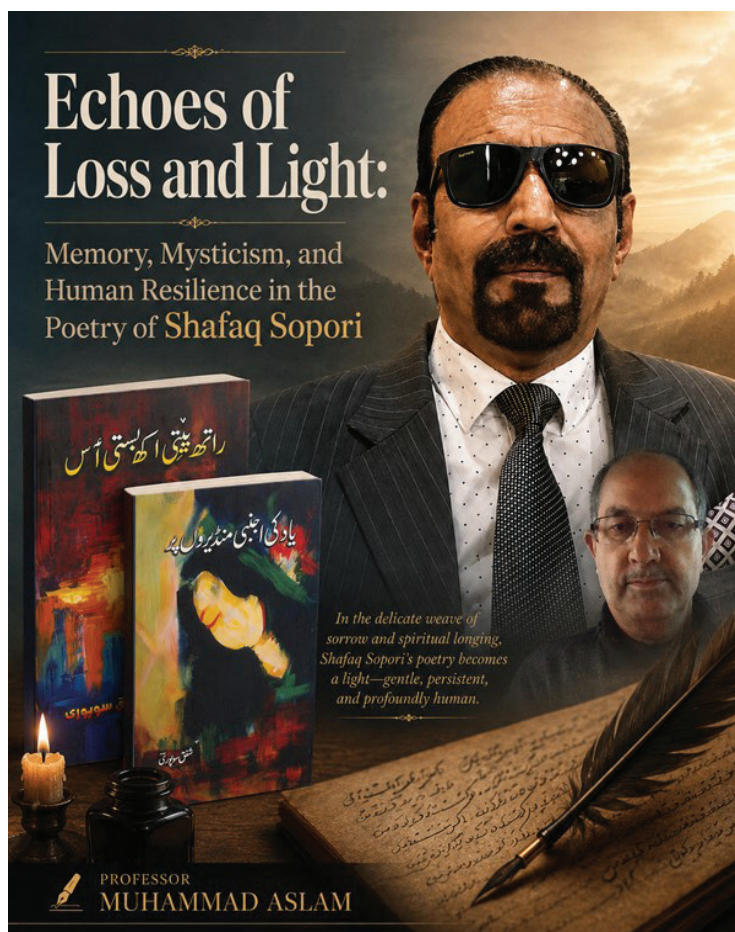
Without practical knowledge of music, it would have been impossible to undertake meaningful research on this subject...The intricate relationship between music and poetry subsequently became the central focus of my academic pursuits...no other scholar writing in Urdu has explored this subject with the same combination of practical musical training and sustained academic research.

Shafaq joined the Higher Education Department as an Assistant Professor in 1993 and retired in 2019. He writes primarily in Urdu and has published eight novels, a collection of short stories, a collection of humorous and satirical writings, and a dictionary.

His debut Kashmiri poetry collection *rath yetee akh basti aes* (Only Yesterday, a Settlement Stood Here) appeared in 2021, followed by the bilingual (Urdu-Hindi) anthology *yaad ki ajnabi munderun par* (Upon the Unfamiliar Parapets of Memory) in 2022. These two collections form the principal sources for the present study.

Transforming the lived realities of his homeland into a poetic vision that is at once regional and universal, Shafaq weaves words into images in his poetry, which emerges from a landscape that has experienced beauty, violence, intimacy, and loss for decades. He is apolitical. He meditates on human existence, where memory acquires metaphysical depth, nature assumes spiritual significance, and everyday life is illuminated through quiet transcendence.

Shafaq is a master of imagery. His images resist fixed



meanings and remain open to multiple interpretations. Although not a mystic, Shafaq often reveals a mystical sensibility. An indirect divine presence permeates his imagery, transforming ordinary experience into a metaphysical insight.

Memory is central to Shafaq's poetry. It shapes the present and functions as a moral force against forgetting. He gives voice to ordinary people whose experiences transcend the particular history of Kashmir to express universal human suffering.

Structurally, his diction is simple yet lucid. His poems are short and rely on paradox, juxtaposition, and suggestive silence. Contrasting images such as fire and unbearable cold, or grief and choral singing, coexist to reveal the complexity of the human condition.

This essay examines how Sopori blends memory, lyricism, mysticism, and history, transforming Kashmir's lived realities into enduring reflections on the human condition.

II. Memory, Loss, and the Ruins of History

Shafaq's poetry is fundamentally an art of remembrance. Memory is a central force in poetry, bridging past

and present, absence and presence. Rather than simply recalling events, it transforms experience into emotional, symbolic, and often spiritual meaning. Shafaq's poems neither recount historical events as documentaries nor reconstruct the past chronologically. Instead, memory survives as a mode of existence: the past continues to inhabit the present, shaping identity long after events have disappeared. Wordsworth defined poetry as emotions recollected in tranquility long after they have disappeared.

Yaad ki Ajnabi Munderun Par (Upon the Unfamiliar Parapets of Memory) presents remembrance as a lived reality. One of the most evocative images reads (p. 57):

*kitne garnu ka hijr jhela hai
in darkhton main kuch
makanon ne*

yaad ki ajnabi munderun
par

ham ko pehchana aashy-
anon ne

The exile of countless ages
has been borne by

A few homes among these trees.

Upon the strange parapets
of remembrance,

It was the forsaken nests
that still knew who we were.

These couplets express the

enduring pain of displacement while affirming the permanence of belonging. Through the images of darkhton (trees), makanun/aashyanun (homes or houses; mark the use of synonyms), and the yaad ki muderon (parapets of memory) shafaq suggests that although people may be separated from their homeland by migration, conflict, or time, their homes continue to recognise them. Separation estranges the past, but it cannot erase belonging.

Rather than narrating historical catastrophes directly, Shafaq evokes their emotional aftermath through absence. In *Only Yesterday, a Settlement Stood Here* (p. 50), he writes:

baskeenah kanh vuch na
magar

raath yeti akh basti aes

Not a single resident was in sight—

Only yesterday, a settlement stood here.

The poem juxtaposes two moments—"today," when the settlement has vanished, and "yesterday," when it flourished—without explaining what caused its disappearance. The omission intensifies the emotional impact, compelling readers to imagine the catastrophe themselves. Although rooted in Kashmir, the poem transcends its local setting, recalling every place where violence, migration, or disaster has erased communities while leaving memory intact.

The same vision recurs elsewhere (p. 65):

yemi basti haenz tshopa che
vanaan

yeti kar taamath aara
grezaan aes

The silence of this settlement bears witness:

Once, its rivers and streams
surged with untamed life.

Here silence itself becomes testimony. What survives is not physical habitation but memory.

Memory also appears as an intimate, living presence when Sopori writes (p. 61):

ae meri yaad ki udaas
zameen,

*kyon mera bojh dho rahi hai
tu?*

O melancholy soil of my
memories,

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continuous. Shafaq's mystical experience is similarly unending; there is no closure either to the experience or to his poetry.

In short, Shafaq's poetry reveals a profound sacramental vision of the world. His symbols—tree, lamp, flower, moonlight, boat, current, and stream—invite readers to move beyond surface appearances and contemplate deeper spiritual realities.

IV. Love, Violence, and the Human Condition

Shafaq tells me that “the subject matter of most of the poems and ghazals included in *rath yeti akh basti aes* (Only Yesterday, a Settlement Stood Here) is closely connected with [the circumstances in Kashmir)” and that he “chose to express [his] emotions and feelings in Kashmiri,” a fact which “[u]nfortunately, the critics overlooked.” Shafaq is apolitical, yet he could not remain untouched by the violence of the 1990s, when surveillance, curfew, displacement and constant awareness of mortality transformed everyday life in Kashmir. His Kashmiri anthology opens with the following ghazal (p. 9):

1 asi hey shaman nerun os
raatas baazar myenun os
2 kaalai log kaerfyu, subhan
vaarah kael' asi samkhun os
3 manza baasan zan vadan lahar
manz baasan zan vanavun os
4 pheranuk naal kalas peth heth
rooda jeren manz pherun os
5 kotah mushkil golen manz
paan khodavas pushrun os

1 We were supposed to leave at
fading light,

To wander the bazaar through the
night.

2 A curfew fell and everything went wrong—

Just as we were to meet again after so long.

3 At times, I seem to hear weeping;
At times, a chorus singing.

4 With the pheran collar drawn over the head.

We had to wander through the pouring rain.

5 Amid the hail of bullets, hard it
was

To leave ourselves unto the mercy of
God.

In just five couplets, Sopori evokes one of the darkest periods of Kashmir's history, when violence claimed lives and rapidly eroded the region's social fabric. The ghazal is a moving meditation on love, separation and violence, blending personal longing with the realities of curfew and militarisation, so that individual grief becomes a reflection of collective suffering.

The opening couplet recalls an ordinary social world before militancy: “stepping out at dusk” and “wandering in the bazaar” suggest companionship and

everyday freedom. The expression *asibeuloh* (“we were supposed to”) immediately signals that such simple acts have become impossible. Although *baazar myenun* is colloquially used for aimless wandering, here it signifies the intimacy of shared time.

The second couplet explains why the anticipated meeting never takes place. Curfew descends just as the long-awaited reunion is to occur, transforming hope into denial and revealing how political violence intrudes upon the most intimate aspects of life.

The third couplet juxtaposes “weeping” with *vanavun* (the traditional Kashmiri women’s wedding chorus), suggesting that grief and celebration coexist in conflict zones. As a Kashmiri poet Janbaz Kishtiwari writes:

kaensi hinz baraāt yivan
kaensi hyund jinaza nivan
kaensi aasaan maeziraat
naazneen yara myani yi chu mulaqat
Here, bridal songs fill every street;
There, a coffin passes by in peace.
Somewhere, it is a henna night.
My sweetheart, such is mortal life:
A ceaseless dance of bond and flight..

The fourth couplet captures life under surveillance. The pheran (a traditional Kashmiri loose cloak worn mostly in winters), symbolizes both vulnerability and protection; pulling its collar over one's head shields against the rain while expressing the determination to continue despite fear and uncertainty.

The final couplet brings together helplessness and faith. Amid flying bullets, the poet finds it difficult to entrust himself entirely to God's mercy. Islamic thought teaches that trust in God (*tawakkul*) must be accompanied by prudent action. Prophet Muhammad expressed this principle when he advised, "Tie her [the camel] and trust in Allah" (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2517). Similarly, Shafaq suggests that survival demands both human effort and divine reliance. The ghazal ultimately stands as a testimony to the endurance of love and faith in the face of prolonged political upheaval.

Throughout the poem, Sopori integrates love, suffering and faith, affirming that violence may wound human life but cannot extinguish the possibility of affection, hope and spiritual trust.

Conclusion

Shafaq's poetry represents one of the most compelling achievements in contemporary literature because it unites regional specificity with universal human significance. His poems emerge unmistakably from the cultural landscape of Kashmir, yet they never remain confined within geographical boundaries. Through symbolic richness and emotional precision, these local realities become vehicles for exploring questions that concern humanity as a whole: the persistence of memory, the fragility of

home, the endurance of love, the mystery of faith, and the ethical demands imposed by suffering.

The unifying principle of Shafaq's poetic universe is the transformation of lived experience into symbolic insight. His landscapes are at once physical and spiritual; flowers signify both beauty and innocence; lamps illuminate domestic interiors while evoking divine consciousness; rivers flow through Kashmir even as they suggest perpetual renewal; and homes shelter families while embodying civilisation itself. The deepest truths are expressed not through abstract propositions but through concrete images.

Equally remarkable is Shafaq's moral imagination. He restores individuality to those whom violence threatens to render anonymous. The abandoned village, the praying mother, and the lovers walking through rain remain unforgettable because they are presented not as political emblems but as fully human presences whose dignity resides in their ordinariness.

His poetry is also profoundly shaped by a mystical sensibility rooted in the spiritual traditions of Kashmir and the wider Indo-Persian world. Without becoming doctrinal or didactic, his poems suggest that visible reality is permeated by unseen meanings. Nature becomes revelation, memory becomes prayer, silence becomes contemplation, and love becomes an expression of divine trust. Transcendence is encountered not apart from daily life but within it.

Stylistically, Shafaq's work is distinguished by remarkable economy. He relies on suggestion rather than explanation, paradox rather than assertion, and symbolic imagery rather than rhetorical ornament, inviting readers to contemplate in order to unfold deeper meanings.

Ultimately, Shafaq is a poet of ethical remembrance. His work resists the erasures of history through a compassionate attention to ordinary lives. By preserving villages, flowers, lamps, children, prayers, streams, and forgotten blessings within the enduring space of poetry, he preserves something even more fundamental: the moral imagination through which humanity continues to recognise beauty amid suffering, hope amid loss, and light amid encroaching darkness.

This rare fusion of lyric grace, symbolic subtlety, spiritual depth, and ethical seriousness places Shafaq among the most significant contemporary voices in Urdu and Kashmiri literatures. His poetry reminds us that literature reaches its highest purpose not merely by recording the world as it is, but by revealing the deeper humanity that endures even when history appears determined to extinguish it.



Mushtaque B Baro

A surprise dashed onto our balcony: a stray cat started to roam around. It was a clear indication of a threat to our family's darling pigeon. We ignored it initially, but after a moment's pause, the children were the first to react.

"If that cat comes anywhere near our balcony again, she's going to regret it," my son announced, his verdict loud and clear.

Taking cues from her brother, the little princess hopped onto the table. “He’s right. We have to protect the pigeon. That cat has to go!”

I was shocked at how hasty their decisions could be.

"Maybe the little cat was roaming randomly and seeking our attention," I suggested.

"Maybe the cat had her eyes on the pigeon," my better half broadcast her will.

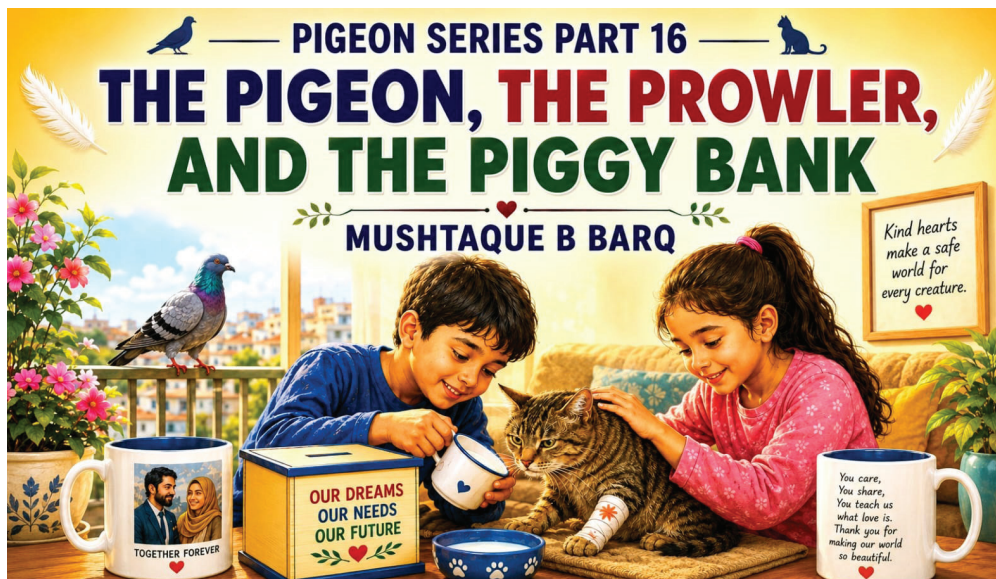
We were divided in opinion. The children ran back toward the balcony, ready to ambush the poor cat. They believed it was a full-blown infiltration. At times I wonder why children make decisions to eliminate things without seeking a peaceful solution first.

I started again, "What if the cat won't harm the pigeon?"

There was a stern response: "What if she had a plan to do so?" my wife reminded me.

"But why should a cat pounce on a pigeon? She too has wings to fly," my daughter raised a query.

"I heard that pigeons shut their eyes when they see a predator, believing that if they can't see him, he can't see them. This is where they make a mistake and make the predator's job easier," my wife narrated a tale, God knows where she'd heard it from, or maybe she'd cooked it up like her unusual concoctions in the kitchen on weekends. Sometimes, a spontaneous response acts as the tiny key that unlocks the heaviest of doors. She had done it before, and once again, her unconventional imagination calmed my restless mind. Such notions work wonders when you embrace them, yet they only deepen the agony when cast aside. In a jiffy, a stick, a coil of rope, and a water pistol were placed on the balcony. I had no idea what they were exactly planning, but one thing was clear: they weren't taking any chances with the bird's security. All of this was being done based on assumptions. In the meantime, the cat returned, limping in pain. We were all taken by surprise: her leg was bleeding. The one who



had brought the water gun to shoot at her was the first to grab the first aid box. The next move was even more humane: my son rushed to the kitchen and came out with a mug of milk, hardly realizing it was my favorite mug, the one I had received as a birthday gift from my wife, with our wedding photo printed on its side.

The cat was received with such love that I felt the pigeon had flown clean out of their imaginations. Once the dressing was done, the milk was offered and taken in the living room. There was no fear of her now; they had entirely forgotten their own plans for war. What I loved deeply in that moment was the tenderness they offered. Just a while ago, this same cat was public enemy number one. Now, a simple wound had melted their fierce resolve, and they were applying medicine with the focused dedication of experts.

While the cat was being nursed, the pigeon perched nearby. As my daughter moved the injured cat onto her lap, the pigeon hesitated and flew away. But once she kept the cat indoors, the pigeon swooped back down for its grains, though the tension in the bird was visible. She ran back and took the cat outside; the cat, looking at the pigeon, had her bristles erect. The bird sensed it too. We were just watching how animals and birds react in the presence of human beings. It took them only a jiffy to understand that they were in safe hands. The pigeon came down and took the grains while the cat sat there watching it all. The unusual tale my wife had narrated now lay scattered on the floor; the bird kept its eyes open, and the cat simply sat there enjoying the sheen of its feathers.

Just after the pigeon had its fill, the cat once again became the talk of the living room.

“How can we leave the cat in such a situation?” my daughter suggested. I read the plea written on her face; she was looking for my approval.

"Yes, how can we afford to let her go?" I responded.

Her face lit up, her eyes filled with joy.

My son was still in a dilemma, wondering whether to let the bird stay exposed to danger or to encourage his sister in finding a new pet.

"I wonder how an old love can be put at risk by nursing a new one," he whispered.

It took my children a minute to decide that the cat would be adopted, just like the pigeon. I approved it. My better half, realizing her disagreement would not be entertained, took the safest way out and stood by the decision.

God knows why I felt a bit sad finding the mug bearing our wedding picture left over there on the kitchen counter. I picked it up and started to wash it, but my wife almost pounced on me and snatched it from my hand. She felt my pulse.

"Don't scold the kids," I requested.

Her wrath found a freezer within her, and she calmed her nerves. But the mug that had sat there for so many months was removed and placed high up on the shelf. My son sensed it; he nudged his sister, and they decided on a secret plan I couldn't quite decipher.

Life settled into a new rhythm with both our pets, but a few days later, a different mystery emerged. Our shared piggy bank went missing from the living room, which shocked me as it was a family fixture. The next tremor that shook me was when a brand new pair of mugs appeared on the table, painted with our favorite pictures. A message inscribed on them melted my heart.

Whenever a need arose, they had their eyes on that piggy bank. In response, we will gladly fill its belly with currency notes as a return gift. You can give even your life to your children when they move you so deeply, both emotionally and rationally.

(Dr Mushtaque B. Barq is a noted writer, poet, translator and currently serves as an English Mentor at Cambridge School. A recipient of several honours, including the G.N. Firaq Memorial Award and the Kalidas Literary Award, Ahad Zargar Award. He is known for his poetic finesse and for promoting Kashmiri literary heritage through his work.)

THE LANE

THAT REMEMBERED THEM

CHANDER M BHAT

*Some friendships
are not bound by
religion, distance
or time.
They are written
in the heart...
and remembered
by every lane.*



Chander M Bhat

There are friendships that begin with introductions, grow through companionship and gradually acquire meaning with the passage of time. And then there are some friendships that seem to have existed even before two people meet, as if destiny merely brings together two souls already familiar with one another. The friendship of Chetan and Shabir (names changed) belonged to the latter kind.

They were different in many ways. Their homes were different, their religious traditions were different and the circumstances in which they were growing up were vastly different. Yet

none of these differences ever entered their friendship. They never needed to discuss tolerance, harmony or brotherhood. They simply lived it.

This was in Murrān, Pulwama, during those years when villages still possessed an intimacy that modern life has slowly taken away. Every lane had a memory, every neighbour had a relationship with the next household, and doors remained open not merely for guests but for anyone who needed help.

In Karafoli Mohalla, Habba Kadal stood a small kiriyana shop.

It was a modest little establishment with wooden shelves, glass jars, tin boxes, weighing scales and sacks of rice, flour, pulses and sugar arranged wherever space permitted. To an outsider it was merely another mohalla grocery shop. But for Shabir, it was the centre of his family's survival.

Shabir came from a poor family.

His father was blind. Age and blindness had taken away his ability to earn, and the responsibility of keeping the

household running had fallen largely upon Shabir's young shoulders. He also had a sister whose future remained another quiet concern of the family.

Poverty had taught Shabir responsibility much earlier than it teaches most young men.

He could not afford the luxury of idleness. While boys of his age might spend their afternoons wandering through lanes, sitting near Jhelum or playing cricket at Id-Gah, Shabir spent long hours behind the counter of his little shop, measuring rice, weighing sugar, making small entries in notebooks and patiently attending to customers.

Yet poverty had never made him bitter. He possessed a warmth that drew people towards him. His smile came easily, and whatever little he had, he shared without calculation.

Across from the shop, beyond a long narrow lane, stood Chetan's house. The lane became the silent bridge between

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them new responsibilities, perhaps new joys and certainly new disappointments. But neither time nor distance erased the memory of the other.

Some friendships do not require daily meetings to survive. They remain quietly preserved within us, untouched by absence.

Then, one day after nearly fifteen years, Chetan came to Srinagar on an official tour. By then he was no longer the carefree college student who had once sat behind the counter of his friend's shop. He was a government officer carrying official files, responsibilities and the appearance of a man who had travelled a considerable distance through life.

Yet beneath all that remained the boy from Murran. The boy who had walked down a long lane towards a little kiriyana shop. Something stirred within him. Perhaps it was not even a conscious decision at first.

Memories have their own geography. A familiar road begins to pull the heart in a particular direction. And so, after all those years, Chetan found himself returning towards the world of his youth. The landscape was familiar, yet not the same. Some houses had changed. Some people were no longer there. New faces appeared where old ones had once stood.

Time had written itself upon everything. But he remembered the way. One does not forget the road to a friend's house. Or to a friend's shop. As he approached Karafoli Mohalla, Chetan's heartbeat quickened.

And then he saw it. The shop. Perhaps the signboard had changed. Perhaps the shelves were different. Perhaps time had darkened the wood. But to Chetan, it was instantly the same little universe he had known in his youth.

And there was Shabir. For a brief moment neither spoke. Fifteen years collapsed between them. They looked at one another as if trying to recognise not merely the faces before them but the young boys hidden behind those older faces.

Shabir stood motionless. Chetan too could not move.

Then one of them whispered the other's name.

“Chetan...”

“Shabir...”

There are moments for which language is too small. They moved towards each other and embraced. Not like acquaintances meeting after many years. Not like two former neighbours. They embraced like brothers who had once been torn apart without being given the chance to say goodbye.

Their eyes filled with tears. No one tried to hide them. What meaning does

embarrassment have before a friend who has known your heart? For some time they could say nothing.

Fifteen years of memories stood between them, the shop, Maharaj Ganj, Sundays, films, college days, the long lane, Shabir's blind father, shared worries, laughter and the sudden separation that had ended a whole chapter of their lives.

Perhaps customers in the shop watched silently. Perhaps somebody smiled. Perhaps someone turned away respectfully.

But for Chetan and Shabir, the world had disappeared. They were young again. For a fleeting instant, Chetan was no longer an officer on tour. Shabir was no longer a man hardened by years of struggle. They were the same two friends who had once sat together behind a wooden counter and believed, without ever saying it, that they would always remain near one another.

They finally sat down. Questions came one after another. “Where were you all these years?” “How is your family?” “Do you remember...?” And every “Do you remember?” opened another locked room of memory.

They remembered their Sunday films. They remembered Chetan managing the shop. They remembered journeys to Maharaj Ganj. They remembered people who were no more. They remembered the mohalla as it once had been. There was laughter too.

Real friendships are strange that way. Even after years of pain, a single forgotten incident can make old friends laugh like boys. But behind every laugh was the awareness of lost time. Fifteen years could not be returned. No friendship, however deep, can recover the afternoons that history has taken away.

Eventually the hour of departure arrived. Chetan had official obligations. He had to leave. Once again, the two friends stood facing each other. But this farewell was different from the one that had never happened fifteen years earlier. This time they could see separation approaching. Perhaps that made it harder. They embraced again.

“Come again,” Shabir said. Chetan nodded. Neither needed elaborate words.

As Chetan stepped outside the shop, he looked towards the old lane leading to his house.

For a moment he could almost see his younger self walking through it, books under his arm, calling out to Shabir, unaware of exile, unaware of separation, unaware that one day those ordinary afternoons would become some of the most precious treasures of his life.

He turned once more towards the shop. Shabir was still standing there. Their eyes met. And suddenly Chetan realised that homes are not made of walls alone. Sometimes a homeland

survives inside another human being.

Years had taken away their daily companionship. History had placed mountains of distance between two communities that had once lived side by side. Houses had emptied, neighbourhoods had changed and an entire generation had learned the meaning of separation.

Yet one thing had survived untouched. Friendship. Chetan walked away, but his eyes were wet. Behind him stood Shabir, watching the friend who had returned after fifteen years and was now disappearing again down the road.

Perhaps he too remembered those Sundays. Perhaps he remembered leaving the shop in Chetan's hands. Perhaps he remembered the carefree laughter of two young men who never once wondered whether one was a Pandit and the other a Muslim.

To them such identities had never needed to be forgotten; they had simply never stood between their hearts.

And somewhere between the little kiryana shop and the long lane leading to Chetan's deserted home lay the invisible remains of a Kashmir that both men had known, a Kashmir in which friendship was sometimes stronger than blood, a neighbour's sorrow belonged to everyone and a poor Muslim shop-keeper could entrust his livelihood to his Kashmiri Pandit friend without a second thought.

Chetan continued walking. He did not turn again. Perhaps he feared that if he did, he would not be able to control his tears.

Behind him, Shabir remained standing at the door of the shop for a long time. And the old lane watched them both. It had once carried Chetan towards Shabir every day. Then, for fifteen long years, it had waited in silence.

That day it had brought him back. But only for a little while. The two friends had met again, yet somewhere deep inside both of them remained the unbearable knowledge that they could never truly return to the years from which they had been separated.

Time had allowed them an embrace. It could not give them back their youth. It could not return the Sundays. It could not restore those simple afternoons when Shabir could casually say, "Chetan, look after the shop till I return," and walk away without the slightest fear, knowing that his brother was there.

Perhaps that is why some memories bring tears. Not because they were painful when they happened, but because they were so beautiful, and we did not know that they would one day happen for the last time.

(Chander M. Bhat, a former Assistant Director, Postal Services, Jammu & Kashmir, is a prolific writer and researcher with over 21 published books. He can be reached at chander1831@gmail.com)

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man, forced to marry the sister of his beloved, tries to substitute by drinking, courting, and marrying a bar dancer; thus he neither becomes an earnest lover nor a responsible father.

Nostalgic recollections are evident in many stories. In the story 'Farewell Aunt Husna', the author shows how education illuminates minds and makes women self-reliant. She feels nostalgic when visiting Hyderabad after Aunt Husna's death. She remembers that Husna was simple, charming, affectionate and communicative despite the house's rigid, aristocratic atmosphere. With her husband's help, Husna manages to get educated and take up social work. She transformed many lives, financed the education of her maid's son, rescued many poor young girls from being married to Old Arabs, a menace prevalent in Hyderabad, and thereby became an inspiration for many. In the story 'Marigold House', the narrator, who was brought up in her maternal grandfather's house during childhood and later forced to leave after his death, visits the place after a long time and learns that her maternal uncle was trying to sell it, but no one was interested. The house and its environs were lying desolate. She discovers a plan hatched by the house's watchman, who had spread a rumour that the house was haunted. After exposing his intentions, she decides to own it as an ancestral legacy. Another story, digging into the past, is 'Jehangir House', an old, grand mansion with a beautiful garden, now razed and replaced by an apartment building, as Mrs Jehangir had developed a fixation that the house had ghosts wandering in it, so she sold it to a builder. The narrator visits it with her friend, as both of them had lived there long ago. They recall different characters who occupied the Jehangir house, besides their own flirtations, and enquire about those occupants. They learn that most of them are dead, and the Jehangir house itself is now a dead past.

A similar situation appears in the story, 'A Requiem for Mehboob Manzil', which is under sale but visited by the narrator and her family, only to find the building dilapidated and the garden devastated. The narrator recalls the splendour of her criminal-lawyer grandfather, her social grandmother, and a love affair with an army officer who dies in war, as well as the servants' tales. The two friendly caretakers, Ahmed Miyan and the bedridden Mahadeo, continue to inhabit the place, though living in penury. Another story in the same vein is 'My Grandfather's House', a blend of Hindu and Muslim architecture surrounded by a garden full of fruit and flowering trees, especially the auspicious Pipal tree, and a deep well that remained

full of water even during drought. The house had witnessed a prosperous joint family, several weddings, a voluptuous maidservant and a witchcraft-knowing male servant who claimed to call fairies. However, he romanced a dhobi's daughter. The narrator remembers her childhood, when she was under her mother's strict watch, and saw her grandfather making advances toward her great-aunt, who was advanced in years and had been brought up in Mumbai. But now the same house looked deserted, and the garden devastated, as the inhabitants had either died or migrated to foreign countries.

Jealousy is the theme of 'Repentance', in which two sisters become such rivals that one snatches the other's lover. The other tries to poison her but is stopped by the thought that the same sister had saved her life in childhood. Thus, base human nature is conquered by elevated consciousness. The story 'Cherished' also reveals another side of emancipated women. Azra walks out of her disabled husband's house and gives up her daughter, as the court is unable to restore the child to her mother. Naaz, the daughter, is brought up by her noble and forbearing stepmother and is a testimony to the fact that environment can alter genetic make-up. The mother, keen to see the daughter at the time of her wedding, asks for permission, and both Naaz's parents grant it, which makes Azra repentant. 'The New Horizon' portrays the determination of a young widow to make her son a doctor, facing a disastrous remarriage from which she walks out and ultimately attends her son's convocation on completion of his MBBS, where she meets her previous husband who confesses his misbehaviour.

'Renunciation' is a compelling story about escapism and retreat into spirituality. A postal clerk unable to cope with his life takes Sanyas, abandoning his sister and beloved, and vows to have no further connection with them. However, when he is confronted by his distraught sister and the child born to his beloved and adopted by her, tears flow from his eyes as he sees their condition, and he faints, overcome by remorse for abandoning his responsibility. Another story, 'Twilight', also delves into escapism. The narrator's father joins Tablighi Jamaat due to indoctrination, leaving his family, while the mother suffers from liver cirrhosis yet continues to yearn to see her husband. Fortunately, he awakens through discussion and self-study of his holy book, which teaches that human service is greater than escapism. So he returns, and his wife is happy before saying a final goodbye. The story, 'Post Office Clerk Turns Into Guava', depicts how the narrator, a Management trainee in the Postal Department, is amused by the fantasy

Kiran Desai renders in her book 'Hulabaloo'. In a letter to her friend, she points out the author's fallacies about the chain of command in Post Offices, the leisure enjoyed there, and the escape of a postmaster who takes refuge in a weak guava tree, alongside tales of the staff's love affairs. In the words of the narrator, "the post office is a microcosm of humanity with its concentration of large manpower." All varieties of people are seen working there or interacting with them. She also highlights the emancipation of women, licentiousness and promiscuity of modern life, illiteracy and atomic explosions getting priority over development.

Humera's concern for Muslim society, including aristocratic Nawabi arrogance, orthodox conformism, short-sightedness, lack of education, early and multiple marriages, rejection due to infertility, the resultant fragile family relations, improvident nature, superstition, belief in ghosts and practice of witchcraft, is depicted in many stories. 'A Different Sky' is a story of cultural shock in which a girl, brought up in the West, is sent back to India and subjected to a claustrophobic, gender-segregated environment; men prefer beards, husbands are supreme, music is prohibited, and women must wear black shrouds. She escapes by affiliating with a philanthropic liberal humanist who helps the poor, the sick, and the needy, and ultimately makes him her life partner. 'Destiny' reflects human selfishness: a man, cajoled by his dying mother, rejects his wife because she is barren and marries again; meanwhile, his divorced wife conceives, and the two face each other in a foreign country after a long time. The man, still childless, recognises his daughter from her features and feels flabbergasted and repentant, while his divorced wife feels pity for him. In the story 'The Missing Bracelets', a playful child puts the gold bracelet carrying an aura of past glory in an urn, and the whole household gets agitated. They call a diviner to find the thief; the child, who has meanwhile died of illness, informs the lady of its location in a dream, which reassures the whole clan.

Humera Ahmed has at times portrayed nature in its minutest details, like a painter, in stories such as The Sunset, A Different Sky, Marigold House, and Jehangir House. Across varied plots, her characters come from different classes and ages, and she captures their idiosyncrasies. Her style is direct, and she uses simple language that grips the reader's heart, making her stories interesting.

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Aks-e-Ghalib: Dast-e-Shifa: The Poet Who Crosses the River of Language



Wani Nazir

There are poets who stay where history leaves them. Some poets simply will not comply. They “Go Over.” Their reach extends across various languages, hundreds of years, borders, and deaths. They come into rooms they weren’t invited to. They sit next to strangers. They get a different weather. When they put words together in one language, they begin to dream in another language.

Mirza Ghalib was always such a traveler.

Aks-e-Ghalib: Dast-e-Shifa, Dr Showkat Shifa’s production, directed and scripted by Arshad Mushtaq, once again places Ghalib’s famous ghost this time on a Kashmiri not Urdu page, from page to body, from poem to image, from history to memory.

Perhaps the most vital transformation of all is that which occurs from the monument into the man. In the beginning, the title is subjected to reflection.

Aks.

A mirror is not the face. It is what the face looks like after a drop of water touches it. It shakes.

It is there because something stands before it, although it can never attain what it reflects. That’s the touchy ground the film walks on. It does not guarantee the complete history of Ghalib. It gives an aks—a reflection; a Ghalib as seen through Kashmiri, through cinema, through the imaginative translating hand of Dr Showkat Shifa.

Dast—The hand is crucial. The object that creates a distance is a hand. The poem is written by hand. Someone else interprets it. Another person flips the page. One opens the door through which the dead return.

Dast-e-Shifa has come to mean much more than a signature in that sense. The entire enterprise becomes a metaphor: the hand of translation reaching out for a poet who has been dead over a century and whispering so softly as he might still have something to say.

We usually treat translation as an act of equivalence.

Words Swap. This sentence for that



sentence. However, poetry does not travel so easily. Every word must have an early childhood.

It holds the soil under its first pronunciation, the mouths which shape it, the history which wound it. So, to translate Ghalib into Kashmiri is not to swap Urdu for Kashmiri as if they were currencies. To put one inner world inside another and wait to see what remains.

What remains is not always the word. At times, it is the pain. At times, it’s great to be silent. At times, a question arises. On certain occasions, it’s just the music.

This is probably the most important part of Dr Shifa’s work. In his translations into Kashmiri, he does not merely make Ghalib communicable to a Kashmiri-speaking audience, but he also alters the distance between the poet and the listener. Ghalib is no longer a question in an examination, a chapter in the history of a literature, a name in the canon.

He appears in their native tongue.

It is not just a language that is one’s mother tongue. It is the first room. The initial cradlesong. The initial point. The first prayer not grammatically formed but heard. When you hear Ghalib, you hear him differently.

Consequently, part of the film’s achievement is that it does not treat Ghalib as an archaeological object. It wants to know about the man behind the name; his tender and soft spots, his love life, his faith, his engagement with politics, his contradictions and so on.

The great poet seems lesser. Becoming smaller leads him to growing larger. A glimpse of the one who had to bear and the poet appears.

This is perhaps the cruel fate of the canonical figures; they lose their pulse.

It keeps their phrases but tosses away their breathing. It recalls its brilliance and forgets the curse of the darkness that gave it birth.

More than others, Ghalib has suffered the fate.

We cite him. We clarify it to him. We instruct him. We transform his sorrow into sayings.

However, there was a man behind the acclaimed couplets who knew that intelligence does not protect one from solitude, humour can be another name for survival, faith can contain doubt, and love expresses itself most powerfully where fulfillment fails.

The movie makes an attempt to return us to that man.

Not the Ghalib statue. Ghalib the injury. Ghalib the spouse. Ghalib the romantic. Ghalib a believer who questions.

Ghalib witnessed the shattering of a century. Although Ghalib is human.

Because it can give time back to a dead person, cinema is particularly suited for this recuperation.

A picture halts. A piece of art retains. But movies move. A hand rises. A face rotates. Someone awaits. Someone goes away. Someone looks at the door that never opens.

The clock resets.

But it is the same area from where the risk begins. Poetry is partly what it doesn’t show. Its most powerful imagery is often unseen. The metaphor’s opening door leaves the reader in front of darkness. By nature, cinema wants to bring forth light.

Ghalib, however, requires darkness.

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He needs the incomplete. He needs the gap between what is said and what is meant.

Consequently, it is essential for the film to present itself not as a biological movie but rather, the imagination of a poet. It enables the filmic Ghalib to remain a reading and not to assume the guise of a final historical truth.

A definitive Ghalib can never exist. There can only be more than one meeting. Reflection again. Listening to another language. Kashmiri hears differently. The difference is the richest possibility of the film.

Kashmiri has its own long history of longing and transcendence, its own closeness to lyric intimacy, to separation, devotion, desire and the divine. Introspection describes the interior, the poet's word description. It is aware of the meaning of love becoming prayer and prayer becoming longing.

When Ghalib enters Kashmir, the room is not empty or lacklustre. A person has been waiting there.

The meeting is not historical in the narrow sense. Ghalib belonged to neither Kashmir nor the mountains. The language, environment, and history of the man belong to another subcontinental configuration. But literature has a different geography altogether, mapped not by borders but notations.

Two poets might encounter one another despite living in different centuries. Two tongues may recognize the same wound. Different accents say the same thing.

That is why it is best to read the suggestion that Ghalib might have belonged to the Kashmiri poetic culture under other linguistic circumstances imaginatively, not literally. The assertion does not relate to heritage.

It is about harmony. What continues to exist when certainty disappears is resonance.

The film's handling of faith gains significance and meaning in this same area. Ghalib's religious identity is intertwined with his intellectual restlessness. To confine him to certitude or to scepticism is to deflate the very tension that animates his poetry. He lives in the challenging neighbourhood where belief and doubt regard one another across the same room.

There is no simple solution. May be it is the purpose of it all.

Likewise, his political consciousness should not get locked up in contemporary categories. Ghalib saw colossal historical disruption during his lifetime. His world flipped upside down suddenly. The old order weakened and a new order came with the coldness of machinery. While the film hardly seems intent on fashioning him into a contemporary version of a political icon, its interest in his political

consciousness seems rather to seek a restoration to him of the dignity of a mind awake to history.

A poet serves as a witness. At times, witnessing is what language can be most political. Every poet has a life beyond his poems. Every famous person has a person who knows him when the audience leaves.

The film attempts to recover Ghalib's ghalib-ness by capturing its domesticity and relating Ghalib's other existence to the poet's greatness as it becomes ordinary where poet is not always a poet where a contemporary name can still be silent in a room.

Film also becomes intimate in ways that literary history seldom allows.

It is something that can make great man wait. It can make him feel uncertain. It can allow him to be loved. He is permitted to fail. It can allow him to just be.

And maybe this is why the film's Kashmiri dialect is even more important than its subject. A language has more than just meaning. It emanates space.

Ghalib enters our life through a vast stream of literature. Kashmiri fosters another kind of intimacy that brings him closer. The translation does not take down the original. It creates another listening.

The poem has been on a journey. The poem has worn new clothes. However, it has not lost its appearance.

The double translation of the film, *Aks-e-Ghalib* is clear from this movement from Urdu into Kashmiri and from Kashmiri into cinema. Initially, the poem translates language. After that, the language medium is crossed.

And every crossing leaves behind something. Additionally, this brings something new. This is the ironic twist of translation. From losing, we create. Not being there can also mean being there. Another voice is acquired by the dead poet.

This is where the film's wider significance lies. It engages in a vital movement away from the restriction of literary inheritance to a specific language community. Ghalib is available for those for whom Urdu is not the language of everyday intimacy. Schools, colleges, universities and cultural institutions there can become new rooms in which this old voice is heard.

However, the pedagogical usefulness cannot be the only judgement of a film. Ghalib deserves more than just a lesson. He merits a situation. Nothingness and ambiguity are what he merits. He deserves the liberty not to be explained.

So, the film is not valuable for reproducing what we know about him, but whether or not it creates the possibility of an encounter with which we did not know but knew.

This differentiation is the first one I make. It signifies that this is Ghalib.

Revelation inquires: “Have you ever felt that?”

Poetry commences with the latter notion. Maybe this will signal the start of cinema again.

Taking a poet who is so strongly associated with Urdu and allowing him to speak in Kashmir is a subtle radical act. This means it is not fixed to definite locations. This object has windows.

A language can give way to another language. A poet can grow bigger by growing translated. A culture can accept with no ownership.

Kashmir does not need to claim Ghalib; he is ours. It just requires a listening ear.

Thus, the film's deepest act may be one of listening. Not representing Ghalib. Heeding the responsive echo. An echo is never the original voice. It is what happens to the voice after the voice is gone.

What Aks-e-Ghalib may finally be is not Ghalib but what Kashmir does with Ghalib after hearing him. The poet enters the sphere of a new language. The language provides him protection. It's cinema that gives him a face. Translation Gives Him a New Childhood.

And for a while, history gives him back his breath. This could be the reason why the title fits so well.

An aks is delicate. It will cease to exist once the light goes. Shift the illumination, and the countenance varies. When the water darkens, the reflection fades.

But as long as it lasts, the reflection is sufficient.

Sufficient to bring back memories that the dead are not all gone. It is sufficiently revealing that a poem can cross over a century and reach us warm. The mystical writer, Paulo Coelho reminds us that language is always a bridge that you may cross. It is not a walled garden, but just a river.

Ghalib has surpassed. Kashmiri: An Original Story and History of Place-Names. Paper to television or film. From the past to recollection. Transitioning from the familiar to the new.

And there, at the crossing, between one language and the other; between one century and the next, the reflection is hardly distinguishable from the face itself.

The poet makes a temporary comeback. Not as a structure. Not as a quotation. But as a human voice in the darkness.

And.

We pay attention.

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REMEMBRANCE

BY MEENAKSHI GOGOI

BY MEENAKSHI GOGOI



By Meenakshi Gogoi

The lashing downpour soaked the greens on earth entirely. Abhinash, after a year's gap, witnessed rains in his hilly town, sipping his favourite cup of Latte at the town's famous café, Suzanne's. It brought alive his memories of Sugandha. He wished Sugandha were with him that rainy evening. But he knew his wish could not be fulfilled, as they had drifted apart. Abhinash recalled one such evening, when he first met Sugandha, who had carried a jute bag full of saplings in her scooty.

The overloaded bag slipped off her scooty after being stumbled over broken pieces of bricks and scattered stones lying on the road, brought by the gusty wind. Sugandha slowly got up, with light bruises on her knees and hands. Abhinash pulled her up and straightened her fallen scooty. He hurriedly picked the saplings and carefully put them into the jute bag. They were not completely damaged, except that the soil at the base of a few saplings was scattered, as the plant wrap plastic was flattened and scratched by the fall. The half-empty road made it possible for him to complete the task speedily. Sugandha thanked him for saving her precious saplings. He helped her carefully tie the bag to her scooty's back seat. The rainy weather was not conducive to them introducing themselves. He rushed to his bicycle at the bus stop. Sugandha put on her helmet and geared

up her scooter. Turning to him, she said loudly, "Hey, I am Sugandha. Thanks again," and left. He shouted back, "Hey. I am Abhinash. My pleasure." Before he could say anything more, she was gone.

Abhinash had not previously encountered a young woman carrying a bag of saplings. Sugandha impressed him. Fortunately, he met her two days later while picking up his cousin from school. She distributed saplings to school children as part of the plantation drive. That second meeting allowed them to get introduced to each other, followed by several meetings to build a good friendship. But for Abhinash, it was more than a friendship. He fell for her, but was not sure about Sugandha's feelings for him.

The tall purple-bloomed Jacarandas, the Gular and Gulmohar trees covered lanes around the café, reminded Abhinash of Sugandha's love for long walks through those narrow lanes, passing through the forest with shrubs and wild creepers across the silent river. Her face would light up as she touched the tiny dandelions and blue wildflowers blossoming along the lanes and on hill-tops during spring. Walking over the glittering dew-drop-covered grass was delightful to her.

Sugandha was truly a nature person who would come to Abhinash's place and drag him to plant a sapling every month. Once Abhinash asked, "Sugandha, aren't you tired of planting every month? Why? I don't get this." Sugandha gave him a stern look. Raising her one

eyebrow with a mysterious smile, she replied, "You will never get. You need to be a genuine lover of nature and its protector to get me on this."

Abhinash nodded and surrendered before her without arguing more. Her street plays and Theatre performances were based on plantation and cleanliness drives, on protection and beautification of Mother Nature. She was popular among school children and college students. A vibrant soul with big dreams in her captivating eyes, Sugandha always amazed Abhinash. He had witnessed her joyful side, which found happiness in little joys of life, by eating Maggi and sipping tea from roadside stalls, purchasing novels one or two at a time from book fairs and bookshops, eating her favourite Doughnuts at Suzanne's and insisting that Abhinash gift her yellow roses on her birthdays.

However, as days passed, Abhinash encountered a transformed, vociferous Sugandha, an environmental activist. After college, she joined a well-known NGO in her hometown, working to combat deforestation driven by development projects in small towns and cities. Abhinash loved her zeal and commitment to protect nature. But at the same time, he feared losing her to activism. Their meetings began to be cut short due to her busy NGO schedule in their hometown and other places. Whenever they met, Abhinash would listen to Sugandha discussing her NGO work. So, there was

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Dr. Ritu Kamra Kumar

I remember an exceptionally compassionate English teacher of mine who made me stand on the dais and speak. She knew that I had the answer to her question but was shy to speak. At first, I was a bit hesitant, stammered and shivered but gradually I picked up the nuances of public communication. Till today I recall my teacher's generosity and goodness with reverence and regard. A teacher doesn't merely teach and research. Her role goes beyond the classroom in inculcating attributes of care and compassion, discipline and dedication, love for the subject and learning with liveliness. She is a friend, confidante, and even a Saviour.

This conviction is shared by an American psychologist Julius Segal “One factor turns out to be the presence in the lives of charismatic adult -a person from whom they gather strength, and in a surprising number of cases that person turns out to be a teacher “Many studies suggest that presence and kind support of a teacher plays a significant role in making or marring the career of a youngster”.

Whenever I conduct Creative Writing Workshops for students or teachers, I often ask this question from both groups and feel elated when students as well as teachers come up with anecdotes how they were guided by their teachers in the crucial junctures of their lives. A teacher narrated that her parents had made up their mind to marry her off when she was perusing her class XII but a visit by her teacher and counselling of her parents by the teacher made them change their decision. The girl could complete her education with emotional and financial support of the teacher and became role model in her extended family and village. That teacher said with pride “whatever little I have achieved today I dedicate it to my teacher and endeavor hard to follow her footsteps” Filled with self-esteem she made her sister-in-law complete her studies when she got married. Such stories are innumerable where teacher has played a pivotal role and her teachings have transcended the four walls of classroom.

Students from sheltered backgrounds may strife and struggle with the transition to the college and succumb to the peer pressure, adopting harmful habits that affect academic performance and mental and physical health. They need guidance. An

BEYOND — THE — CLASSROOM

BY

**DR RITU
KAMRA KUMAR**



observant teacher can at once notice the student getting distracted and disillusioned. She would step out of her cursory role of only teaching and discover the cause of her mental state. She can either help them herself or seek professional counselling for the concerned student to pull out such student from that devastating dilemma. So, teachers who are considered second parent can transform a low esteemed student to a well-balanced human being. Robert Brooks in his book 'The Self -Esteemed Teacher' aptly mentions that teachers have a life long impact on students' memories, both positive as well as negative. More over in today's fast paced world of evolving life style habits ,changing societal expectations and complex family dynamics, I believe a teacher's job profile need to be comprehensive promoting physical resilience and mental fortitude among the students to cultivate a strong poised foundation that can help children survive the undue harmful temptations and let them thrive in all spheres of life.

Education isn't static; it is dynamic and ever evolving process that has undergone tremendous transformations. The impact of the teacher evolves not only teaching of particular teaching skills but fostering among students' self-esteem. Reinforcing self-esteem in the class room is associated with the increased motivation and learning. The use of strategies to foster self-esteem can go hand in glove with teaching academic skills and need not require additional time from teachers. If anything, a focus on self-esteem can create engrossing, enriching and ennobling environment in the classroom and a teacher can revel in sat-

isfaction and sagacity. Self-esteem strategies require only keen sensibility and compassionate demeanor on the part of a teacher

During my Workshops I feel exuberation and elation of participants' {teachers and students} as they share how their teachers have instilled in them values that weren't written in books, weren't part of their curriculum but their erudite teachers weaved them in the narratives of their teachings delightfully and with dexterity. The values and ethics became part of their pilgrimage of scholarship. The students learn to make choices and decision making, communicating with confidence and conviction, caring for others and understand the concept of community service as teachers incorporate such ethics in class room environment. A teacher's role can never be minimized as most of the time, barring a few exceptions, it is positive possessing qualities of a 'charismatic adult 'who not touches students' minds but also their spirits- the way they see and feel about themselves for the rest of their lives. Apt are the words of Aristotle "Those who educate children well are more honored than they who produce them; for these only gave them life, those the art of living well'

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