



Kashmiri Playwrights

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1

1 Playwrighting in Kashmir

Sh. M.L. Kemmu

Kashmir had a rich tradition of writing plays and performing them in Sanskrit from 2nd Century A.D to 12th Century A.D, side by side there were numerous Natya-Charyas professing in Natya and galaxy of scholars writing commentaries on Bharata's Natya Shastra, most authentic being 'Abhinav Bharati' by Abhinava Gupta Acharya (10th Century A.D.), Vide Sholok No: 16 of second Tarang of Rajtarangini, Kalhan informs us that there lived Chandrak Kavi during 2nd Century A.D. who wrote plays of sorts for people of all castes and creeds. Kalhan considers him incarnation of Vyas Muni, writer of Mahabharata. In Abhinava Bharati, Abhinava Guptacharya writes that Chandrak wrote Rupakas in Sanskrit language of Rodra and Veer Rasas. One can assume that Chandrak must have remained most popular playwright of his times. Some of the Shlokas from his plays are quoted in Commentaries and manuscripts of Khemendra and Srivara. It is really unfortunate that the plays written by Chandrak Kavi are not available to us. Yashoverman of Kashmir is also mentioned as Playwright. Shiva Swami was one of the important poets during the reign of Avantivarman. Besides Mahakavyas he had written Prakaran and Natikas. Shyamalik was another Kashmiri poet who had written a Bana type of play, 'Padtadik'. He lived during 5th century. Bana is always humorous and full of satire. It has only one character who narates, and acts through question-answer style. Any actor playing a Bana should be a versatile one in his art. He has to keep the audience fully involved in what he narrates, acts and describes. It is monologue as well as mono-acting. Till date we have only four Banas in Sanskrit language available to us known as Chaturbani, the Padtadik is the earliest one among them.

Kshemendra (990-1065 A.D.) who is considered people's poet, had written three plays, Lalit Ratan Mala, based on Udayan story of Brahat Katha, Kanak Janaki, based on Ramayana episode, Chitra Bharat, based on some story of Mahabharata. Unfortunately these plays have not reached us till date. He himself quotes certain shlokas from these plays in his extant work, Kavi Kanthabaran. It seems that these plays were Uparupakas (Natikas) of Shringar and Veer Rasa. Bilhana (1028-1090 A.D.) was a poet of eminence and is famous for his Historical Mahakavya Vikramankh-devcharitam. He has written a 4 act Natika known as Karn Sundari. The influence of Kalidasa's Malvika Agnimitram and Harshas Ratnavali is markedly seen on the Natika. Its main Rasa is Shringar. A Sanskrit play, 'Prabhavati Pradyuman Natakam' had come to light, which after getting printed in the Press, was never released by the Research and Publication Department, J&K Govt, Srinagar. Because after Late PN Pushp there was no Director of eminence to head the department and carry on research work particularly on Sanskrit and Sharada manuscripts.

While praising the women of Kashmir, Bilhana says that in Natya Prayog (Theatrical performances), they excel Apsaras of Heaven such as Rambha, Chitralkha and Urvashi. Even if it may be considered nostalgic exaggerated statement, yet it reveals that women were acting, and taking part in theatrical performances.

Vishnodharmotar Puran and Nilamat Puranas written before 7th Century are very important to know about socio-cultural life in Kashmir and its surroundings. V.D. Purana in one of its chapters describes importance of Fine Arts, ten kinds of Rupakas, Mudras of Dance, Music, Aesthetics etc. etc. It is encyclopedic work concerning all the branches of knowledge and is a source book of importance. So is Nilmatpuran for Kashmir studies. According to Nilmata Purana there is no festival of importance complete without theatrical performances, music or dance. This markedly shows that people were real patrons of arts and Natas (Actors) and Ranga Jeevina (People associated with theatre) were given their due share of produce, clothes and money as Prekhsha Danam. Therefore, some kind of plays were written and enacted on these occasions. Budh Purnima, Krishan Janamshtami, and festivals connected with Lord Shiva were celebrated and some sort of Theatrical activity was also associated with these festivals. Therefore, one can say that Jataka tales, Shiva Leelas and later on Leelas connected with Lord Krishna and Rama were also enacted on such occasions. Since all such occasions were celebrated by the people the play scripts written and performed were not preserved in the hope of writing a new one on the next occasion. This is true even nowadays, when some one writes play, or a rough sketch and the same is later

on improvised by the actors on their own. Those of the plays which were written by known poets and writers were totally according to the rules of Natya Shastra or at times modified innovations, or total rejection for expressing some philosophical point of view like Agamadambaram of Jayant Bhat (850-902 A.D.)

Jayant Bhat's play is in four acts but cannot be termed Natak-Rupaka set forth by Shastras. It presents different schools of Philosophy as were prevalent during Shankar Verman's time in Kashmir. The scene of the play is Srinagar and the place Ranaswamin Temple in the IVth Act. Four schools of thought discussed in the play are Baudha, the Arhata and the Charvak; the mimansaks and the Nyaya (including Shaiva); and Agama (Panchratra). The hero of the play is neither any king, Devta or Heroic Person but a Snataka, who has completed his studies. There is no heroine and Vidushaka in the play. It defies the norms of Bharat Natya Shastra as well, and the Sutradhara of the play expresses doubt that experts of dramatergy may find fault with the play but it has been brought to him by the pupil of Jayant Bhata for performance and they comprise the audience hence lets the students of Nyaya see the play.

During King Kalsha's reign, low music styles (Upang Geet) were introduced and patronized and Playwrighting received very little attention. Some Prabandh and Charit Kavyas were written and perhaps actors produced and presented on stage exhibiting their talent at singing.

During Zain-ul-Abdin Badshah's time a Charita in Kashmiri was written by Uttasom for performance. Srivera in his Rajtarangini writes, "that Yodhabhatta is a poet in the vernacular language-viz; Kashmiri, and composed drama, pure like a mirror called the Jain Prakasha in which he gave an account of the King." These are not extant. Kashmir has seen many a turbulent times after 12th century, attacks, forced conversions, floods, raids, fires and epidemics from time to time and this has resulted in the loss of Books, manuscripts and play-scripts. Yet the most powerful theatrical form of folk theatre, once known as Bhand Natyam has somehow survived. We call it Bhand Pathar. Even during the Muslim rule, Bhands were the popular entertainers. They were roaming minstrels, not only in the Valley of Kashmir, but also used to cross Pir Panchal range and perform in Jammu, Himachal, Punjab and other areas entertaining people through their humorous plays.

With the spread of modern education and establishment of Institutions in the early years of 20th century plays began to be staged by students in Colleges but it was once a couple of years affair. It was during the celebrations of coronation of Maharaja Hari Singh in 1924-25 that Elfred Company of Bombay was invited to present its plays in Jammu in the open at Purani Mandi for the public. After having seen the plays the then Maharaja Pratap Singh desired to have a local company of actors to produce and present the plays for the people of the state in Srinagar and Jammu.

Thereafter, The Amateur Dramatic Company was formed under the Patronage of Maharaja and plays of Agha Hashar Kashmiri, Betab and other writers in Urdu were presented year after year at Srinagar and Jammu. The plays written in Parsi style like, 'Bilwa Mangal' Surdas, Mahabharat, Bewafa Katil, Khoobsoorat Bala, Yahoodi Ki Larki, Veer Abhimanyu, Achut Kanya and Danveer Karan were produced and presented for about twelve years till 1937. The Amateur Dramatic Club was dominated by Government Officials and Tankhahdaar actors. Other Theatrical Companies were also formed by enthusiasts at Srinagar one after the other presenting the same Betab and Agha Hashir's plays but they performed at Baramulla, and Anantnag as well.

The first Kashmiri, play was written by Shri Nand Lal Koul 'Nana' in the same Parsi Style in 1929 and was produced the next year in the heart of the City of Srinagar. It was based on the famous Puranic tale of Satya Harishchander and was named 'Satach Kahvat' Nana wrote a few more plays, 'Dayi Lol', 'Ramun Raj', 'Pralhad Bhagat' and according to GMD Sufi, all these plays were published. Out of these it is Satich Kahvat which was staged by many a groups till 1955. Dina Nath 'Madrer' and Sudhama Ji Koul were later playwrights who wrote plays in this style but never published them. Shri JN Wali wrote a play about Habakhatoon entitled 'zoon' and this was published in 1950. Shri Tara Chand 'Bismil' was another Kashmiri poet playwright who wrote 'Satach Wath' Akanandun and Ram Avtar out of which 'Satich Wath' was published and staged a number of times by local amateur theatre groups. On the foot prints of Parsi

style, Kashmiri plays based on Puranic tales, such as Prahlad, Satyavaan Savitri, Krishan Janam, Shankar Parvati, Tapasya, Shiv Lagan' were presented at Raghunath Mandir, Fateh Kadal, Chotta Bazar, Rainawari, Sheetal Nath, Baramulla, Anantnag, Mattan and Chattabal till 1955 at different interval of times.

During the forties of last century, some amateur groups were formed and few Kashmiri plays based on social themes were produced one after the other. Shri Triloki Nath Vaishnavi Rafeeq wrote two plays in Kashmiri but the titles were in Hindi such as 'Chitar', 'Samaj Ki Bhool'. 'Vidhya' was another play which was produced prior to independence. It was directed by Shri Mohan Lal Aima, who himself acted the main role against Vidhwa and composed its music. Shri Sarwanand Bhan was a Sports and Cultural Enthusiast. He used to encourage young poets-writers and make them to evolve a play on any burning social topic till an improvised version of the play would emerge. 'Aulad' and other plays were written and presented under his guidance. Those days both play-wrighting and production were result of collective efforts of writers, poets, actors, musicians and theatre enthusiasts. The dialogues were written in simple prose and delivered in realistic style instead of 'Blood and Thunder' style as was in vogue in Parsi Urdu style. The songs were composed on popular filmi tunes. The role of Manzimyore (Middleman arranging marriages) was acted by late TN Tapiloo, late SN Sumbli and Pushkar Bhan, in different productions.

Soon after Kabali raid in 1947 some of the prominent poets, writers, artists and theatrists united themselves under Cultural Front which focussed local issues through their plays and songs. Working scripts for stage performances were written and improvised by the performers. The Cultural Front, later turned into Cultural Conference, emphasised progressive trends and brought young writers and theatre artists into its fold and an awakening to create peoples theatre to present local issues on stage through short musicals and open air performances. Most of the artists and performers associated with the Conference got appointed in Radio Kashmir, Srinagar and writing for stage received a jolt but for very short time.

Shri Dina Nath 'Nadim wrote his first Kashmiri Opera 'Bombur Yambarzal' in 1953, which was produced the same year and presented at the Nedous Hotel and SP College Hall. He wrote 'Heemal Nagirai' with Noor Mohammad 'Roshan' in 1956 which was presented at Hazooribagh Open Air Theatre constructed for the purpose by Jashan-e-Kashmir Committee. Both these operas were directed by Shri Mohan Lal Aima. He also composed music and some songs proved so popular that these are sung even now, with vigour, interest and involvement.

Three Kashmiri plays written by late Ali Mohd Lone, Shri Amin Kamil and Noor Mohammad Roshan were published by the State Information department during these very years. The plays related to the floods--their effects and devastation, and measures to control it with peoples involvement. Out of these only one 'Wiz Chi Saney' by late Ali Mohammad Lone was presented through State Cultural Conference in different villages. Shows were government sponsored.

Till 1960 there were only a couple of writers writing for the stage but the scenario completely changed from 1962 with the construction of Tagore Hall in Srinagar. Now a proscinium theatre with modern lighting system was available for state performances. Simulatenoulsy with the establishment of J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages in 1958 the theatre activity remained dull till 1964 when Drama Competitions/Festivals became annual feature both in Srinagar and Jammu. Academy also conducted Theatre Workshops from 1970 and Playwrighting workshop thereafter. More than a dozen playwrights emerged and their plays were enacted in the festivals and Tagore Hall became a centre of activity.

Ali Mohammad Lone and Pushkar Bhan were regularly writing Radio Plays, Shri Lone adapted a few Russian plays in Urdu and later on began to write in Kashmiri, first for radio and thereafter for stage. After Wiz Chi Saney, he wrote Suya as Radio Play in Urdu and later on re-adopted it for stage in Kashmiri in an elaborate way. His Taqdeersaaz exposes the socio political beahaviour of Free Thinkers of Society for personal gains and ambitions, simple hypocrisy. Suya is a historical play in which Sutradhar is an associate character from begining to end. Durlabh Pandit is his third play in Kashmiri, a character play.

Pushkar Bhan wrote a serial of plays entitled Machamma-on unemployed youth, having fantastic dreams to serve his parents but fails at every attempt to attain his ambitions. It was only "Hero Machamma" which was staged a couple of times and Abhinav Bharati's production ran for 25 nights. Bhan wrote several plays in collaboration with late Shri Som Nath Sadhu, such as Chapath, Grand Rehearsal. Besides being humorous, these are social and reformist in content.

Sajood Sailani has been constantly writing for both Radio and Stage. His Shihul Naar, Rata Kreel, Gata Reni, Ropyi Rood, Kajey Raat Gashi Taruk and Utra Buniyul remained successful on stage for their being mixture of fantasy, humour and pungent.

Avtar Krishen Rahbar, virtually a short story writer began to write plays first for Radio and then adapting them for stage. His plays were mostly on current topics concerning society such as Bu Chus Choor, Aulad, Talash, Vola-Harish, etc. He could not bring out any collection till date and these plays remained dramatic exercises. He wrote a play on "Budshah" as well.

Prof Hari Krishen Koul has written "Dastar", a humorous character play, "Yeli Wattan Khur Chu Yivan", a social play about present day family crisis and "Natuk Kariv Band", an experimental play.

Mohammad Subhan Bhagat, a Bhand artist, wrote Taqdeer, Yeti Chu Banawavun, Poz Apuz, three rural plays and Kani Shechey, Mantini Legi Panzoo and other plays in Kashmiri folk style. Now Ghulam Rasool Bhagatyar has brought out his collection of folk plays, "Civil Kina Sarkari" in 1996.

Moti Lal Kemu started writing plays at an advanced age first in Hindi and later on in Kashmiri. He has so far brought out 8 collections of plays, out of which Trunove, Tshai, Lal Bo Drayas Lol Re, Natak Truche and Tota Te Aina have won him awards. His Dakh Yeli Tsalan after being translated into Hindi was produced by the National School of Drama Repertory Company entitled 'Bhand Duhayee' and its 34 shows have been presented till date at Delhi, Bhopal, Calcutta and other cities.

Ghulam Rasool Santosh (late), a poet and playwright was also first writing for the Radio and thereafter adapted his plays for Stage. His Akanandun, But Ta Buldozer were staged.

Shri Radha Krishen Braroo has written two Kashmiri plays in Folk Style, Yahoo and Reshivar--

Shri Ashok Kak has recently brought out his collection of plays Sath Sodur and he is some times seen to get them enacted.

During the last century there were vividly four trends, in Kashmiri play-wrighting musical operas like Bombur Yamberzal and Vitasta, Folk style plays like Manzil Niku, Haram Khanuk Aina, Mangai, Mantini Legi Panzoo etc, experimental like But Ta Buldozer, Lal Bo Drayas Lol Re, Natuk Kariva Band, Chare-Pathar, Comic-humorous with social content like Chapath, Grand Rehearsal, Kane Shaicha Ropyee Rood etc.

The militancy in 1989 gave a final blow to all this activity. Tagore Hall was damaged with grenades and bombs. Best of the playwrights, actors, theatrists were part of the exodus of 1990 and got scattered in the country.

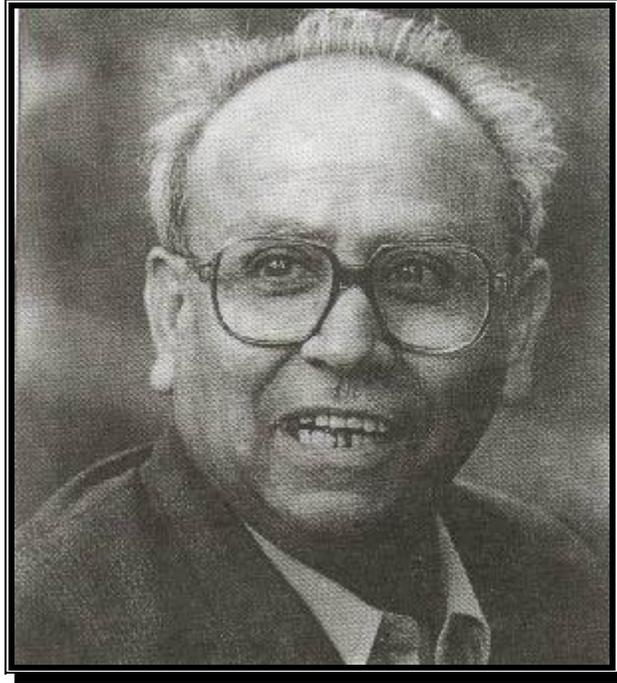
During its journey of 70 years Kashmiri playwrighting attained its high and low standard and some of the plays were translated into Hindi as well. So far about 25 books of Kashmiri plays, (3 one act collections included) are published in Kashmiri. Unfortunately, during the last century all the stageable plays were not published and preserved with loyalty perhaps because neither there is book purchasing public around nor regular theatre activity. so in view, after all a play is to be enacted on stage for people. A playwright has to tread a long distance to attract and inspire the actors to choose his play for production so that the audiences share aesthetic experience.

Kashmiri is a spoken language since 8/9th century and has its literary masterpieces too. Even after 54 years of independence Kashmiri language is neither a medium of instruction in Kashmir nor taught as a subject in schools though it has been recognised by the Constitution of India and is placed sixth in the 8th schedule. All the dailies in Kashmir are published in Urdu and English and none in Kashmiri. The State Academy runs two Institutes of Music and Fine Arts, one each at Jammu and Srinagar but has no plans to teach Dramatics.

Kashmir is facing a proxy war and attempts are being made to destroy the very Kashmiri ethos. When there are no actors, no theatre groups and readers, for whom should a playwright write? When government is not interested in running a Theatre Arts Institute and preserve and promote the traditional Bhand Pathar, how much time it will take to get extinct? When the Media programmes are attacking the very roots of rural and traditional culture, can our folk culture and theatre survive? Yes mediocre writing for TV and Radio will attract the writers as long as money is readily available for writing. But writing for theatre will be a talk of the past.

Source: Kashmir Sentinel, Panun Kashmir

2 Moti Lal Kemmu



Moti Lal Kemmu

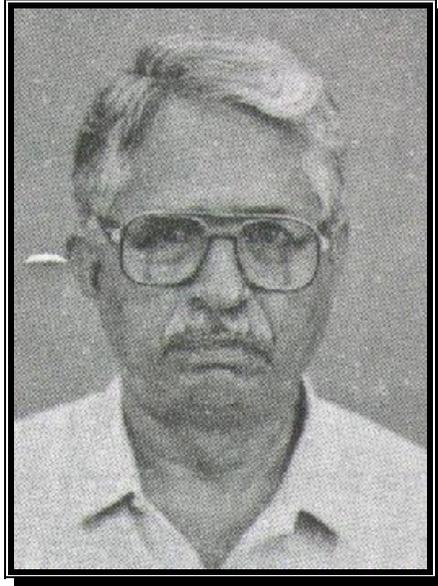
Born in 1933 in Srinagar, Shri Moti Lal Kemmu graduated from Jammu and Kashmir University in 1953. He received specialized training in Drama and theatre from Prof. C.C. Mehta at Baroda University from 1961 to 1964 under a Govt. of India scholarship. Later he served in different capacities, in the cultural establishment of Govt. of Jammu and Kashmir from 1964 to 1991, during which period he also wrote, acted and directed plays in Kashmiri. He emerged as an important Kashmiri writer with his plays: Teen Asangati Aikanki (1968), Lal Drayas Lol Re (1972), Trunove (1970), Tshai (1973), Natak Truche (1980), Tota Tol Aina (1985). Several of his plays were also translated and produced in Hindi.

He was actively involved in preserving the age-old, dying folk theatre of Kashmir, by reorganising Bhand artists into regular groups, now working in the valley under his guidance and support. He is the founder of many theatre groups such as Abhinava Bharati, Kashmir Bhagat Theatre, Shahwali Lika Rang, Luka Theatre Bombay, National Bhand Theatre, Wathora etc.

Shri Kemmu has also been writing well researched articles on folk theatre, music, dance and culture of Kashmir in Kashmiri, Urdu, Hindi and English, which have been published in prestigious journals. Shri Sidharth Kak's documentary film The Bhands of Kashmir was produced under Shri Kemmu's expert guidance.

Shri Kemmu is presently a Senior Fellow (Literature) of Govt. of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, devoting his time to writing of plays and a book on folk theatre of Kashmir. He has also organised a number of actor's and playwrights' workshops in Kashmir and made significant contribution to the promotion and dissemination of Kashmiri arts and culture. In recognition of his service to Kashmiri arts and literature, Shri Kemmu has been honoured with several awards by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, Rashtra Bhasa Prachar Samiti etc. He received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1982 for his contribution to Kashmiri literature as a playwright.

3 Dr. Harikrishna Kaul



Dr. Harikrishna Kaul

Harikrishna Kaul is one of the major Kashmiri playwrights of the modern era. He started his literary career during his college days in early fifties, writing short stories in Hindi. He continued writing in Hindi till mid-sixties when he switched to writing in Kashmiri and immediately established himself as a major Kashmiri playwright and short story writer.

Harikrishna Kaul's plays are about ordinary people who provide us an opportunity to reflect on ordinary as well as larger issues of life and existence. The characters are real flesh and blood characters that one can easily relate to. The old man *Lala Sahib* of *Yeli Watan Khur Chu Yevan* is perhaps the best example of such characters created by Kaul. This widower and father of two middle aged sons painfully finds himself becoming increasingly irrelevant in the affairs of the family. His futile search for importance in the homes of his two sons ends up in his inability to decide where to go. He has nowhere to go. This character lives in the memory of all Kashmiris who heard the play on Radio or watched it on the television.

Another example of memorable characters created by Harikrishna Kaul is the old accountant of the humorous play *Dastar*. His uniquely archaic approach to office work became a legend and his famous lines *Rama Lagay Chaanya Lilaye* could be heard on the streets of Srinagar years after the play was first shown on television.

In mid seventies Kaul's play *Natak Kariv Band* was first staged at Srinagar's Tagore Hall. This play draws on the epic Ramayana and has Hanumana revolting against Rama's decision to banish Sita. As the play unfolds the audience finds Rama representing the ruling politicians who are ever ready to betray Sita, the people, for the sole aim of staying in power and Hanumana unmask this betrayal crying *Natak Kariv Band*. This play is a milestone in Kashmiri literature and has been staged in Hindi as well as other Indian languages. The chief minister of the state, Shiekh Abdullah saw a performance in Delhi and was deeply moved.

Harikrishna Kaul's characters like the ones mentioned above are still popular in a Kashmir that is fast losing its touch with a secular past.

The exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir valley in late eighties has robbed Kaul and indeed all other Kashmiri Pandit playwrights the platform on which they presented their plays. There are no audiences or listeners or viewers. So his literary contribution is now mostly in the genre of short stories and novels. He has won many national awards for his writings, including the *Sahitya Academy Award*, but has lost his audience.

3.1 Short Stories

3.1.1 Sunshine

Harikrishna Kaul

Contemporary Kashmiri Short Stories

Arriving in Delhi, Poshikuj found herself in a totally new world. She heaved a deep, contented sigh. The best part was that there was no Muslim in sight - everywhere her own Pandit brethren. The vegetable seller a Pandit, the barber a Pundit, the milkman a Pandit. Above everything else, there was deliverance from that fishwife! The 'fishwife' meaning her elder daughter-in-law, the very thought of whom gave her goose pimples. How she would pounce on her like a witch at the slightest excuse! There was a time when no one had dared to take her name in vain, but thanks to that virago, her name had been dragged in mud. Well, God had also 'rewarded' her as she deserved. Otherwise, born of the same mother, why should the destinies of Gasha and Saaba have been so different? Look how Saaba is prospering here, and Gasha? Not enough to eat even. And all because of that fishwife's deserving. No, she would not go back to Kashmir even when summer came, she was resolved.

It was around ten in the morning when Poshikuj came into the courtyard to sit in the sun. Half the courtyard was paved in brick and the other half was turf. Around the turf were flower-beds. Potted plants decked the paved part and flowering creepers hung from the roof of the house. Saaba was the pet name of Poshikuj's younger son Surendranath, who had been allotted a nice 'D-II' type Government house in Sarojini Nagar. On the ground floor were the drawing room, bed-room and kitchen. An open space in front of the kitchen had been converted into a dining room with a table and chairs. A toilet, bathroom and two bedrooms were on the first floor. There was a terrace and a Barsati on top.

Surendranath had gone to England on scholarship for higher studies, and it was there that he had found a job in the Indian High Commission. He had been transferred to Delhi three years back, posted to the Ministry of External Affairs on a post of some importance, earning around a thousand rupees per month. He had been married before going to England, which was a matter of some regret to Poshikuj. Had he been unmarried before going abroad and landing this plum Job, what a catch he would have been! The richest and the noblest of the land would have been begging before Poshkuj now! But what was written down in fate could not be undone, so she never let anyone suspect this secret sorrow of hers.

Poshikuj sunned herself to her heart's content in the lawn, feeling the warmth seep into the sinews of her neck and back, relaxing them. It seemed that her rheumatism from Kashmir was all gone. She looked up to the sky. Its glassy blue pleased her very much. On the upper balcony she could see the washing that Chhoti had hung out to dry. How they shone in the bright sun! The foreign machine was certainly a boon. Chhoti could not have taken more than five minutes to finish the washing and yet how sparkingly clean the clothes looked! Suddenly her train of thought was disrupted when she happened to see Chhoti's undergarments among the washing. And she blushed with embarrassment. Oh God, what must the neighbours think of such immodesty? She got up and began to pace the courtyard. On an impulse she went and plucked some flowers, gathering them in the 'palloo' of her sari. She would take Chhoti along and go to a temple, perhaps the Birla Mandir. They say it was a worthwhile sight to see. It would not take them too long, half an hour at the most. They would be back before lunch. She went in, put the flowers from her sari 'palloo' on the dining table and sat in a chair, waiting for Chhoti to come downstairs. How long she takes! Must have been in the bathroom for more than an hour now. God only knows what all she rubs on that body of hers. Coming to Delhi has certainly changed her, all restraint and propriety forgotten. But still, you had to admit, she is a thousand times better than that fishwife!

After a while, she heard the bathroom door open and Chhoti came clattering down the stairs. She wore fresh clothes - a crisp sari and a matching blouse. Her hair was not done yet, but still she looked better now, not floating around in a gown as she was earlier, thought Poshikuj.

"Oh no, Mataji! What have you done?", the sight of the flowers on the table drew a cry from Chhoti. Poshikuj was stunned - she knew she had done something she shouldn't have.

"Why did you pluck these flowers from the garden? Particularly these hollyhocks?", there was a tinge of anger in Chhoti's sense of loss.

Her daughter-in-law's sharp rebuke hurt like death. And all for just a few flowers! How the woman preens herself on her new sophistication. There I was just 'Kakni' and here she has elevated me into 'Mataji! Mataji Shit! But swallowing her fury, she said in a low voice, "I thought we could go to the temple."

"You should have told me first. There is no temple in this location, nor anywhere near. The places close are the Ashoka Hotel and Chanakyapuri."

"What is that?"

"Oh you wouldn't understand. Come, let us go and sit in the sun." Poshikuj was stung - she seemed to be on fire from top to toe. This daughter of the notoriously stupid Govinda understands, and I wouldn't? The cheek! She needs to be put in her place. Asking for it, she is, otherwise she will walk all over me. No, I must assert myself.

"Do you take me for a complete fool? Don't I know about the Birla temple here, where people throng from all over the place?"

"Birla Temple is very far away from here. Farther even than Connaught Place and Gole Market, it is."

Poshikuj did not believe her. It was only the other day when she had seen something like a temple in the distant western horizon where the sun sets. It had blue domes. She was sure in her heart that this must be the famous Birla Temple. She fumed to her daughter-in-law with a determined look and said, "Then what temple is it that can be seen from the terrace? The one with those blue domes? The cleaning woman also told me that that was the Birla Temple."

"What does the cleaning woman know, Mataji? That building is neither a temple nor a mosque, it is the Pakistani Embassy - Pakistani office, as they say."

Poshikuj was revolted at this explanation from her daughter-in-law. What a fool this woman takes me for! The brazen lie! No one dares to openly mention the word "Pakistan" in Kashmir, even though there are only Muslims around. And she would have me believe that there is a Pakistani office in Delhi, where there are only Pandits everywhere? What a cock and bull story this daughter-in-law of mine is cooking up! But who can argue with a shameless liar? Poshikuj restrained herself, not wanting to get into a fracas with this one and have another scene like the ones with that fishwife. She had no strength to deal with viragoes-silence was golden at such an occasion, she told herself.

It was around twelve Chhoti lit the gas and made rotis. Then she warmed the vegetables which had already been done in the pressure cooker in the morning. She laid the table and placed two tumblers of water on it. She sliced some onions in a plate and squeezed a lemon from the fridge on them. Poshikuj saw the preparations for the meal and said, "Don't set a place for me on the table, I am not having your 'lunch'."

"But why? Do you want to fast?"

"Why should I fast? Let the plates be. Give me my roti in the small basin and I'll have it here, on the floor", saying this, she went up to her room and brought down the rag of a curry her bedding from Kashmir had come wrapped in. She spread it on the floor. Chhoti merely looked at her and brought had a dozen rotis in a small basin, the vegetables in a small bowl. Poshikuj took out a small towel from her petticoat pocket, spread it out and laid the bowl on it. The basin she held in her lap and began to eat with relish.

The meal over, Chhoti went up to her room. She came down after about an hour, dressed up and hair done smartly. "I am going to Miss Kapoor's. I shall be back by three o'clock", she said.

Poshku, did not reply, but her silence made no impact on Chhoti. She merely looked at her watch and left. Poshikuj felt rebuffed. But she told herself not to mind, who was she to stop her? Let her do what she will.

She went back to the garden. The warmth of the sun soothed her ruffled feelings. One could give anything for this lovely winter sunshine! To tell the truth, this was the only worthwhile thing here, she thought. She pulled her sari up and began to scratch her leg. Her eye fell on her feet and she saw the chapped skin and cracked heels. God damn the winter there! How it ruins one's hands and feet! And then she thought of Bittu and groaned. The poor wretch! His chilblains had turned into suppurating sores. How many times I warned that witch to take better care of her son - make him wear warm socks and fur shoes, I used to tell her a hundred times. But would she ever listen? But then, a fur shoe does cost a pretty penny. And what is poor Gasha's salary, after all? Barely enough to make two ends meet. Come to think of it, he doesn't have an overcoat to wear. How he must shiver in the cold outside! It is all a matter of luck, nothing else. She heaved a sigh.

Poshikuj looked around at the flats. All was silence. No one in sight, as if everybody was dead. Aren't neighbours supposed to interact with one another all the time? But here they might as well be living in different countries, completely oblivious of one another! But even if they did mix, how would she understand their foreign gibberish? Besides, the names of these women are equally strange: one is 'Mrs Jain, another 'Mrs Sunder,' a third calls herself, 'Mrs Prakash' and still another is Mrs Something! Just look at this Sikh woman next door. Her daughter-in-law must be my age but still she is called 'Mrs Khem Singh' - God knows what this 'Mrs' means? Well, this city may have something to it, but frankly, what does it have?

She heard the rumble of a scooter, and knew Saaba was back. He came in and asked her, " How was your day, Ma ? You O.K?"

"I am all right, son, May God shower prosperity on you."

Saaba went up to his room but came back immediately. "Where is she?" he asked Poshikuj.

"She said she was going to see Mrs. Kapoor!"

"Which Mrs. Kapoor?"

"The same who does all those things to her hair, I mean the one who is rather fair and slim."

"You mean Miss Kapoor."

"That is what I said."

Saaba burst into laughter, "You never said that. It is Miss Kapoor, meaning Kapoor Sahib's daughter. You called her Mrs. Kapoor, which would make her his wife!"

"Let her go to hell for all I care! How should I know these subtleties ?"

"You will have to learn these subtleties now that you are staying here," Saaba turned to go up but Poshikuj stopped him with, "How come Chhoti is so close to this Kapoor woman? I do not quite approve of her ways, let me tell you."

"Oh come on, she is all right. How does it matter? We have to watch our own interest, that is all."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that her father is a big officer in All India Radio and that Chhoti is trying for a Job there."

"What do you mean? Do you want your wife also to work now? Is not your big salary large enough?"

"It is not a question of money alone. She gets so bored here, it would be a good change for her. And then, if your income increases, is there any harm in it? There are so many needs and expenses, you know. We have a radio, yet no T.V. We have a scooter, but no car."

"You are just being greedy."

Saaba merely laughed. His glance fell on the curry and he asked, "Who spread this rag on the floor?"

Poshikuj could feel that Saaba was angry. Softy she said, "I did."

"Why?"

"I find it difficult to eat, seated in a chair at the table, son."

Saaba said nothing. Soon after, Chhoti returned and he took her aside and the two had a brief consultation with each other. After that they had tea. Then they called a cab and taking Poshikuj along, went to Chandni Chowk. Here they bought a steel thali, a wooden Chowki and a pair of chappals, a voile 'Chikan' sari and a small Shiva idol for her. Once home they served her food in the steel 'thali'.

That night Poshikuj could not sleep at all. All kinds of thoughts kept coming in her mind, leaving her restless. So they are thinking of buying a car. What luck for this daughter of Govinda the idiot ! Well, you had to say that she has brought luck to our family. On the other hand, there is that wretched one, bringing nothing but misfortune to home and hearth! God knows whether Gasha bought a bicycle or not? He was saying that if available on instalments, he would certainly get one. The poor fellow has worn his feet out, trudging from Rainawari to his office every day.

Come to think of it, a quilt is too heavy for the weather here. God knows how cold it must be there. I will ask Saaba to write to Gasha - he must not stay too late. To hell with that Jawahar Nagar tuition work, God forbid if anything should happen to him, we won't be worth a penny. ----

Just think of all that abundance of things available at Chandni Chowk! How many clothes! Such perfect outfits for Bittu. If I had been carrying my own money, I could have bought something for him. Well, if I ever go again I will definitely get a shirt and shorts for Bittu - and a hockey ball. I must also get bangles for the girls next door. And that fishwife must also have a sari or something. Of course, if God should spare me, Saaba will keep me in luxury. He was telling me that he would take me to Hardwar next month. How keen that departed one was to go to Hardwar! But even after death, he could only reach Shadipur. How could poor Gasha afford those five, six hundred rupees for the journey all the way to Hardwar? Had Saaba been here, things would have been different.

So there are Muslims here too! All those burqa-walis in Chandni Chowk. Would they also be feeling the same fear here that is always there?

She heard the door of Saaba's room open and someone walked on the cement floor with rapid steps, Poshikuj recognized the footsteps. After a while there was the sound of the bathroom flush. Curse the woman's bowels, Poshikuj commented to herself, but what could you expect, after consuming gallons of that dal with rice in the evening? The roar of the flush must have woken up the whole neighbourhood. Why, she should have had it broadcast from the radio! Isn't that the place where she is supposed to be working now?

As the dawn broke, Poshikuj left her bed, went to the toilet, had a bath, and came back to her room. Wrapping a blanket around herself, seating the Shiva idol in front, she began to chant a bhajan. She knew bits of the Shiva Mahima Stotra and recited them too. Her prayers over, she went up to the terrace and sat in the sun. The sky here seemed much wider, it was not like the bounded sky of Kashmir, mountains all around and a tiny patch of sky in the middle. Perhaps it was due to this unbounded expanse of sky that people's vision also widened here, material prosperity must uncloud mulds too. One loves to have baths here, so easy to keep oneself clean and tidy. Her thoughts were interrupted by Saaba's call, and she came down. The table was set with cups and saucers, bread and eggs. Saaba, was wearing dressing gown, reading the newspaper. Chhoti came in from the kitchen carrying a tea-pot. She was in a gown-like garment, her hair tied with something that looked like a strip of red cloth. Placing the tea-pot on the table, she went to the fridge and brought out butter and strawberry jam, both of which she proceeded to apply to the bread. Poshikuj ate a couple of slices of bread with her tea. She other two had eggs too. Watching them, particularly Chhoti, eating the eggs made Poshikuj think of Bittu. How thin the poor thing was, yet not even a cup of milk was available for him. If that, mother of his had allowed him to come with me, his health would certainly have improved in this winter sunshine.

The tea over, Saaba went to his room. Dumping the cups and plates in the slim for the 'Lila' to wash, Chhoti followed. After some time both reappeared, spruced up, smartly dressed. Poshikuj gave them an appraising look.

"I am leaving for office Ma, and she will come with me up to the market. I will help her buy the meat", said Saaba and pushed the scooter outside. He sat on it, with Chhoti on the pillion. She put her right hand on his shoulder. Phut, Phut, Phut went the scooter, speeding on the road.

Would Gasha have purchased the bicycle after all? I could have given him the fifty-sixty rupees I have, to help him out. I could send them to him. Poshikuj was lost in these thoughts when suddenly Miss Kapoor materialized before her. After saying namaskar she asked in Hindi. "Mrs. Bhan is at home?" Poshikuj understood the question and replied in her broken Hindi, "market - get meat".

Miss Kapoor smiled. Poshikuj did not like her smile. Indifferently, she said, "Sit - she come soon". But Miss Kapoor did not sit with her, she went into the drawing room instead, sat on a sofa as if she owned the place.

"What does the bitch want here?", Poshikuj said to herself and shrugging for shoulders went to the lawn to sit in the sun. Chhoti returned with her shopping and Poshikuj told her, "There is someone waiting for you inside. Mrs. Kapoor, it is."

"Mataji, not Mrs. Kapoor, it is Miss Kapoor."

"All right, Miss Kapoor let it be! One speaks to her normally and she laughs at one in return!"

"You must have misunderstood. The poor thing is not that sort", saying this, she too went into the drawing room.

Her daughter-in-law did not believe her. This hurt Poshikuj deeply. But it was her own fault, intervening without rhyme or reason. The couple think no end of the bitch. No wonder they do, considering they need a favour from her father. Miss Kapoor, indeed! God knows how many men she must be intimate with, and she is still a Miss, Poshikuj snorted to herself.

Warmed by the sun, Poshikuj had began to doze when a burst of laughter from the drawing room made her sit up. They were laughing at her, she knew. The mortification was worse than death.

She would not stay here long. She must soon find someone to go back to Kashmir with. She could leave within the next few days in that case. And if she could, the only thing she would carry back with her, would be heaps of this winter sunshine!

3.1.2 The Saint and the Witch

Harikrishna Kaul

Translated from Kashmiri by Neerja Mattoo

Tarachand died at five-thirty in the morning. The news reached Ramjoo's residence at seven. Immediately after, Ramjoo, Sonamal and Heebatani left Jawaharnagar for Bana Mohalla.

"Salutations to such a death!" said Ramjoo. "No pain, no illness. It was only the other day that I met him at Habbakadal. And we stood there a long time, talking of this and that. Do you know what he said to me that day? 'Let the weather hold a little, I'll come and spend a few days with you all at Jawaharnagar.' Ramjoo heaved a deep sigh and added, "only goes to show you - how near death is!"

"A fine release for him, nothing but snubs and knocks for the poor woman left behind", Sonamal said, "even the ones born from your own womb do not bother these days, what can you expect from an adopted son? Dear God, let me not live a day without my husband - let me go into Your arms with all the marks of my marriage intact!", she wiped a tear with a corner of the long veil covering her head.

"Poor fellow, such a saintly soul he was! So obliging - always ready to help, be it friend or stranger. So good to everyone! And then he wielded such influence too - seemed to know everyone who mattered, and they held him in such high esteem", Ramjoo elaborated.

"He looked like Lord Indra himself", Sonamal gushed, "his parrot-green turban, almond-coloured shervani, tight-fitting white trousers and feet shod in fine moccasins - how well they suited him! I have never seen his footwear unpolished."

"Well, he was certainly a 'gay cavalier' in his time," Ramjoo chuckled, "don't you remember the stylish angle his turban had? When Gasha was getting married, I - as the husband of his eldest aunt - was the one who had tied the bridegroom's turban. But the wretch had it untied and declared that he would not step out for the bride's place unless his turban was tied by Tarachand!"

"They say that even at this age he would walk up to Hari Parbat every morning," Sonamal touched upon another aspect.

"Not only that - he would spend every Saturday night at the feet of the goddess Chakreshwari; every Ashtami would find him before the Devi at Khir Bhavani."

"What a voice he had! One day I heard him singing bhajans at Khir Bhavani - it was just like so many bells ringing at once."

"He was a Raj Yogi, in fact. While seeming to enjoy all the luxuries of this life, he had attained a spiritual plane too high to comprehend by us. Who knows what secret mantras he chanted?"

"That is exactly what stood by him at the end. They say that all great souls relinquish their bodies in this very manner: one minute they are there and the next, gone!"

"Didn't I say that one should salute such a manner of dying?"

Heebatani heard her brother and sister-in-law's comments in silence. Their words seemed to torment her. She wondered why they could not observe even a minute's silence. How could they be rushing off to Bana Mohalla with such enthusiasm? One would think they were going to a party. Did they not feel even a shred of sorrow at this sudden death - Tarachand's death? She herself was devastated, numbed with grief. Had she had even the least suspicion that Tarachand would be gone so soon, would she not have rushed to him, touched his feet and sought his forgiveness? Would she not have fallen at his feet and confessed that truly it was she - she alone - who was guilty of harbouring the sinful thought at that fateful time when she had almost destroyed a life-time's achievements of a Tapasvi, a rishi like him. She was a sinner, she would have said, and asked for absolution from him. But alas, he had not even given her the opportunity for such penance; Tarachand's death had dealt her a blow the anguish of which would stay with her till death.

"There's no denying that Tarachand was a saint," Ramjoo continued to eulogize the departed soul.

"A saint indeed! A god, I would say," Sonamal corroborated heartily.

"Pure heart, pure eye and handsome like a god - that was Tarachand. And his wife? Ugly as sin. Yet he doted on her, ready even to hold out his palms to receive her spittle!"

"How right you are! A woman like Tarawati? What an absurd match for a man like him. The like of her does not deserve to be called a wife. No looks, no brains, no grace of any kind. Just a lump of flesh trailed by a veil."

"That may be so, but you can't deny that she is the real victim of this blow. Who can tell how Natha will treat her now, whether she will have any comfort from him?"

"What comfort did she ever give him? As she has sown, so shall she reap."

"What can you expect from such a relationship? It is always the same in such cases: the mother never contented with the adopted child and the child equally grunted."

"How can you say that?" Sonamal countered, "Nathji is a real gem. And his wife Shanta - meek as meek can be. The two of them would not allow Tarawati to lift a finger for any work. More likely than not, it is your own offspring who is ready to pluck out your entrails these days" Sonamal tied the sash round her pheran a little more tightly.

"But Tarawati has raised Natha as her own from his infancy."

"As if I know nothing!" Sonamal contradicted her husband, "I did not always live in a bungalow at Jawaharnagar (bless my Saiba for it!). Wasn't I their tenant for all those years? I know every bit of the goings on in that household. Not once have I seen her brow free from a frown - always a sour face, that one. Well, God also treated her the way she deserved. Better be a bitch than barren, that's what I think."

"How does it matter now? Our relationship was all with Tarachand - he is in heaven and the story ends."

"Yes, it was only he who knew how to maintain relations, the courtesies and graces of hospitality," Sonamal had still not exhausted herself talking. She continued, "As for her - the very sight of a guest would send her into mourning - as if her father had just died!"

"Tarachand enjoyed life to the full, not only enjoyed all the luxuries for himself, but ensured that others had them too. Actually he was in government service at a time when it meant something to be in it. Wherever he was posted, he received royal treatment. He did not have to suffer the indignities of this 'People's Raj' too long either - he retired soon after it was imposed on us."

"Oh yes, he certainly did relish all the pleasures of this world. This must have been his only sorrow."

"To tell the truth, Tarawati is not so bad, only she is rather dumpy."

"I did not mean her looks alone every woman cannot have the beauty of a part, but this one seems to be a case apart. Knowing full well that her husband was a man of refined taste, delicate feelings, a lover of cleanliness, tidiness and neatness, she should have paid some attention to her own grooming at least. But she seemed to find even washing her face a chore. Dressed in a rag of a pheran, there she would sit at a window, mourning God knows what. Her hair always tangled, the tresses lank with grime, she looked like a witch indeed - God save us from Evil!"

"But Tarachand never complained at all," Ramjoo said.

"Never!" Sonamal agreed, "he looked after her so well. You won't find such devotion even among the most modern of husbands."

"He was certainly a god incarnate, but his life was wasted and ruined by this witch."

Tarachand's life had been wasted and ruined - the realization of this had dawned upon Heebatani before everyone else; perhaps because her own life had also been wasted and ruined. She had just completed fifteen years of age when she was married. Within five years she found herself a widow. But even out of those, more than three must have been spent in her parents' home.

All that was a thirty year old story. Today Heebatani could not even remember the face of the partner of that brief companionship. With the greatest effort, she could only stir a dim recollection of a vague form: an eighteen or nineteen year old Kashmiri Pandit youth, thinly built, shy. When she used to go up to the store-room to bring down rice or spices, he would follow, stalking her. But the loud shout of, "Damodaraah!", from his mother's powerful lungs would send him scurrying like a dog with docked ears into the small room next door. How stern, how formidable his mother was! Far from giving the couple the privacy of a room of their own, she did not even allow them to exchange a few words with each other. The moment Heebatani returned from a long visit to her parents' house, her husband would find himself despatched to his maternal grandparents' place - so apprehensive was the mother of losing her grip on her son. But in spite of all her efforts, lose him she did in the very fifth year of his marriage, for ever. The mother herself did not survive the son more than a year. For a long time after, Heebatani could see nothing but desolation wherever she turned. After her mother-in-law's death, her brother brought her home. For about a year she was looked after very well, but soon her sister-in-law put her to work, scrubbing and washing in the kitchen. Heebatani thought that this was what she had been made for. Accepting the finality of her fate, she plunged wholeheartedly into the drudgery and chores of her brother's house- hold. Soon after, Ramjoo's relations with his collaterals soured, and as a result of the family dispute, he moved out and became a tenant in a portion of Tarachand's house. You could say, without fear of any contradiction that it was here that a new life was breathed into Heebatani, thanks to Tarachand. He gave up going out in the evenings after returning from work, taking up the task of imparting religious education to Heebatani instead. He would read out the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagwat and Shiva Purana to her. He bought her copies of the Bhagwadgita and Hanuman Chalisa to study. Instead of sweeping and mopping the floors in the mornings, Heebatani now went to the temple, gently pouring water on a Shiva Linga. She also began to follow Tarachand's practice of observing the

Ashtami, Amavas and Purnima* as days of fasting and prayer. On these holy days, she would cook the ritual food - rice and vegetables - for Tarachand herself, simmering the sweetened milk till thickened, frying pakoras and potato chips and making halwa and sago kheer according to strictly laid down religious prescription. After he had been served and fed, she too would eat the same food. Tarawati could not have been too happy with Heebatani taking over these duties from her, but she could not say anything.

Heebatani went on pilgrimages to several holy places with Tarachand. On a number of Ashtamis, she went to Khir Bhavani with him. It was Tarachand who was responsible for her going to Bhavan in Mattan where at long last, she had the shraddha of the poor dead Damodar performed. Once when news came that a Sadhu of great spiritual power had taken up residence in Chandigam, Tarachand took her along to seek his blessings. They stayed at the Sadhu Babaji's ashram for a night. The next afternoon they left for Sogam on their way home.

The memory of that fateful day sent shivers down Heebatani's spine even now. On the way, it had started to rain - a sudden deluge that seemed to crush stones into sand with its fierce power. Drenched to the bones, their clothes dripped wet as though they had both had a dunking in the river. And to top it all, there was no bus for the town at Sogam. Luckily Tarachand found an acquaintance in the overseer of the area. The overseer himself was away in Srinagar, but Tarachand had the chowkidar open his official residence for them. The chowkidar lit the iron stove and hugging its warmth, they dried their wet clothes. At about five, Tarachand went out and bought some meat and asked the chowkidar for some rice, oil and spices. Heebatani went into the kitchen and cooked a meal. After they had eaten, she spread the overseer's bedding for Tarachand. For herself, she took a couple of blankets and lay down. But sleep eluded her. There was not a moment's lull in the rain. The month of July had become as biting cold as December. She tossed and turned on the cold floor for a long time, unable to find restful sleep. And then she quietly slipped under Tarachand's quilt. As her arm fell across his back, he woke up. Finding Heebatani in his bed, he leapt out, went to the pitcher of water, washed his hands and feet and sat down in the classic asana for meditation. Heebatani ran into the kitchen. In that refuge, she dug her teeth into her flesh. How she wished that the earth would open up and she jump into the abyss and disappear for ever. Her eyes turned into crumpled, dried apricots with incessant weeping. For a long time afterwards she could not meet Tarachand's eye. It was God's grace that soon after, they shifted to Jawaharnagar permanently. As they were leaving, there was a bitter altercation with Tarawati for some trifling reason, with the result that interaction between the two families ceased for the next few years.

A long time had passed since then. Heebatani was almost fifty now. Many a time the thought had occurred to her that she should go to Tarachand and seek his forgiveness for her sin. But perhaps the shame was too deep for her to face him - something always prevented her from carrying the thought out.

The road from Jawaharnagar to Bana Mohalla seemed too long even now. She was in mortal fear that they might have taken him away before their arrival.

It was eight by the time they reached Bana Mohalla. Tarachand's body was still there. A flower-bedecked plank had been prepared, and it lay waiting in the yard. There was a large gathering of people sitting on mats around, everyone of them relating the good deeds of the departed. Ramjoo sat down among them, Sonamal and Heebatani went in. Seeing them, Tarawati and a few other women set up a loud wail. Sonamal went close to Tarawati and pressing a handkerchief to her lips, stopped her from crying. Heebatani did not go near Tarawati. She went up to where Tarachand had been laid down on a bed of grass. Taking hold of the dead man's feet she wept profusely, emitting loud cries of, "Oh my father, brother, guru!"

After a while she rose, prostrated herself before Tarachand's body and said, under her breath, 'It is true that I was the one enfolded by darkness. Please forgive me my sin. This life of mine was a complete waste and ruin, let not the same happen to my next one. I must have your forgiveness.'

Tarachand's body, laid on the plank, was carried away at about eleven, elaborately decorated with wreaths and garlands of fresh flowers. Just before the pall-bearers lifted the plank, an expensive shawl was spread on it. Tarawati followed the funeral procession into the alley, weeping and wailing loudly. She

was brought back, a couple of women supporting her. Once inside, she sat quietly for a long time, stunned into silence. Then, all of a sudden, she burst out to the women gathered before her, "Forgive me, my sisters - for fifty years the seal on my lips has not been broken, but now that he has left the house, I must speak. Look at me, even now I am that seven year old, untouched, unravished child bride!"

Heebatani seemed to fall from a great height. It was as though a light had begun to shine upon many a dark corner, an answer given to many an old puzzle. She rose and took the other woman in her arms, and the two women howled together.

The eighth day of the lunar fortnight, the night of the new moon and the full moon night respectively.

4 Bansi Lal Nirdosh

**ख्यातनाम कश्मीरी साहित्यकार
बंसी निर्दोष का निधन**



जम्मू-कश्मीर के लब्ध प्रतिष्ठ नाटककार और स्तम्भ लेखक बंसी निर्दोष का 21 अगस्त 2001 को देहान्त हो गया। वह काफी समय से अस्वस्थ थे। कश्मीर के प्रसिद्ध लेखक एवं पत्रकार पंडित श्यामलाल बली "तीर्था कश्मीरी" के सुपुत्र बंसी निर्दोष का जन्म 1930 में श्रीनगर के बड़ीयार मोहल्ला में हुआ था। उन्होंने अपना लेखन पत्रकार के रूप में अमृतसर से प्रकाशित उर्दू दैनिक "नया जमाना" में उपसम्पादक के रूप में आरम्भ किया। काफी समय तक 'नया जमाना' से जुड़ने के बाद वह श्रीनगर लौटे और यहां दैनिक 'खिदमत' में सब एडिटर हो गए। इसके बाद आकाशवाणी के श्रीनगर केंद्र में हालात-ए-हाजिरा प्रोग्राम के लिए सामयिक विषयों पर आलेख लिखते रहे। इसके साथ-साथ रेडियो के लिए नाटक भी लिखते रहे।

कश्मीरी भाषा में इनके तीन कहानी-संग्रह तथा दो उपन्यास प्रकाशित हो चुके हैं। बहुचर्चित उपन्यास 'अख दौर' का हिन्दी अनुवाद 'एक दौर' शीर्षक से हिन्दी विकासपीठ, मेरठ से प्रकाशित हुआ है। इनकी प्रतिनिधि कहानियाँ

का हिन्दी रूपान्तर 'पैदाइशी गुलाम नाम' से राज पब्लिशिंग हाऊस 9/5123, पुराना सीलमपुर दिल्ली-31 द्वारा प्रकाशित हुआ है इनके द्वारा रेडियो के लिए लिखे नाटकों की संख्या सौ से अधिक है। प्रकाशित पुस्तकें हैं- 'अख दौर', 'मुकजार' (तलाक) (उपन्यास), 'गिरदाब' (भंवर), 'बाल मरोयो' (मैं बाला मर जाऊं), 'आदम घु यिधय बदनाम' (आदमी यों ही बदनाम है)। (कहानी संग्रह), 'सुबहि सादिक', 'अमर कहानी' (जीवनियाँ), 'गुरु गोविन्दसिंह', 'कोमुक शॉयर' (कौम का शायर), आदि।

'एक कहानी' सीरियल के अन्तर्गत दूरदर्शन के राष्ट्रीय प्रसारण कार्यक्रम में 'मौत' कहानी का प्रसारण। 'दोन थॅर' (अनार की डाली), 'रिश्ते', 'गिरदाब' 'तफतीश' आदि कहानियों पर टेली-फिल्में निर्मित।

निर्दोष जम्मू व कश्मीर राज्य कल्चरल अकादमी द्वारा दो बार पुरस्कृत और बख्शी मेमोरियल ट्रस्ट द्वारा भी सम्मानित हुए।

'कोशुर समाचार' परिवार महान कश्मीरी साहित्यकार बंसी निर्दोष के निधन पर विनम्र श्रद्धांजलि देते हुए उनकी आत्मा की शान्ति के लिए बाबा अमरनाथ से प्रार्थी है।

- सम्पादक

Source: Koshur Samachar

5 Moti Lal Saqi

5.1 Moti Lal Saqi is no more

Community loses a veteran warrior on the cultural front



Moti Lal Saqi

Poet, writer, folk-lorist, researcher Moti Lal Saqi passed away in the wee hours of May 21, 1999 in New Delhi after a massive heart attack. Earlier in March he had undergone surgery for a heart ailment at Jammu, and was now recuperating at his eldest son, Vijay Saqi's residence at Sarojini Nagar. The tragic news of his death was received with great shock by his numerous friends and admirers in Delhi who rushed to bid him a tearful farewell. With his demise the Kashmiri Pandit community has lost yet another warrior who was in the vanguard of the struggle to save and sustain its culture in exile.

Born in 1936 at Bijbehara, Kashmir, Moti Lal Saqi enriched Kashmiri language and literature in several ways, and emerged as a major poet and critic in the language while still in his youth. From the lyrical romanticism of '*Modury Khwab*' (Sweet Dreams), his first collection of poems, to the spiritual restlessness and an inward quest for higher values based on faith reflected in '*Mansar*', for which he won the Sahitya Academi award, and '*Mrigvan*', Saqi underwent a significant change in his sensibility as a poet and established an idiom distinctly his own. The traumatic experience of uprootment from his native soil in 1990 found a poignant expression in many of his poems, his long poem '*Marsi*' (Elegy) being a most disturbing document of the tragedy of the Pandits' displacement. His latest collection '*Niry Nagma*' (Songs of the Green Meadows) shows his intense nostalgia for Kashmir and points to the torture of having to live in a forced exile away from the Valley's myriad charms and attractions.

Saqi's contribution as a literary critic is equally impressive, his work on Sheikh Nur-ud-Din, popularly known as Nund Rishi, and the Sufi poets like Samad Mir is regarded as monumental. As a folk-lorist, Saqi compiled five volumes of Kashmiri folk-songs with a valuable introduction and annotation. His numerous articles on Kashmiri literature, art and culture were published in several prestigious magazines and journals of the country.

Moti Lal Saqi was a lexicographer as well, having worked as an editor of the Kashmiri-Kashmiri and Urdu-Kashmiri dictionaries brought out by the J&K Cultural Academy under the Chief Editorship of Prof. S. K. Toshkhani. He also edited the three volumes of Kashmiri Encyclopedia published by the Academy, showing his great acumen as a researcher.

His latest book '*Aagar Neb*' reflects his deep research and study regarding various aspects of Kashmiri culture. Surprisingly enough, Saqi was awarded Padmashri for his services to Urdu literature.

Moti Lal Saqi was also associated with the activities of the N. S. Kashmir Research Institute and had agreed to work for the compilation of the encyclopaedia of Kashmiri culture which the Institute is going to bring out. We at NSKRI deeply mourn his loss which we feel is immeasurably great for a community that values learning and literature above everything else.

Source: Unmesh

5.2 A tribute to Saqi

Shyam Kaul

Poet, writer, dramatist, scholar, researcher, encyclopaedist, specialist in Kashmir's cultural and literary heritage, authority on the Valley's Rishi tradition - all rolled into one - Moti Lal Saqi.

A simple villager, who never shed off his pastoral homeliness, humility and open-heartedness, who never allowed even a grain of false ego enter his head, inspite of recognition, both at state and national levels, and who always lived the lily of an honest and eager learner till his last breath. That was Saqi - ever lively, ever communicative, ever cheerful.

When I think of Saqi the words of the great French philosopher Voltaire, come to my mind. He had said, "not to be occupied, and not to exist, amount to the same thing".

Saqi kept himself perennially occupied with finer pursuits in life. Put your finger anywhere on the literary and cultural canvas of Kashmir, and you will find Saqi's name there, as a contributor, a researcher, an elucidator, a commentator or a scholar. All that kept him occupied were his creative endeavours and his pen seemed to reach everywhere. In these days of pin-pointed specialization, one hardly finds any equal to this man of multifarious brilliance.

When the physical and physiological makeup of his person, especially his heart? prevented him from keeping himself actively occupied, as he had done all his life? Saqi ceased to exist. He died.

Like all displaced Kashmiris, Saqi's soul had been deeply lacerated when circumstances drove him out of Kashmir, the land of his ancestors. Everyone loves his land of birth, but Saqi had done so, sometimes with the passion of a lover, sometimes with the care of a doting mother, and sometimes with the dedication of an ardent admirer. His only possession, only asset and only wealth, was his pen, which he used all his life in praise of Kashmir.

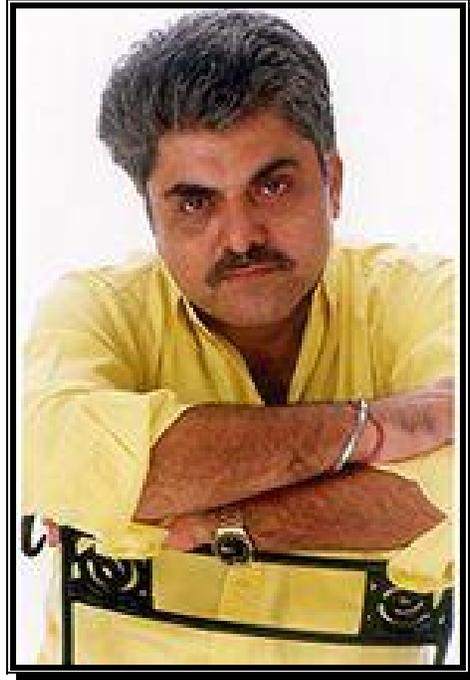
Some years back I once told him that since our displacement, he had gone a little slow with his pen. He responded with a deep sigh and recited a coupled of Nadim:

*Mye khoon-e-dil az syatha chhu chyon kyut
Tsu thav pagah kyut sharaab Shaqi*

Then, after a pause, he added, with yearning in his eyes, "because our *pagah*' (tomorrow) will be in Kashmir". He did not live to see the '*pagah*' of his dreams. Many of us won't, either.

Source: Unmesh

6 Ashok Pandit



Ashok Pandit

Ashok Pandit shot into prominence with *Filmi Chakkar* - one of the more successful comedies on satellite TV. Soon after he made *Tere Mere Sapne*, a serial that depicted the story of a joint family set in today's milieu. He also has to his credit one of the most successful countdown shows on satellite TV - *Colgate Top 10*.

However the projects that are closest to Pandit's heart are the ones he is currently working on - a serial called *Muqammal* for Star Plus which is "a woman's search for a complete man".

Pandit is also fiercely passionate about his first movie *Meri Zameen*. The movie is set in the backdrop of the Kashmir problem and brings to light the plight of the Kashmiri Pandit community to which he belongs. In fact it was this passion and anger that made him shoot a documentary '*Sharnarhi Apne Desh Mein*' which won the RAPA awards for the best documentary last year.

Today, Pandit along with wife Neerja, who is a playback singer, and their two children constitute a happy family but one meeting with this talented film-maker makes it clear that Kashmir is very much a part of his sensibilities.

Courtesy: [Indian Television](#)