Chapter IV

Locating the Ethnic in Kashmiri Short Story

The birth of short fiction was no ordinary event in Kashmiri literature as it drastically widened the contours of the language. Borrow as it did from the rich mythological, oral and cultural legacy of Kashmir, its emergence was also the recognition of the richness of that mythical and oral lore which was as late as the nineteenth century, compiled and translated by such well-know European scholars as Aurel Stein, Hinton Knowles and William Crook. The point to be underscored in the context of the Kashmiri short story is that it was the first formal attempt of the prose writing in Kashmir. Barring sporadic translations of some religious texts, Kashmiri did not have any tradition of prose writing, unlike the English and other European short story traditions. So, the Kashmiri short fiction had to begin from the beginning, though it had one of the richest traditions of folklore in the world at its back. Another point is that the Kashmiri short story had a torturous beginning. It took birth in the violent context of partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan and the subsequent mayhem and bloodshed across India in which millions of people lost their lives in the communal frenzy. The partition led to the division of
the erstwhile state of the Jammu and Kashmir and the ensuing contesting claims of India and Pakistan over it. In this confrontation, the medium of the short story was adopted as a tool of propaganda to reinforce the Indian nationalist narrative on the Kashmir dispute. In 1950, the first two Kashmiri short stories by two Kashmiri Hindus, referred to as Pandits in common parlance, appeared in the journal *Kwangapoash* (saffron flower), the official organ of the Cultural Conference, a body of the progressive writers from Kashmir. The two stories ‘yeli phol gaash’ (When it dawned) by Somnath Zutshi and ‘jaweabi card’ (The reply card) by Dinanath Nadim, both published in 1950, produced enthusiasm among local writers for having adopted the Kashmiri language, the principal identity mark of the Kashmiri community. Soon many writers picked up the momentum and produced a number of short stories, which despite many technical flaws came to be recognised as a milestone in the formative phase of the Kashmiri short story. However, the form entered the landscape of the Kashmiri literary scene through the Urdu language in which some Kashmiri writers like Prem Nath Pardesi and Prem Nath Dhar had been writing. Almost all writers in this phase were influenced by the progressive writers’ movement of India, an offshoot of the communist ideology. These writers believed in looking at literature from a
particular point of view which at times contradicted with the realistic depiction of life. Such an ideological interpretation of life forced some writers to make the bold choice of presenting life as it is without any idealistic understanding. Therefore, it can easily be said that the Kashmiri short fiction began as a protest against the unrealistic and idealistic depiction of Kashmir by the progressive writers in both Urdu and Kashmiri languages (Muzmar 1999:58). The protest by writers like Som Nath Zutshi, Akhter Mohiuddin, Tej Bahadur Bhan, Sofi Ghulam Muhammad and Ali Muhammad Lone initially began in Urdu only but soon all these writers shifted to the Kashmiri language to get closer to life as demanded by the realistic literature.

Unlike other genres, the Kashmiri short story is deeply embedded in the native soil of Kashmir and is the ace reflection of the rich and variegated experiences of cultural and social life of Kashmir, deeply informed by its ethnic mores. It depicts the socio-cultural landscape of the Kashmiri ethnicity which has been looking upon itself as a distinct identity in view of its struggle for political rights and cultural assertion against the larger whole that it finds itself caught in. It is also emblematic of the ethnic and cultural consciousness of the collective Kashmiri community,
showing Kashmiris at their best as well as worst with all their faults and flaws. Surveying the contribution of major short story writers of Kashmir is a delight as it does an autopsy on the Kashmiri ethnic community as a whole.

Nadim

Though Nadim began writing short stories with his ‘jawaebi card’ it was propagandistic in nature. His story ‘sheena pyato pyato’ (Keep falling, snow! 1952) was his first serious attempt in the form. In this story, Nadim uses the first person narrative technique to describe the social milieu of Kashmir. It narrates the ordeals and hardships that the people of that era had to face including the political subjugation that was the order of the day. Here is a passage from the story being narrated by the protagonist, a young boy who is subjected to torture and humiliation along with his father by the establishment:

…whenever I reached there, I was reminded of a different thing, perhaps of the day when I, accompanying my maternal uncle, visited the city for the first time. There was a ‘marshal law of a different kind in the city...I remembered how they made us crawl the road near Gawkadal. My mother had given me a corn bread enveloped in a piece of cloth which I had tied to my neck, but when we were made to crawl with our bellies
touching the dirty road, the knot of the pouch got opened. I was about to seize it, but a gunman came near and struck my hand with his gun; the scar of the wound on my right hand is still visible.

(quoted in Shouq 2014: 9)

This passage gives an idea of the political oppression that Kashmiris were subjected to even in the wake of their new found freedom in 1947. According to Prof Moza, the story objectifies Nadim’s tender solicitude for the Kashmiri labouring class, “(seeking) to quicken sympathy in the hearts of readers towards these miserable Kashmiris who, due to the lack of opportunities in their native Kashmir, are compelled to seek employment in inhospitable plains (Moza 2014: 136).”

In ‘sheena, peto, peto’, the narrator is an unnamed woodcutter, working in a depot at Pathankote. Together with Qaedir Chaaperem, Ramza Bab, Moma Matahaenz and Salem Tantrey, he is living on rent in a dilapidated structure. The structure is about one and a half miles away by road from the depot where the narrator works and only one mile away by short-cut through the fields. Once while walking along this road, he recollects his past experiences and plans for future. He remembers his romantic childhood experiences with Noora, his neighbouring girl. The
narrator and Noora have been deeply in love with each other. In the winter following the first martial law, Noora’s father was crushed to death by a snow avalanche near Behram Gali and Noora pined away in the remembrance of her father. The narrator then remembers his first experience of the city life. The city is under martial law. The people are canned mercilessly in the Exhibition Ground. The narrator and his uncle were made to creep on their bellies near Gav Kadal. The narrator was delivered blows on his wrist with the butt of a gun. After the day’s labour, the narrator often remembers Kashmiri cuisines like vata kram, pamba haakh, soye toop, buttermilk, red beans and turnip, black beans and turnip, simmered turnips etc. He remembers Kashmir winter. It must be snowing heavily in his native village, he remembers. The villagers sitting indoors must be either softening the wool or redesigning torn garments. Some villagers must have arranged musical concerts. Most of the compound walls must be completely under snow. Thinking about the walls, the narrator remembers his own dilapidated compound wall and is choked by the anticipation of its collapse. He remembers the habit of repeating the childhood rhyme, inviting snow, under the shelter of the wall. The children in unison would shout ‘sheena, peto, peto, bhaaya, yeto, yeto’. Absorbed in these reflections, the narrator reaches his destination. As he tries to
open the door, someone from inside shouts: ‘sheena, peto, peto’. He learns from Qaedir Chaapere that the parrot they are tending has been taught to repeat these words by Mussa Kol who had joined them lately and has not found any job so far. The group spends its mornings and evenings in the kitchen, but, Mussa Kol always sits in the adjacent windowless room with his spread out bundle. Nobody knows what the bundle consists of. If any person accidentally strays into the room, he at once covers it with his blanket. Finally, Mussa Kol finds the job of weighing oil cakes in an oil factory for a wage of two rupees per day. On that day, instead of retiring into the windowless room, he enters the kitchen with joy and satisfaction. But, Mussa Kol soon falls ill and is examined by a doctor. On the following Thursday, all except the narrator, leave for their work, who attends to Mussa Kol. Next day, the narrator also prepares to leave for work but is implored by Mussa Kol to stay back. Mussa Kol tells him about his return to his home in Dooru. Mussa Kol had two sons and two daughters, the eldest one being a nine-year-old daughter. He was carrying dresses and toys for his children but lost the baggage while crossing Banihal, during a heavy snowfall. Hopeless and dejected, he reached his cottage and overheard his children inviting snow. He also heard them asking their father to bring clothes, loaves of bread and baked
flour. The eldest daughter desires an ornate cap and lots of bangles. The youngest one desires only a *pharan* and *potsh* because she has no garments to protect her against biting cold. Hearing the newborn weeping, Mussa Kol turns back and resolves to visit his home in spring with all these things.

Next morning, Mussa Kol’s condition has considerably improved and the narrator too leaves for his work. But he decides to return earlier to tend to Mussa Kol. On reaching the room, he observes Mussa Kol in peaceful slumber. He has his opened bundle on the right side. There are baby garments, caps embroidered with artificial gold thread, glass bangles, and an armlet and ear-ring of aluminum. He tries to awaken Mussa Kol who is already dead.

Through ‘*sheena, peto, peto’*, Nadim consummately depicts the abject pathos and poverty of the Kashmiris. It brings to the fore the wretched life that the labour class had to live in pre-1947 Kashmir. It also reveals his compassion towards people at the lower rungs of Kashmiri rural society. Nadim has embellished his work with choice Kashmiri words and phrases. Nadim was primarily a poet and did not write many short stories. His other notable short story is ‘rayy’ (Blight).
Akhter Mohiuddin

In the 1960’s, the Kashmiri short story continued to develop at the hands of writers like Amin Kamil, Akhter Mohiuddin, Sofi Ghulam Muhammad, Ali Muhammad Lone, Taj Begum Renzu, Umesh Koul etc. But the writer at whose hands, the Kashmiri short story came to the fruition was Akhter Mohiuddin.

Akhter began his literary career as an Urdu writer but he soon shifted to the Kashmiri, his mother tongue, and emerged as the best short story writer the Kashmiri language has produced so far. His career of creative writing is spread over more than 55 years during which he produced masterpieces like ‘dand wazun’ (The brawl), ‘daryaayi hund yezaar’ (The bridal pyjamas), ‘aapan hor jang’ (Aapa lost the fight) and ‘aadam chhu ajab zaat’ (Man is a strange breed). He gave new dimension to the Kashmiri short fiction and extracted his characters from the local life but added such hues to them which make them universally appealing. He was the first Kashmiri writer who took the genre of the short story seriously and let it free from the stifling grip of propaganda and progressive movement:

Akhter’s stories are not simply the foundation stones in the Kashmiri short fiction but all the evolutionary phases of our
short fiction can be seen at work in his writings… Akhter’s stories have the intensity of feeling and the depth of experience… Akhter’s story is a forthright expression of how an incidental truth becomes a universal and everlasting truth.

(Saqi 2014: 30)

*Sath Sanghar* (Seven Peaks) was the first collection of his stories which was published in 1955. It was also the first collection of Kashmiri short stories, as such. His second collection was *Sonzal* (Rainbow). It carries his seven stories and was published in 1959. His third collection was *71979 and Other Stories*. His stories were the first attempt at realistic fiction without propagating any ideology. He anchored his stories and their characters in the socio-cultural landscape of Kashmir. Akhtar was the first Kashmiri writer who adopted this art form seriously. He was temperamentally a storyteller, his temperament stood by him throughout and he sighted those people in society who instead of living in an unreal world lived, moved and acted in a real world. This made the real Kashmiri environment, behavioral patterns and temperamental attitudes permeate his short stories. “Readers could for the first time recognize the characters he created…This remains the significant contribution of Akhtar to Kashmiri fiction (Khan 2014: 70). For Akhter, what was important was not any ideological frame
of mind but the real character who lived at a particular point of time in a particular locale of Kashmir. Akhter’s characters, drawn from the life around him, are depicted so skilfully through their actions and dialogues that one wonders at Akhter’s powerful observation of his society. That is why all his stories were successful experiments in the genre. His short story ‘dande wazun’ (The squabble) could be claimed to be the first serious and successful short story in the Kashmiri language. The story is a genuinely creative attempt at extracting a slice from the ordinary life of a scavenger couple:

Instantly Breese Watul stood up and tossed a few slaps on Ashma’s head and then dragged her throughout the room with her braid. Fortunately, Ashma did not catch fire from the hearth otherwise she would have got burnt down whole. The vessel full of trots was boiling on the hearth.

(Mohiuddin ed. 1995: 12)

This is how the story begins instantly, making the reader imagine himself amidst all this witnessing how an ordinary incident triggers a squabble between the spouses but consummates in a moment of love and affection. Its power lies in its wit, humour and satire which is the hallmark of the Kashmiri society. Centuries of subjugation and disempowerment have made Kashmiris laugh at
themselves to purgate their sense of frustration and this story looks like a beautiful attempt at the same. The couple in the story belongs to the lowest rung of the Kashmiri society, called Waatal (sweepers) locally, who are looked down upon by Kashmiris themselves but who constitute an inseparable part of the Kashmiri ethnography.

The response of Ashme to this violence is her shrieks invoking people around to help her: “Is there nobody around! This guy will kill me! May he collapse and die! May all your near and dear ones die for my sake!” (Mohiuddin 12). The cursing and abusing one’s relatives is a typical Kashmiri response to untoward situations.

Another story of his, ‘daryaye hund yazare’ (The bridal pyjamas) is the celebration of a moment of intimacy between an aged couple. Nabir Shala, an old artisan while retexturing a shawl in his shanty, needs scissors. His wife Khotoon Ded goes around to look for scissors. Rummaging through the shelved bundles in the store room, she comes across her bridal pyjamas and is overcome by the fond memories of her nuptial day. Meanwhile, Nabir Shala enters the room and, finding his wife lost in the memory of her youthful days, urges her to wear the pyjamas. Initially, Khotoon
Ded due to her coyness resists but finally gives in. While wearing the trousers, she almost falls down when Nabir Shalla instantly holds her in his hands. It is precisely at this time that their son-in-law enters the shanty and finding them engaged in a moment of intimacy, simply walks out. The two are overcome by a strong sense of shame. Finally, Naber Shalla consoles himself and his wife by saying that, “everyone is a king in his own way” (quoted in Shah 2007: 47). The event which is not ordinary from the local standards of propriety and morality, given the sensitivities of relations involved, is depicted through the most possible natural idiom.

Kashmir has historically been a poor place. But, over the years, it has economically improved though its political plight is yet to be redeemed. Akhter’s story ‘sheene jung’ is an apt comment on the kind of inhuman behavior the moneyed class breeds when they have all power concentrated in them. The story is set in a typical Kashmiri locale and begins with a Kashmiri folk song. The first passage of the story beautifully describes the winter season in Kashmir: “It was heavily snowing for the last five days now. And the cold was so severe whatever little snow fell, it would freeze. For these few days, the people had three times thrown the snow
down from their rooftops. Even the roads had heaps of snow on them” (Mohiuddin 100).

After this graphic description of Kashmir’s harsh winter, the author introduces us to the life and the characters who live in this winter. Mome Khoje, the richest man in the area is thinking about what to serve next to his guests, talkhe (milkless salt tea) or plain tea, after they are done with Harisah. Talkhe is a conventional Kashmiri tea served without milk and considered to be very digestive while Harisa is the pounded meat fried and usually had with an ethnic bread. These are all ethnic delicacies of Kashmir. The guests had been invited to watch live the traditional game of snow fight in the chilling winter. The game, very popular among all sections of the society, would be traditionally held by the rich to show off their money and class. Mome Khoje too had planned the game and had invited the guests over wazwan, the ethnic meals prepared by the specially trained cooks. One of the players is a sick aged man who pleads to Mome Khoje to spare him in view of his ill health but he is paid no heed. During the game, happening in accompaniment with the dainty dishes being served to the guests, Mome Khoje throws Goshtaba, the sweetest of these dishes, towards the players as they slacken due to severe cold. Goshtaba,
the local delicacy which Kashmiris are crazily fond of, reinvigorates the players. But the aged player dies in the night due to pneumonia which had got aggravated because of his gaming in the day. The next day as Mome Khoje pays a visit to the dead player’s house to condole the demise, people are awed by the generous gesture of the rich man and comment like this: “This is called generosity. Such a rich man has come to condole the death of this penniless man. Another one remarks: That is why even God has been generous to him. I have heard the other day he had organized a game of goshtaba fight instead of snow fight” (Mohiuddin 107). The story is an apt comment on the exploitative economic system prevalent in the traditional Kashmiri society and the gullibility of the masses who are fooled by the outward kindness and generosity of the exploiters.

All stories and characters of Akhter are set in highly particularized locales of Kashmir and show his insatiable quest for local life, events and characters. The armed insurgency in Kashmir against the Indian rule also gets reflected in such short stories of his as ‘aatank vadi’ (The terrorist), ‘nav bemaere’ (New disease) and ‘jali hind danda phel’ (The broken teeth of Jalla Bibi). These stories show the resilient spirit of those caught in the quagmire of
brutal oppression and constant surveillance unleashed by the security apparatus to check armed revolt by Kashmiris against the Indian rule. These stories are like postcards from a country which seemed outlandish in the twentieth century world in view of one of the most brutal oppressions in the contemporary world.

In ‘Jali hind dande phel’, Jalla, an educated and bold girl from the city helps her aged father cross the road on a curfewed day. Her audacious reply to the soldier’s blunt refusal to stop beating her father enrages him so much that he along with all his colleagues pounces on her and beats her to pulp. Next morning, her illiterate father is seen searching for something at the same spot on the road and mumbling to himself, “The broken teeth of Jalli… They must have fallen here (Mohiuddin undated: 91). The story emphasizes the fact that even education means nothing in absence of political rights. Even a law degree is not able to save Jalla from the savage wrath of the soldiers who she tries to argue with to save her aged father from their brutal beating. Another interesting fact in the context of this story is that Jaleela has to take recourse to Hindi/Urdu, the non-native language in Kashmir to converse with soldiers, because the soldiers are not natives but brought in from outside. The search for the broken pieces of Jaleela’s teeth
symbolically refers to the search for the native identity which is lost in the kind of set up that is in place in contemporary Kashmir.

In ‘atank vadi’, Shafiq, a young kid, is fascinated with the gun in the hands of the omnipresent army personnel around him. Once, on coming across a patrol party of the soldiers, he starts crying and beseeching his accompanist lady, probably his grandmother, to arrange a gun for him too. The Indian soldier on coming to know that the kid is not scared of him but is asking for a gun instantly blurts out “Bastards, they are all terrorists” (Mohiuddin n.d.: 125). The story is a punching comment on the effect of militarization on young minds in conflict zones.

The story ‘nav beamear’ again narrates the negative effects of militarisation of a society and its consequences on a civilized society. The unnamed character in focus in the story is taken to a doctor for the treatment of his eccentric behavior. “When he reaches home, he does not enter the door. He stands outside the door for hours as if waiting for something. Then he turns back instead of getting in” (Mohiuddin 124). The doctor has not prescribed any medicine or therapy for treatment. He has simply recommended that “when he reaches the door of his house, he should be frisked” (Mohiuddin 124). The treatment works and there
is improvement in his disease which has struck the place, of late. Again, the anecdote is a telling comment on the kind of brutal oppression Kashmiris are being subjected to post their military revolt against the Indian rule. The scene also has been enacted in Hyder (2014), the much-hyped Bollywood movie set in Kashmir.

The story ‘Election’ is a satirical punch on the way elections are conducted in Kashmir and then, proclaimed to be a vote for India. The first sentence itself deflates the hype the Indian nationalist narrative gives to the Kashmir elections. “It was already decided above who would win and who would lose but to conduct the drama was necessary” (Mohiuddin 98). The story shows a triangular contest happening:

On the voting day, a procession comes out of the green flag holders followed by scores of young kids, some teens and a few adults. Next day, the victory of the red flag holders is announced. In the evening, the red flag holders too bring out a procession followed by the same scores of young kids, some teens and a few adults.

(Mohiuddin 98)

The net outcome of this electoral win and loss in the context of Kashmir is shown to be just this:
“Haji Saheb (the winning side) would not haul the timber now to the official timber depot but to his own courtyard. He would not distribute it among the people against the official ration cards but sell it after sawing for a hefty sum. The Katcher (other winning side) would send the word around to purchase cement, iron and other such stuff from them in case anyone needed it. They were construction contractors of official assignments. The Dars (the losing side) would complain that the other side had lost all propriety and, above all, stole in their business. They would sell locally made shawls etc but would also carry a fistful of opium under cover. Only God knows better.

(Mohiuddin 125)

The elections in Kashmir have come to simply mean exploitation of the local population by both winners and losers. It does not mean the restoration of the human and political rights of Kashmiris. Nor does it mean their representation in the process of law-making at any level. It is simply a drama which is enacted to vindicate a point that India needs to uphold its control over the territory of Kashmir.

The “scores of young kids, some teens and a few adults” represent Kashmiris who just follow anybody who fools them and exploits their vulnerability in absence of their human and political
rights and any support from any quarter. They just behave like cattle that are willing to follow anyone who leads them for personal interests.

These stories despite set in one of the most militarized conflict zones in the world with contesting ownership claims of Pakistan and India, are attempts at producing genuine art which transcends any category and could be claimed to be their plight by the sufferers of any conflict in the world.

**Amin Kamil**

Amin Kamil (1923-2014) was one of the defining litterateurs of the Kashmiri language and literature. Besides being a poet of unparalleled lyricism, Kamil was a prolific short story writer who painted Kashmir on the canvass of his stories. Kamil’s stories show the Kashmir between 1947 and 1980’s. His forte lies not in narrating the incidents but in going beyond, delving deep into the working of the Kashmiri mind. He was from a rural background but had settled in the central city of Sringar, equipping him with the acumen to wed the rural and the urban sides of the Kashmiri life. His keen observation of the surroundings and the kind of characters they breed in their lap remains unparallel. His stories remain the best examples of depicting the stock Kashmiri response
to certain situations. Kashmiris, due to their inherent simplicity of mind and gullibility, are easily vulnerable to any kind of political exploitation. They are easily wooed by the contradictory ideological stances and they easily commit themselves to both without having any qualms of conscience. They are good followers, irrespective of who leads them. And above all, over the centuries, they have developed a strong sense of humour which does not make them so much to laugh at others as much on themselves:

(Kamil’s) stories steer the timely truth in a way that these truths retain their freshness. His short stories are not bound by the limitations of time and space. The changing face of time too is not able to dent in any way the truth in these stories.

(Saqi 2014: 30)

Kamil’s story ‘yaadoostu gugu guu’ (And the dove cooed) depicts the cynicism brought in by the exploitative politics unleashed in the name of progressivism and communism which was in rife around 1947’s in the sub-continent and also in Kashmir. Set in Kashmir in the aftermath of the revolutionary land reforms, the story is a punch on the larger questions of the populist politics which is inherently exploitative. The peasants who were granted the ownership of the land they were tilling, were simultaneously
subjected to a levy called *mujvaza*. The initial enthusiasm was soon replaced by the agitation. In the story, centred around a peaceful demonstration of peasants organized by Abdul Kabir Wani, popularly known as ‘Kabir Bechi’ (Kabir the Beggar), a prominent communist leader, the peasants find themselves grappling with unheard of expressions like ‘people’s struggle’, ‘international peace’ etc. But, they remain glued to the speeches as this simply meant an end to ‘*mujvaza*’. Gula, a young boy in the crowd is also enthused as his father has also addressed the meeting. What happens halfway through the protest demonstration is against his expectations:

After Gula’s father finished his speech and sat down, a long-haired worker from the city, started his speech. While he was speaking, people heard rumbling of the lorries and started whispering to each other. A few children stood up to see what was wrong and he too joined them. He saw policemen with long sticks in their hands coming down from the lorries. They were being led by the Zeeldaar (Revenue officer) of Tsawalgaam and the Officer of the local police station; the latter would be present at all public meetings. Gula felt happy, guessing that the meeting had been taken seriously by the administration. When the policemen entered the premises, they started beating people without any inquiry. He heard his father
and the guest speaker from the city crying to people not to do anything in retaliation for it was a congregation for peace. Within no time the whole gathering dispersed and the commotion was so loud that it seemed the pandemonium of the Doomsday. People ran away in whatever direction they found for escape. It resembled the chaos caused on the occasions of collection of ‘Surplus’ paddy. He could not make out what was happening. Many were trammelled in the stampede. Wriggling through the legs of people, he dropped his cap, which his maternal uncle had got him after labouring in the Punjab during the past winter. All the children were crying and he too shrieked.

(quoted in Shouq 2014:7)

The writer deliberately ends the story on a positive note in tune with his communist leanings at that time:

Gula lifted the scrap of cloth in his hand and, raising his arm high, he yelled: ‘Long live World Peace!’ In the meantime, the ferocious bitch sitting near the house of the Zaildaar barked. Gula started with fear, stumbled against a stone and fell prostrate on the ground. He soon stood up, kicked the stone and wiped his face with the scrap of cloth. He saw the beak of the dove on the bunting smeared with blood. He was really bleeding. He forgot his dripping blood and remembered the dove on the bunting. A smile appeared on his lips and he held
the scrap of the bunting again in his hand, raised his arm high
and, running fast towards his playmate, cried aloud: ‘yaa
doostoo ...guguu guu.!’

(quoted in Shouq 10)

Amin Kamil excelled in portraying the cultural landscape
and the behavioural patterns of ethnic Kashmiris. His stories are
master strokes in serving a satirical punch to the socio-cultural set-
up of Kashmir of his times and, in the process, bringing out the
thought process of the typical Kashmiri who has his own unique
way of looking at things. His story ‘koker jung’ (The cockfight)
still remains the unparalleled delineation of ethnic unpolished
Kashmiris. Though the story is focused on a specific lower class of
the Kashmiri society, by extension, all Kashmiris can easily
identify with the characters and claim to have witnessed the scene
somewhere around them. The story is about the squabbling
neighbourly relations between two Kashmiri women who feel
jealous of each other in everything. Finally, their jealousy touches
new heights when Jaane Bitch, one of the two, gets a new rooster
as pet. Shah Maal, her neighbour, forces her husband to get one for
her too. As the cocks engage in a fierce fight for dominance, the
two women see their chronic jealousy in action in the fight between
their respective cocks. The way Kamil describes the two cocks
almost makes them come alive in the minds of the readers who visualize their blood-soaked beaks, erect feathers, harsh eyes, fearful poise and scary frets and fumes in front of them. Here is the passage that paints the fowls in action:

Jani’s cock and her own were struggling desperately with each other, raising clouds of dust around them. Jani the Skinny was enjoying the cockfight from her window. Shahmal discerned a flush of joy on her face. She was apparently sure of her cock’s victory, perhaps because his comb was smaller but thicker, his wattle clung to his throat, and his sturdy limbs made him look a thorough fighter. He had trounced all the other cocks of the neighborhood in fight .... The feathers on the cocks’ necks stood erect in perfect circles. Their heads trembled and shook with rage. This shaking seemed to have electrified their feathers. Their bodies seemed elongated and the tail feathers swollen. They glowered at each other and stretching their trembling necks, transmitted messages of fire and rage. Recklessly they attacked each other, pecking and tearing sharply with their beaks…. The cocks raised hell, struggling furiously. They plucked each other’s feathers till blood streamed forth.

(Kamil, retrieved)

The story focuses on the uncouth psyche of two women caught in the exploitative set-up of the early twentieth century
Kashmir. The fact which is relevant here is that it was a real incident that prompted Kamil to write this masterly story. Amin Kamil has this to say about the origin of the story:

We were putting up on rent at Batamaloo. There were just two houses behind our house. One morning there was an extremely heated exchange of words between them. I looked out of the window and found two cocks engaged in a fierce battle with each other on which the two landladies from the windows of their respective houses were abusing and cursing each other. I was ashamed and went inside. This became the basis of the ‘Koker Jung’ short story.

(Quoted in Fayyaz 2014: 81)

All the stories in Kamil’s collection of stories, kathi manz kath, read like an album from the cultural life of Kashmir. Each story focuses on a particular section of society and brings out the psychological aspect along with the cultural side of the characters to the minutest possible detail. Almost all characters are from the lower stratum of the Kashmir’s cultural life: artisans, craftsmen or people in semi-urban localities. He also talks of that crisis in the values of the Kashmiri life which have bred a strange kind of cynicism in Kashmiris. He also subtly brings the post-47 politics
into play, thereby making it look like a scandal which deceived
Kashmiris more than anything else:

In *Kathi manz kath* collection of short stories, all the characters, incidents, landscape, canvas are absolutely Kashmiri, the characters chosen are wedded to the Kashmiri soil. Their phycological make is tied to the Kashmiri psyche as nail is to the flesh.

(Fayaz 76)

Two other stories of Kamil, ‘phatak’ and ‘sawal cchu kaluk’, bring into focus the exploitative administrative set-up of the ruling class that belonged to a different religion from that of its subjects. However, what makes these stories still relevant is that nothing has changed; only the rulers have changed. Rulers look at people same way irrespective of who they are. Moti Lal Saqi, while commenting on ‘kafan chhor and ‘phatak’ stories, says:

Though Kamil in his short story ‘Kafan choor’ gives expression to a folktale, but the shroud thief of the story continues to live among us in different shapes. This shroud thief is called by many a beautiful name. His progenitors play such tricks that the sensitive and the knowing put their fingers between their teeth… Similarly, the “phatak” also reflects a recurring truth. The *phatak* is still open and whosoever the phatakwallahs get hold on are put inside. After reading this story, I recollected
having once asked a police officer why they harrass innocent people and picked them up. He replied that they simply obey the orders from above: “If anything untoward happens, we are instantly directed to arrest a particular gang of fifty odd individuals. We are bound to obey the orders. During search if we don’t find a particular individual, we arrest any of his relatives or neighbours or whosoever we get hold on to complete the list. Then we inform the authorities that necessary action has been taken.

(Saqi 30)

A prominent note of Kamil’s stories is a satirical punch which refers to the strong sense of humour Kashmiris possess. All his stories show the working of the Kashmiri mind and at the same time shed light on the satire, at times bordering absurdity, it adopts to look at things. Here is a passage from the story ‘sawal cchu kaluk’ in which the officials of the two police stations are caught in contestation over a dead body in view of their respective jurisdictions:

But this dead body… look, it will decompose… for how long will it … He did not let me complete my point…

Let it decompose… the question is that of the head…. Which side was it?... Let the dispute continue so long as that question is not addressed.
I was dumbstruck. What else could I say?

(Quoted in Fayyaz 82)

The story metaphorically refers to the larger dispute about Kashmir between India and Pakistan both of which claim it to be theirs. So the people continue to suffer as the question remains unaddressed.

‘jahanami’ is another story of Kamil which limns the darker side of life as people grapple with their systems to change it. Adopting the mythical method in this story, Kamil impeccably demonstrates the English maxim that ‘the known devil is better than the unknown devil’. The resultant cynicism found across Kashmir, has made Kashmiris withdrawn. The collective ethnic consciousness that comes out through the stories of Kamil, also refers to this fact that the typical Kashmiri traits owe their origin to their mythical lore. Though this story has been written in mythical method, it does not stretch to the mythological lengths. Zajje Pather has been a locality in the far off corner of the rural Kashmir in the ancient Kashmir. Here is how the author describes the locale in which he sets the mythical tale of epic proportions to comment on the contemporary Kashmir:

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People no more believe in such tales because such things don’t happen around them now. But that does not mean that such a thing had never happened in zajje pather. Nevertheless, zajja pather is not extinct. We can even now go there and find the traces of that locality which must have existed there once. It’s a meadow now where many shepherds, in their huts, rear herds of sheep. But there was a time when around six thousand souls of both men and women lived there. It had five graveyards to bury its dead.

It is said that the area was well off. Once the only, earning and fit-for-marriage son of an old lady named Sul Ded died there. She virtually got mad. Seven of her blighted children had died in her womb and this was the only child who was finally born wholesome after tying many votive knots….

(Kamil, 85)

On the mythological pattern, this is how Kamil begins the story. Kamil takes recourse to the past to comment on the present of Kashmir. After the description of the locale, the actual story of a harrowing experience that disturbed the peaceful life in the village begins. An old lady has to bear the pain of the death of her only son who is buried in the adjacent graveyard, after proper burial. The villagers keep consoling Sul Ded until the evening sets in when they start leaving for their homes. Alone in her hutment, Sul
Ded fails to calm herself down because of her grief and starts moving towards the grave of her son to cry to the full of her heart to relieve herself. It is pitch dark all around with even moon hid behind the clouds. In the grave silence and extreme dark of the night, as she gets close to the grave, she sees a human silhouette moving around the grave. First she feels like collapsing out of fear, but she soon recovers and musters all her all courage and calls out, “Who is there? What on earth are you doing here this time?” On hearing this, the silhouette makes quick movements and then disappears. With all her courage, Sul Ded keeps pulling herself with heavy steps towards the grave. To her shock, she finds the grave of her son open. She shrieks out loudly which wakes up the people around. They gather at the grave and are shocked to see a human body disinterred after burial. After making wild guessing, they conclude that someone had stolen the shroud from the body of the dead. This is how this begins and slowly takes the form of a convention:

People kept cursing the shroud thief and the shroud thief kept striking all the five graveyards, opening their shroud and stealing it and setting the grave right. When no dead in the Zajje Pather remained without the theft of their shroud, it gradually became a convention there. Now, no one was angered
by or afraid of the shroud theft because for the last twenty years they had been witnessing this. However, when they would bury the dead, the following day, they would visit the grave to set it right...

Finally Ganna Bab on his death bed confesses to have been stealing the shroud of the dead over the years. With his death, all the villagers heaved a sigh of relief for such an inhuman practice to have come to an end. However, they are shocked to see the naked body of Gann Bab lying outside his grave on the following day. Not only was his shroud stolen but the body is also disrespected. Everyone is scared to death:

“We won’t find the like of Ganna Bab. He would just steal the shroud and not disrespect the body. This devil is worse than the beast…”

It is said that afterwards the people would pray for Ganna Bab and curse the new fiend.

(Kamil 93-97)

In this story, Kamil borrows from the mythical anecdote and, then, comments on the contemporary situation. All attempts of Kashmiris to improve their lot have ended in cipher. With every change in the system, they end up pining for the earlier one and cursing the new one. The story is found by the contemporary
Kashmiris to be equally relevant now as it must have been in the remote past.

In ‘phatak’, Kamil again takes recourse to a past anecdote to comment on the present Kashmir. Here is how the comment commences:

I casually asked Dwarka Nath, “It’s fine that it was your duty to arrest the agitating people but what the hell is this that you enter the houses and grab the innocents from their homes and put them behind the bars.

What Dwarka Nath told me in response to my query reminded me of a 26-year old incident when the Maharaja Hari Singh ruled the state.

(Kamil 73)

The narrator during the feudal rule had once seen the cops pulling some half a dozen cows. They were followed by a few women and small kids crying and pleading them. When the narrator asks the cops about the whole episode, he is told that the preceding day, some cows had intercepted the cavalcade of the Maharaja when he was driving home from the airport. Instantly, he had ordered the suspension of the police officials concerned, and the DIG had ordered that all wandering cows be put in the phatak. Any cop who is found derelict in his duty would be suspended.
We too have our families. We won’t take our livelihood casually for anyone else. We too have to prove to have been alert to our duty. We did not find any wandering cow around to put in the phatak. Therefore, we pulled these cows from their cowsheds to put them in the phatak. Yes, they will have to pay the penalty of ten annas, we are giving them those ten annas. What twist is there in this.

(Kamil, 73)

An incident in the so-called democratic era reminds the narrator of something equally horrible which had happened during the feudal regime. Even after the lapse of so many years, the story is still relevant for its issues of administrative vandalism, police high-handedness and the arrest sprees which are still so common in Kashmir and the unbridled powers the police force wields. Interestingly, Kashmir has many draconian laws in force like Public Safety Act and Armed Forces Special Powers Act, the former giving unrestricted powers to police and the latter to the army. The change in guard has not changed the plight of Kahmiris who continue to live under fear and scare.

Kashmiri Pandits

A parallel line in the Kashmiri short story, running since its birth has been that of the Kashmiri Pandits, a small minority of Hindus
living in the Kashmir valley. The Pandits have always been a privileged lot and have always been on the right side of every ruler of Kashmir. Therefore, the thematic concerns of their literary pursuits are altogether different from that of the Kashmiri Muslims. However, Kashmir as a locale and its ethnic mores are something which work as the texture of their works too. Their works are more insular, inward-looking, and philosophical as against the mundane issues described in the literature of the Muslim writers. These Hindus fled Kashmir in the backdrop of the armed insurgency against India that broke out in late eighties and early nineties, as they were targeted for being committed Indians.

Kashmiri Hindus are one of the ancient and culturally compact communities that have succeeded in preserving their unique sense of cultural and ethnic distincthood over the centuries. Their education and their privileged position have always helped them in their endeavours. Some Pandit writers in contemporary times too took to pen to preserve their social and cultural ethos in their short stories.

**Bansi Nirdosh**

Nirdosh was one such writer who, in his stories, artistically, painted the Pandit ethos. His stories reflect a deep and penetrative
awareness of the Pandit life and its social application in the old Srinagar city. The characters are delineated in a way which indicates to the author’s consciousness of that ethnic vision which had made the Kashmiri Pandits extra-cautious about preserving their cultural and ethnic identity. The characters and dialogues in his stories refer to the efforts by the Pandits to grapple with preserving their identity.

Nirdosh’s stories are like a beautiful album of landscape paintings in which all shades of cultural, social and domestic life of the middle class Hindus of the Srinagar city are drawn with dexterity. Though his stories encompass the daily life of Kashmir but his deep and comprehensive understanding of a particular community keeps on raising its head in all his stories. In a way, his stories are a potent attempt to preserve a particular cultural and social ethos which does not have many means for its preservation at its disposal now.

(Saqi, 31)

Only three collections of his stories, namely, baal mareeyoo (May I die young for you), aadam chhu yithay badnaam (Man is infamous for nothing), and girdaab (The whirlpool) have been published. Besides, he published one novel, titled akh daur (An era) and a book for children titled qoamuk sheeyir (Our national poet) about the life and works of Rabindarnath Tagore. The total
number of short stories included in his three collections is nineteen; a long story among these stories, has been called a novelette, titled *etiy rab atiy sab* (Now it is mud and then a feast). His unique contribution to the art is that he particularised the setting of Kashmir in the form and for this purpose he used narration of events as a tool. Nirdosh takes maximum benefit of the narrative element. Here is a passage from his story, *etiy rab, etiy sab* (Now it is mud and then a feast):

From that very day Somnath accepted that locality as his own. He bought all the goods and victuals of daily use from the market of that locality. Whenever he needed vegetables, milk, spices, sugar, he preferred the market of the locality to all other markets. And within two to three months, he developed credibility for himself, and no shopkeeper dithered in giving him goods on credit . . .

(Shant 2014: 160)

Nirdosh’s characters are simple in their temperaments. They are typical Kashmiri Pandits who are deeply involved with their locale and the characters around them:

When he was set free from the prison, he forgot everything. He cast an intense glance at his body: he almost abhorred it. ‘Who knows who had jinxed me when I set out from my house?’ He reflected. ‘I shouldered all this humiliation for nothing.’ He sat
for the whole day outside the jail near Waris Khan’s abyss at the bottom of the hillock Parbat. He had an intense desire to drop himself into that deep hole which was quite visible in spite of being deep; he could see even its bottom. He anon reflected, ‘If I was not dead even then! Is it not better to go home instead? If they entertain me, well. If they do not, what then, they cannot slit my throat. They might imprecate me, at the most. Let them do so.

(Shant 161)

The narrative evokes the setting in Nirdosh’s stories. Waris Khan’s abyss on the foothills of the Hari Parbat or Kohi Maran hillock is in the heart of the old city of Srinagar. The abyss has gained mythical proportion as much as the hillock in whose shade it lies.

In his story, baal mareeyoo, Poshi Kuj is desirous to see her daughter-in-law back from her parental house where she has gone as she cannot bear the taunts of her mother-in-law. Her desire grows more intense when she watches a feud between Sula Waatul and his sister-in-law, Ashm, living in the neighbourhood. When Qadir reconciles with his wife Asham, Poshikuj feels relieved that the couple got reconciled. She keenly desires the return of her daughter-in-law. But her desire turns pervert at the end of the story,
when she sees her son to have taken the initiative without taking her on board:

When Poshikuj opened the door, she was amazed; she felt some flame consumed her inwardly. She forgot what she was about to say. Pran Nath was not alone, but had come with his wife along.

(Quoted in Shant 166)

Nirdosh’s stories are centred on living men and women of Kashmiri ethnicity. He uses what has been described as the Puranic method that makes the reader wonder whether he is reading a Puranic tale or a contemporary short story:

In all stories of this nature and many other stories of Nirdosh, keen observation is employed to create appropriate setting for individual characters. He creates the ambience obtaining in Kashmiri Hindu families, and the typical behaviour evinced by characters in this peculiar background. Description of trivial domestic appliances, like the raised platform for holding bronze pitcher and flask, the niche for keeping shoes under the platform, the gables of the pent house, the shelves in the walls, a hookah in a shelf, women wearing wooden slippers ambling to the public water tap, making fire around the frozen water tap in the chill, and breaking the sheets of rime...all these and many
other spectacles quite common in Kashmir dominate Nirdosh’s stories.

(Quoted in Shant 170-1)

The Hindus living in the old Srinagar city of the middle of the twentieth century is the backdrop of all his stories. His literary concerns were his own street, road and his own mohalla.

There are some Pandit writers who deal with the same theme in some of their stories. ‘taaph’ by Hari Krishan Koul is again a good example of the same attitude to the issues of ethnic and cultural importance. The monologues by Poshikuj indicate to her sense of anguish at the ethnic assimilation of Kashmiri Hindus into the pan-Indian Hinduism:

Poshikuj thought. Women have a strange name here. There is one Mrs Jain. Then there is Mrs. Sundaram, another one is Mrs Prakash and yet another one Mrs Something. Look at the Sikh lady of this quarter. Her daughters and daughters-in-law must be of my age but still she is referred to as Mrs Kheem Singh. Who knows what this ‘Mrs’ means. Delhi is a good place but it’s nothing at the same time.

(Bharti 1995: 140)
Hari Krishan Koul

Koul (1934-2008) is one of the most important short story writers in the Kashmiri language. He produced four short story collections: *pata laran parbath* (The Chasing Hill), *haalas chu rotul* (For Now it is Dark), *yath raazdane* (In This Capital City) and *zool aparyum* (Illuminations Across). He published his first collection *pata laran parbath* in 1972. ‘Taaph’ is his much celebrated short story which was first published in the *Sheeraza*, the literary organ of the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages in 1967. Koul’s creativity is a blend of realism and fantasy. He portrays the socio-cultural set up to which he belongs.

Stories written by Hari Krishan Koul are comparable with the best stories of the writers in the genre. The prominent stories in his first collection are ‘taaph’, ‘vaaraag’, ‘curfew’, ‘dharma katha’, ‘shamshan vaarag’ and ‘pagah’. His story ‘*taaph*’ (Sunshine) under the surface reflects the ambivalent relationship between the people belonging to two distinct communities of Kashmiri society-- Muslims and Hindus. The story revolves around an elderly Kashmiri Hindu woman, Poshi Kuj, who has shifted to New Delhi to live with her younger son and his wife. She is happy for being away from the chill of Kashmir and enjoys the warmth of sunshine.
in New Delhi. She consoles herself that she is relieved of the ‘polluted’ hands of Muslim bakers, vegetable vendors, fisherwomen and the house-keeper. At the same times, she fondly remembers her carefree chat with them which she misses in Delhi. When she hears ‘azaan’ (prayer call) from the nearby mosque, she is surprised why it is allowed in Delhi, ‘the capital of her Hindu country’.

On reaching Delhi, Poshikuj had heaved a sigh of relief:

“Damn everything else, what matters most is that there is no trace of any Muslim here, there are our Hindu brethren only to be seen all around ... milkman, a Hindu, baker, a Hindu! And then God has freed me from that rude woman...’ This was one more relief to Posh Kuj. That ‘rude woman’ was none other than her elder daughter-in-law. The very idea made her shiver...

(quoted in Shouq 17)

The story adequately reveals the general ambivalence of Kashmiri Hindu community who, on the one hand, feel to be rooted in their centuries-old Kashmiri culture, and, on the other hand, alienated for having been denied the privileged position in the contemporary Kashmir. Poshi Kuj confuses Pakistan Embassy with Birla Mandir in New Delhi, the temple of her dreams. Her
daughter-in-law Choti smiles and tells her that it is Pakistan Embassy:

How uncouth she reckons me! But falsehood has no feet to stand upon. There in Kashmir, where all around you there are Musalmans, no one dares to name Pakistan, and here in our Delhi there could be the office of Pakistan! How does this daughter-in-law of mine try to befool me!

(quoted in Shouq 18)

The whole story shows the incompatibility of Poshi Kuj with her environs in Delhi where she feels at ease and unease at the same time. She is relieved of everything she perceives to be bad about her life in Kashmir. But after a pause she feels nostalgic about her life in Kashmir:

This incompatibility neither dominates the story from the beginning to the end nor emerges at the end abruptly. But a kind of tension between compatibility and incompatibility pervades the whole story and finally hangs in favour of incompatibility.

(Talashi 2012: 97)

She believes that she would not go back to Kashmir even in summer but the next moment she is consumed by the scorn on the face of Choti, her younger daughter-in-law, on her plucking
flowers. She is smoothened by the sunshine of Delhi but is also disheartened by the broken values she is made aware of through the inner garments of Choti hanging in sun for drying. On the one hand, there is warm sunshine of Delhi and, on the other hand, there is biting cold of Kashmir. On the one hand, there is sky of Kashmir screened by snow-capped mountains and on the other hand, there is infinite sky of Delhi. In the beginning she says, “She won’t go back to Kashmir even in summer” but the story ends on her idea, “Had she anyone to accompany her, she would visit Kashmir for a few days.”

Though Poshikuj puts up in Delhi, we keep peeping through her into Kashmir lying in the backyard of her mind. We come to know about her other son and his wife in Kashmir. The same technique has been employed by Koul in his stories like ‘yath razdane’, ‘na wanen layakh kath’, ‘zool apearim’ etc. The story emphasises the fact that while being away and enjoying her stay in Delhi, her soul continues to roam in Kashmir, the predicament all ethnic Kashmiri Pandits are going through. She is not able to sever her roots in Kashmir. Despite having much needed comfort and the warm sunshine, Kashmiris always crave for, she is restless to go back to her roots and find her inner comfort. This underscores the
ethnic-cultural tension that we see in the writings of many of those Pandits who despite having stayed outside Kashmir, have not adjusted there and continue craving for their settlement back in Kashmir, their motherland.

In ‘halas cchu raatul’ (For Now Its Dark), Koul places certain existential questions in the specific geographical locale of Kashmir. The journey to Kashmir from Jammu, the nearest outpost to the Kashmir valley from the outside world, turns out to be more a journey within, an existential journey that takes off in the chilling winter of Kashmir. The story abounds in words like taer (cold), roodh (rainfall), tulle katur (frozen snow), waw (wind), pancheal waw (the strong wind of the Peer Panchal mountain range), tchat (biting cold), gagray (thunder), wawe dake (wind waves), roodhe raath (torrential rain), toofan (storm) and panchader (waterfall). Three characters, travelling to Kashmir from Jammu, have to take shelter in a dilapidated room en route to save themselves from the torrential rain, strong wind and the biting cold of the winter. The description of the Kashmiri winter in the first para of the story provides a glimpse of the winter season in Kashmir that defines much of what Kashmir and its lifestyle consists of:

It was so cold as if I was lying naked on the frozen snow in the chilling winter. It was a large room and there were three of us
there in that room. The windows were shut but they had no
glasspanes. Outside, it was raining heavily with strong waves
of wind of Peer Panchal mountain range. This wind, this cold
of Banihal was blowing hard in this room of the tourist hostel.
Even inside the room we felt as if we were sleeping outside.

(Koul 2007: 158)

This is the set that builds the story: a windowless room,
extremely cold night and the three characters. These and the
passage quoted above make the texture of the story. The central
character is caught in uncertainty that characterizes much of the
Kashmiri life. He is scared of huge mountains that Kashmir is
worldwide known for. He is unsure if he would ever reach his
destination. In this unsure and uncertain situation, he asks some
existential questions which he gets spontaneous responses for from
Swami Ji, the most knowledgeable of the three: “… the reader
feels the agony of the stranded passengers and at the same time the
peaceful mental situation of Swami Ji” (Bashir 2014: 62).

Koul has very skilfully created mythical situations in many
of his short stories like ‘phare’ (Smoked Fish/Lies), in which all
the twelve characters suffering from physical defects attain
mythical dimensions, and, thus, disprove the impression that only
the great and flawless personalities can be mythical. Eleven
disabled persons, each wearing an ordinary white but filthy garment, eat the fish which they together catch from the nearby rivulet and live a happy life. Gradually, there comes a time when all of them except the stammerer come to believe that it is Nur, Nar and Naar who send them fish through the rivulet.

‘phari’ is one of Koul’s masterpieces. It is a multi-dimensional story. It is the story of twelve handicapped persons who are not selfish and have neither friends nor enemies. Coming of a black-dressed man into simple and honest lives of these handicapped people points to organized efforts to inculcate notions of inequality and discord in an atmosphere of equality. It is also a story of the struggle between positive and negative forces. Towards the end, the white-appareled man is defeated. The story abounds in ironies. The biggest tragedy is that of the character ‘dumb’ who has logical insight without the capability to express. Those who have the art of concoctions dominate others and divide others.

The short stories of Koul provide new insights into the socio-cultural setup and the exploitation of the common Kashmiri. Koul’s art is unique in the genre of the Kashmiri short story. With his evocative expression and a deep sense of his ethnic and cultural
consciousness, his art has been called as a “multidimensional creative ability” (Raina 2005: 200).

An important dimension of the Kashmiri short story is the employment of the myth with the foregrounding of a contemporary issue. Universality and timelessness of myth has always attracted the critics and writers and it has been appreciated as well. But it needs an artistic skill to relate it to the present day situations. There are many writers who have taken recourse to this technique, prominent among them being Hriday Koul Bharti, Farooq Masoodi, Bashir Akhter, Gulshan Majeed etc.

**Hridey Koul Bharti**

Bharti (1937- ) has contributed a lot to the development of the Kashmiri fiction. ‘Shikast’, ‘aabnosuk rolar’, ‘hamzaad’, ‘vakhte kis chokhatas manz’ are some of his notable stories. Bharti is a master in creating personal images. His technique is based on a combination of dream and reality and myth and history (Muzmar 100). The loss of the identity is one of the central motifs of his stories. In one of his stories, ‘hamzaad’, a person sees people chattering like monkeys, having a thick hairy skin like them. He is able to see this as long as as he keeps his distinct identity. But then he is subjected to an operation through which he undergoes a sort
of mental metamorphosis in consequence to which he does not see any difference from them as he has developed a thick skin and also chatters like monkeys.

Bharti concentrated on creation of personal symbols in his short stories and by relating myth with his personal experiences, he, in a way, created new myths. His short story ‘Shraz’ is a juxtaposition of a folk tale and the author's personal experience. Shraz is an indigenous Kashmiri myth that reverbrates the universal urge to recreate:

(T)he shraz … is a typically Kashmiri mythological bird. In the myth, the bird is in love with the moon and attempts to hug it. In its pursuit of the moon, the bird goes atop a height and, guessing the moon to be closer, jumps off the height to grab the moon. It falls down to death and from its ashes rises another shraz. The myth reads like an indigenous version of the mythical Greek phoenix.

(Ahmad, retrieved)

In this story, the author very skillfully interrelates the myth and his life. The locale of the story is a bus stand where the two characters, a male and a female, are waiting for the bus. The male character relates the story of Shraz to the inquisitive female character. The mythical bird ascends the highest mountain peak to
embrace the moon but as it jumps up, it falls down and decomposes. From its ashes rise many insects who, in turn, develop into full-fledged birds and, then, meet the same end. The cycle continues unabated. The recurrence of this cycle of death and birth is symbolic of human endeavours of aiming for the impossible, resulting in failures in the endeavour. But, the same unsuccessful attempts give meaning to one’s existence through struggle and perseverance. However, in the short story, the male character modifies the story to express his emotions for the female character:

What happened to him! His heart sank and blood coagulated. His prowess to fly was exhausted and he lost his identity. The knowing suggested that leeches were its remedy. But the leech rearees had long abandoned the locality as no one’s blood coagulated in that area now.

(Koul 2007: 112)

In ‘tsekre viyuh’ (The wheel of the destiny), the author tries to say that our destinies are as much predestined as the frozen moments in photographs or paintings, hanging on the walls of his room. In this story, the narrator is engrossed in looking at the painting of Abhimanyu, a character from the Hindu mythological epic, *Mahabharata*, alongside the picture of Ibn-e Ishaq, his
classmate from an African country. His focus leads him to ruminate on the fate like this:

This moment has got frozen there only… This moment is the barrier between action and its consequences. This reality is restricted to my room only. ... His meeting with Ibn-e Ishaq and his fiancé…. This moment did not freeze. Nor would he want it to freeze because then this moment would have become cold like a corpse… The large and heavy pillar is still in the hands of Abhimanyu. His strong muscles have not slackened a bit. The spear-weilding warrior of Korawas is still just about to throw his spear. This just is the reality of that moment which has got frozen on the wall of my room. Otherwise, this episode has ended long ago… This frozen moment should melt now with the warmth of life. Those days from the Mahabharata should come to an end now on my wall too… The moment frozen on the wall of my room is probably the last door of my chakre vyuh. Probably it’s my turn now.

(Koul 1974: 78)

The name of his friend and that of the mythical and legendary figure occupy the niche. The past is ossified in the formation of the wall images. Neither the lotus-formation of the epic nor that of his Nigerian friend is the subject of the story, but it is the maze that has gripped the consciousness of the anguished
protagonist--lonely and besieged. The writer has been able to relate his personal experience to a glorious event of history as a single moment integrated sub-conscious level.

**Arjan Dev Majboor**

Majboor did not write many short stories but the very few he wrote made their impact on the over-all development of this genre in the Kashmiri language. ‘haaras to korun wande’ (Spring Has Turned into Autumn) is one of his moving stories that deals with the predicament of the migration of the Pandits from Kashmir. The central character of the story is a seventy year old lady Poshi Kuj who has lost her memory with the loss of her motherland. She continues to live in Kashmir in her mind while being away from it. She lives each season of Kashmir, its landscape, snowfall, mountains, gardens and the gushing streams. She wallows in its harsh winter and the beautiful autumn. She feels all cultural and ethnic symbols of Kashmir like kanger, dessicated food, and other ethnic Kashmiri cuisine. She remembers each of her neighbours and calls out their names. Here are some passages from the story: “Snow has destroyed the plant saplings on the mountain ridges. All the saplings we had planted in spring have broken off. Twigs of apple trees have fallen down. God be kind to all! (Majboor 2010:309).
Her son Somnath just enters the room after having travelled a lot searching for an alternative accommodation. He is exhausted and lies down in the room. Poshikuj, unaware of his predicament reacts like this:

You must be tired… snow is stuck to you all over. Go and shake this off in the washroom. Arundhati wil get tea for you…. Hey, someone is calling from the backside. I think it is Azeez Bhat, the fish seller. May God help him marry all his four daughters off. He first visits our courtyard with his fish; “Poshikuj, I have got a big catch for you today: whole two kilogrammes. Go and get a big tray. Cook it with red raddish grown on the ridge side. I swear, your mouth will sweeten after eating the fish.”

Then suddenly Poshikuj screems: Hey, my kanger fell off. She started picking charcoal with the palms of her hands but she could not find anything. She sprung up but collapsed. Pami who was lost in watching her instantly came forward to hold her. Somnath and Arundhati lifted Poshikuj and lay her on bed. They fed her a few sips of water. She became conscious. …. Hey night has set in. Light the candle. Throw the snow off the rooftops tonight only.
Somnath was holding his tears. Arundhati would have cried aloud but she knew that it was not her own home. They will be thrown out in the night only. She was dumbstruck….

(Majboor 2010: 310-11-12)

The story is a chilling reminder of the kind of existential, ethnic and cultural challenges that the Kashmiri Pandits had to face in the wake of their migration from their motherland, Kashmir. The story especially focuses on the aged Pandits who could not reconcile to the hostile weather and environment they had to bear outside Kashmir. The sudden migration of the Pandits put them in a precarious situation where they had to deal with multiple challenges at the same time which took its heavy toll especially on the elderly as they were more conscious of the sense of getting uprooted.

**Farooq Masoodi**

Masoodi, with just few of his stories, created a niche for himself in the literary circles. He broke the conventional plot and character scheme of the short story and cleaved through the convention to develop the art in a unique way:

Though lavishly praised by some and condemned by others, Farooq’s stories created a stir because, discarding all conventional claptrap, he presented his characters in their
essential nudity, emphasizing the fact that since every person is irretrievably enmeshed in various circumstances, he is basically governed by animal instincts.

(Raina 201)

Masoodi experimented in the art through such of his stories as ‘noshi lab’, ‘kohi qaaf’, ‘samaah’, ‘alfatah’ and ‘kohi qaafas peth pari, ‘jin te hero’ etc. In these stories, Masoodi puts forth his experiences in the form of powerful symbols.

‘The spectacle’ by Farooq Masoodi is a beautiful depiction of the loss of cultural identity as perceived by the Kashmiris themselves. The story is set in the backdrop of the civilisational mores of the Kashmiri icons like the river Jhelum to mourn the loss of that identity which was a matter of pride for Kashmiris once upon a time. Here is how the story begins and develops:

He kept on stoking his head with his fingers. He remained in doubt even after stoking his dry and rough hair. That is why he tapped with the nail of his finger on the top of his head. The head made a sound which he felt echoing through his whole body. He felt sure that his whole body was hollow and ringing from top to bottom. … He pulled out the drawer of the table and put his hand in to search for something. The drawer was bottomless. Putting his hand in from one side and bringing it out from the other end, he started searching for something. His
fingers found clue of nothing. What am I searching for. He could not think what he was looking for. The empty drawers indicated to no clue of any legacy. Irritated, he pushed the drawer in and could not recollect what he was looking for… . He kept on searching on the edges of his head but could find no clue as if his memory had disappeared after deceiving him for ever… The whole sky was blue. It had no blue patch anywhere, no vestige of any cloud. He could not create a patch of cloud with which to gain access to something.

(Masoodi, 195-6)

The whole passage reads like a dirge to the loss of the identity which has disappeared from the collective memory of the ethnic Kashmiris. The story shows the civilisational mores of Kashmir having originated and developed along side the meandering of the river Jehlum which is one of the potent cultural landmarks of the ethnic Kashmir.

**Gulshan Majeed**

Majeed has presented such situations and characters which otherwise seem to be quite disgusting at their surface but his treatment and the context in which he uses them adds to their meaning and they attain wider dimensions. His characters are shorn of any specific identity. He uses such symbols in his stories which
are abhorrent in normal life, like ‘scabbies-affected dog’, ‘worn out shoes’, ‘pests’, etc. In his short story ‘khashirlad huni sendis ardalas manz akh safar’ (A journey in the escort of a scabby dog), a group of people travelling under the leadership of a dervish are much perturbed by a scabby dog which does not leave their company. They are at a loss to understand whether they are escorting the dog or the dog is escorting them. Finally, their leader advises them to split in different directions to get rid of the dog. Once they converge again, after travelling separately for long, they are shocked to see the dog with them again. The story reads like a mythical anecdote which amuses and puzzles at the same time.

Another story of his, ‘afsane’, is set in the uncertain political situation in Kashmir where Lal Chowk (the Clock Tower), located in the heart of the city and named after the Red Square of the erstwhile USSR, has assumed a symbolic value of a fort whose control refers to the control of the whole state. But this road always remains a site of much turmoil: “Only God knows what the reality is. The story is that a shoe fell off in the midst of Lal Chowk. One who dropped it was whisked away by the procession” (Majeed 1995:201).
The beginning impeccably describes the dilemma Kashmiris are caught in. They are unwillingly taken along by those whom they never connect with. They are rebels without a cause, lost in the maze of their own worries while swearing by slogans they never believe in. The story also connects the political and the personal. Here is the passage:

The one who fell it off was whisked away by the procession. A child saw it and before he could be crossed over by his mother by catching his arms, he put his foot inside the shoe but it fell off just after a few steps. It was seen by a dog who took off from that side of the road and pulled it to the edge of the road on this side … Majja pulled the hem of the cloak of his mother and said, “Mom, shoes.” Mom was lost in her thoughts …

Majja looked back and saw the shoe in the mouth of the dog, “Moji, there is a dog here”, your father cost me a lot. Mother was lost in her reveries…

Mother felt the shoe slipping out of hand. This rascal had beckoned me beforehand. I would have reached the home by now. Majja’s father must be enraged. I will push this same shoe in his mouth if he alarmed the neighbors today also.

The shoe must have got dusted, Majja thought, but where will its weight go… The procession kept on going. The shoe must
have been trampled upon, Majja thought, but where will its soul go, I just need its soul.

(Majeed, 205)

Majeed is known for writing stories that challenge the conventional understanding of the genre or that of the society for that matter. He has a knack of challenging the society with his narrative and the narrative with the way he looks at society. Almost all his stories are like that. Despite being burdened with philosophical undertones, his stories are set among the run of the mill of the Kashmiri ethnic society. His philosophy is not borrowed from any unindigenous philosophical tradition but originates from the local sources which have been feeding the indigenous literary tradition of Kashmir. His stories do not show any solitary character wallowing in any of his philosophical misery but shows the tradition in action through the common characters of Kashmir.

Conclusion

Surveying the strong tradition of the short story writing in the Kashmiri language, we come to realize that within a short span of time, the genre has superseded other much older genres of the Kashmiri language like poetry and drama. It has outgrown its origin and has successfully placed itself on the pedestal of the
indigenous tradition of Kashmir. Its thematic concerns have not remained restricted to its traditional index but have skillfully absorbed the ethnic and cultural life of the Kashmiri consciousness. The way the genre has been used and adopted by the ethnic writers of Kashmir has helped it develop a narrative pattern and a structure of its own which makes it look like an inalienable part of the intellectual tradition of Kashmir.