Chapter-4

Looking into the Heart of Life: The Short-Stories of Akhtar Mohi-ud-din

Kashmir has always been very rich in the folk tales of unknown authorship (loke-khatha). They are stories of diverse kinds and are undoubtedly variants of popular tales in India and other countries and have been kept alive by oral tradition, recited by professional story tellers called Kathagary. Like the poetry that was written long ago- Vaakh, Shrukh, Vatsun and Masnavi – they have also been landed down the generations in the same way. One finds a variety in repertoire (meaning) of these story tellers. These are typical Indian stories like the Tale of a Parrot and The Story of Raja Vikramaditya, tales of Persian origin like Yusuf Zulikha and Mahmood of Ghazni and a medley of other stories- fairy stories like Wazirmaal and Lalmaal, romantic tales like Shah Sayaar, Tales of Highwaymen and other popular spicy narratives. Sir Aural Stein, who translated Khalhana’s history of Kashmir, Rajtarangni and gave the world the first collection of folk stories. This book was published in London in 1923 and was edited by Grierson.

Short story in Kashmiri started with a a serious attempt given by writers like Nadim, Zutshi, Noor Mahamood Roshan and Aziz Harwan in particular and in the issue of March 1950, Kong Posh, two short stories appeared Jawabi Kaard by Nadim and Yeli Pholi Gaash (When Dawn Broke) by Zutshi, both from progressive writers group.

All the stories that appeared then showed a coherence in the sentence structure. It was also refreshing that the words were chosen from everyday speech, one of the essentials for all progressive writing. Hence Kashmiri prose was forging ahead of expression- narrative, descriptive, expository and emotive- soon after 1950. This really was a long –felt need, for there are a thousand things in life which cannot be expressed by the poetry only.

The two stories that were the first to appear in print were followed by more, like Nadim Rai (Blight) and Sheena Pyato Pyato (Keep Falling Snow), Aziz Haroon’s Zoon (Moon) and Bram (Illusion), Noor Mahamad Roshan’s Neh Gata, Mirza Arif Nanreare. Rehman Rahi’s Yeli Su Thana Pyav (When He was Born) and others. However Nadim soon found that short story was not his cup of tea, he had a long way to go before succeeding in this field. He
certainly had talent but wasn’t writer to practice this art. All the stories mentioned above belong to the progressive period coinciding with the raid on Kashmir by Pakistan. Naturally, they have very common characteristics, there were not more than twelve writers in the field of the short story, most of whom had written earlier in Hindi or Urdu before switching over to Kashmiri as most poets from Zinda Kaul to Rahman Rahi had done. This led to importing of new themes and new styles they had known during this period. However, the short story that developed in Kashmir despite a few temporary foreign plumes, was firmly rooted in the soil. Prose was now being used for the first time for creating characters from various strata of Kashmiri society, both Hindu and Muslim. The task these new writers faced was thus a challenging task. They had to search for new words and phrases to clothe new thoughts and feelings in, to use old words native colloquial idioms and new contexts and connotations, incisiveness and dialogue.

Zutshi’s collected short stories were published covering forty five years of authorship as the stories here are very different from his first story written in the progressive literature days. After that a new period started, showing a greater maturity, with characters not tailor made.

These short stories are really short. The language is simple and sweet, and all figures of speech are drawn from the everyday life of common people. The first period of Kashmiri short story came to an end in 1955, with the most prominent among the new comers, Akhtar Mohiuddin (1928-2001) set a new trend. As T.K. Raina states:

For in his short stories you find for the first time a realistic portrayal of characters and situations and deftly woven plots, unlike what the unreal world of progressiveness had presented. There is freshness of theme and style and a marked sensibility. His diction is remarkable, fresh and these are unforgettable characters. One also finds a vein of satire as in Dandivazun and Daryayi Hund Yazar. (194)

Dandivazun (The Tiff) and Daryayi Hund Yezaar (Red silken Trouser) remain unparalleled so far, even by Akhtar himself. T.K. Raina further believes that, “One doesn’t find the pre- determined plot in any of stories, in which the accent is rather on revealing the mental process at work in the psyche of very ordinary individuals.”(194). In the genre of short stories the most outstanding writers are Akhtar Mohiudin, Hari Krishan Koul and Amin Kamil, who
have written short stories which can stand shoulder to shoulder with the best stories in other traditions. As Prof. G.R. Malik says:

Akhtar Mohi-u-din’s short story is at once related to its time and environment, Kashmir’s age old tradition of story-telling and modern fiction, and yet it remains in a fundamental sense Akhtar Mohiudin’s own story. Above all each of his stories emerges ultimately which comprehends a wide variety of experience and insight turned into genuine works of fictional art in which traditional and modern elements are organically fused together. ‘Man is a Strange Breed’ reads like a virtual fairy-tale while stories like ‘The Hourie of Paradise’ and ‘Red Silken Pajamas’ are bitterly realistic. (7)

In the story _Aadam chu Ajab Zaath_ (Man is a Strange Breed) Malla Subhan is the owner of a house boat, H.B. Butterfly. Even in his old age he served the guests, he had hired a servant also; his neighbors were annoyed with him, because he would earn good money. Malla Subhan was not poor. When he got married he had two daughters and two sons. The daughters were married off and one of the sons died at the age of seven months but Ramzan the other son died in the prime of his youth. During Second World War many British came to Kashmir, Malla Subhan’s son, Ramzan ran away from home. He enlisted himself in the army. Subhan was shocked, because there was no reason for his son to run away from home, as they were earning the livelihood more conveniently than most of the house boat owners because no other house boat was filled with British as theirs. Akhtar through Malla Subhan tells that Kashmiri’s even did not know who is fighting, for whom and for what purpose.

Why should he kick it all away and join the war? Whose war was it anyway? What had they to do with it? If anything, they should pray to God that the British are defeated and German win and come here in their place – they are supposed to be better spenders. They are the ones who will bring prosperity here. Why is my son fighting on the other side? (13)

But still Ramzan ran away. He was amused by the foreigners. He always thought that their world is much more fascinating. They had railways, airplanes, factories, bombs, all kinds of arms, wars and so many things. He considered himself caged in Kashmir amidst of Dal and
mountain range engulfing it and just one market to see. For four years nobody knew about Ramzan’s whereabouts. When Ramzan returned from the war back to Kashmir, it was early summer and he laughed with delight looking at the soft waters of Dal and the mountain range surrounding it and was happy for coming back to life. He was now fed up of the world he was yearning for. He had now seen the truth of unseen world. He comments on the materialism of that world as:

Lands of Iraq, Egypt and Arabia were devoid of feeling, utterly lifeless. The tarred roads, factories and railways of Europe, he said, were cold blooded and cruel, as if the dead metal, steel had stretched it out and spread its cold body all over creation. (15)

Akhtar further says:

Ramzan was full of such strange observations ever since he had come back from soldering, like telling them that all that steel had frozen the hearts of the people in those lands, loss and death meant nothing to them and that he would also have been lost or dead if it had not been for the memory of the soil of Kashmir and the thought of its soft and gentle touch on his feet—that had kept him alive. The picture of the greenery of Kashmir in his mind would refresh his eyes, he would say, and the fact was that his thoughts focused on it all the time had saved him from getting lost or dying. (15)

In the story, *Houri of Paradise* Akhtar Mohi-u-din’s critical realism can be seen in abundance through the atrocities of Feudalism. Zaildars servant was son of Sammad Dar of Pethpur. Samad Dar was Zaildars tenant. His son was staying in Zaildars household, to look after the cows and feed them. But after sometime, the rumor spread all over the village that servant had passed an ‘unseemly’ comment at Zaildars daughter Fota. The whole village was filled with silence and stillness like graveyard. Even dogs were cursing the heavens for having created them to see this day because Zaildar was not that type of a person to ignore this incident. Every villager knew the anger that Zaildar will lay on the family concerned. “When Rahim Shakdar had stolen a basketful of cherries from the Zaildar’s orchard and the Zaildar had literally bitten him
in his anger.”(37). Zaildar was not only feared and respected in the village but even the government officials would favour him. As Akhtar says:

Because whenever one of them come on a tour to our district, he would be feted at the Zaildar’s table, Zaildar would also use his influence to get them out of any scrapes they might get into. It was said that the old Maharaja himself had graced the occasion of his marriage with his presence. His property stretched over acres of land. Most certainly half of Kashmir was his. Hence the quaking fear, in our hearts. (37)

Samad Dar’s son ran away from the home village and Samad Dar did not know anything about his whereabouts. He could not be traced. In the meantime Fota gets married to another Zaildar’s son. Akhtar, ironically, describes the condition of Fota after marriage:

But her feminine modesty had only increased with time, because like the Zaildar’s, her in-laws were also scrupulously particular about the matter of purdah, and did not have a parallel in the world. Her husband too was a conscious of his prestige and self-respect, as Ghula Sahab was. So Fota still did not show herself even to the sun or moon. She still recited Koran in a voice, which put even the singing Fairies of the Forest to shame. She was a model of virtue for village maidens to follow. (42)

The narrator once meets Samad Dar’s son in a mosque and thought that he might have been dead or swallowed up by a river or banished in a strange land. When asked by narrator as to why he did make lustful advances towards Fota? The boy blushed at this question and was clinching his teeth and could not answer as “anger made him tongue-tied”. When the narrator goes back to the village after some time his wife’s face frightened him and she had turned pale and was highly agitated:

Is anything the matter? I asked her quickly and she spoke in her Whispers, “do you know what had happened? Fota was caught flirting with his servant lad” what? Where? My throat went dry “at her in-laws” my wife stammered. (38)
Akhtar Mohi-u-din’s stories have a strong cognitive and critical strain. His another short story *The Second Meeting* is a satire on how time plays its part in the life of a human being. What once was naturally fresh and beautiful is now, with the passage of time hard tried with the help of artificialities to look beautiful. Time has degenerated the freshness and beauty from the same very face. In *The Second Meeting*, the narrator on seeing the lady he had already met twenty years before doesn’t look the same. The narrator had spent intimate moments with her and he could now see the considerable change in her looks which he doesn’t want her to know.

It is not something that one should talk about. Not that it has no significance, but, that if she gets to know of it, her heart will break and she will weep and lament as to why time shall exist at all. (46)

When he had first met her, the feeling of air being heavy with the ‘scent of honeysuckle’ and rainbow against a clear sky would amuse narrator.

The moment was such that it is hard to find a parallel to describe its beauty. There was magic in her eyes. I don’t know what they mean when they talk about the magic of Bengal but if it has a quality of mystery about it, then it certainly lay in her eyes. I was fascinated—a snake caught in the charmer’s spell. My eyes were fixed on her lotus face. Her voice was sweet. When she spoke, it wasn’t merely her lips that moved- she communicated with her hands, her head, her shoulders, her whole being. Suffused with the sweetness of her voice, her body-language enhanced her beauty and combined with her beauty, her words sounded even more sweet. Were she to hum a song, it would seem as though far in a rich forest, poignant pipe, still un fashioned, had found its voice, sustained by the hope that the eternal maker would come and pierce holes in his breast and turn it into sieve of melody. (46)

As the narrator once again comments:

Time the master craftsman is always at work. If he wants to create he may produce an eternity fresh blaze of colour but when he wants to destroy, the solid tree in a distant forest will turn hollow, a lightening –struck skeleton, rotten and repulsive. (48)
And after twenty years when he went there the second time, she could not recognize him but he did:

Her hair looked the same, but today its glow owed itself to henna. The attempt to spin the old magic with her glances was still there, but dusty cobwebs seemed to hang limp upon her lashes, dull, monstrous. There was the hint of a squint too. It seemed that in the murky fluid of her eyes flashed the images of countless sins and misdeeds which refused to be denied. Her face did have colour, a film of powder and rouge, but where was the natural luster which had then shone like the vibrant colours of a rainbow? I recognized her and in the recesses of my heart a smouldering fire began to rage: why did I have to come here? I should have died in the intoxication of that first heady wine I had drunk when I came here first— that was heaven. (48)

The narrator further says that the more pathetic condition is when the lady does not recognize him:

She did not recognize me at all. How many changes must have been wrought in my face and appearance by Time, the master craftsman! Even now I would get up in the morning, dress as usual and satisfy myself that I continued to be just as I had always been. The occasional toothache, knee–pain or back strain and other such ailments had always seemed temporary aberrations. And as soon as cured, I thought myself as fit as I had been before. But today it dawned on me that I was wrong. The fact was that Time had left its indelible mark on each and every part of me. And therefore, I was the person I was that day when the two of us had met for the first time behind the shade of the Hill of Fairies! My palace of ice cracked and crumbled into pieces in a moment, and that certainly is not a matter of little significance. I was old—so old that my beloved of yesterday did not recognize me. (48-49)

His story *The Game of Snowballs* is about a rich person who wants to entertain himself and his guests. He does not bother even to risk the life of the workers. He in order to entertain his guests in the thick of winter throws a party in which all the Kashmiri dishes are served and
relished and above all a special Kashmiri dish ‘Harrissa’ is served. While enjoying himself and his guests about twenty workers are hired to play a game of snow balls which was the source of entertainment in those times. One of the workers Nabira who is asthmatic does not want to play. Khawaja Muma did not spare Nabira, even if he coughed several times in order that he will be spared. Nabira who could not withhold the shivers due to the chill and the wet clothes due to snow requested to leave the game. Khawaja Muma does not allow him and after the end of the first round of the game, food is served to the workers which Nabira does not want to eat, but khawaja Muma flares up, scolds and calls Nabira by names: ‘Run in, you cur, will you?” He Flared up. “Grown too big for your boots, you son- of - a bitch? (130). Nabira got feverish immediately after the first round of the match.

He was running with high temperature when he arrived home. His eyes had caved in and his lips had turned pallid. He was gradually losing his power of speech. His wife did her outmost to put him back on his feet, but every medicine proved inefficacious. Even the Talisman failed him. The end came only the few days later. (130)

When Khawaja Muma went to Nabira’s house to sympathise with his kin every one there praised Khawaja Muma’s humble gesture and his concern for them

Here is a king come to pay homage to the meanest of his servants, remarked one of the inmates of the house.” The other went still further “His humility has rewarded him well. God has been kind to him. Didn’t he recently hold a match of snowballs at which he entertained about two dozen workmen? (130)

In 1955, he wrote a Kashmiri short story Dandvazun (The Tiff). By reading Dandvazun one can say that first time in Kashmiri short story someone is talking about the lower class, the family of scavengers. The short story got fame, however writer himself did not have the inkling that it will be acclaimed. As Akhtar says, “… I was afraid to write in Kashmiri, can Kashmiri give vent to my feelings, this made me always scared and sometimes I felt hopeless, but the plot of the story was fabricated in my brain…(2)”.

Dandvazun (The Tiff) is a story of a family of lower class, who have prepared a special dish which was boiling on stove, boiling and ready to be served but the husband and wife start a
tiff because they are not able to spare some money for the clothes of their daughter which she was in need. Meanwhile the dish, which he had bought from the money received on the first of the month, is stolen by one of the hooligans of their neighborhood and when the matter is settled down they look for the dish that is to be seen nowhere. The whole story brings out the life lived by socially marginalized people, how they manage their expenses and how they meet their ends. All the characters of the story seem to be real: “With all his anger, yep! Breeus the scavenger got up and slapped his wife, and hit her three or four times…” (Dandvazun: 2). Just as Dandvazun is the depiction of reality of scavengers, their social and economic problems same is the case with Bren, which depicts the life of Gujjars, another socially marginalized group. He portrays social, cultural and psychological problems of this group. The narrative of story is so transparent that it seems whatever is there is happening is in front of us.

Kashmir has its own culture, its own customs. The uniqueness and exclusiveness of Kashmiri culture can be discovered with different short stories of Akhtar Mohi-u-din. He has given different hues and colours to the cultural entities of Kashmir. Akhtar admirably uses these colours in his stories. He shows the laments and lamentations when there is death of somebody and festivity when there is any festival or marriage. He dramatizes the situation by showing Kashmiri ‘tumbaknari’ and ‘nout’ and women preparing for ‘rouff’. Mohalla Hooligan gives the in-depth into how Kashmiri’s are used to take tea in ‘Samavar’. In Red Silken Trouser Akhtar depicts how Kashmiri’s are used to eating meat and in Mahmoodoo Walladi Lassoo he shows how Kashmiri’s used to live in huts. In these stories he thoroughly depicts the culture of Kashmir. These stories portray the picture of the ancestors of Kashmir, who had lived in shacks. And in this modern age certain things of our culture have been still preserved “He had to take wazawan throughout the week, and had to take bakerkhwani with kehewa and could not sleep throughout” (34). This is true of every Kashmiri household in the summer season which is the season of marriages.

Akhtar’s early short stories portray the locale and environment which include Kashmir peasantry and common people. He depicts their fate, poverty, helplessness, unemployment and Begaar (labour without wages), which is the fate of Kashmiri people. They are inflicted by the atrocities. In his short stories he pictures the political game plans which Kashmiri people have to endure silently. Wanun Ma Banam (My Lips Are Sealed) and Election are the examples of this
kind of politics. *Election* shows those all tricks which politicians play during the process of election in Kashmir. This story portrays the environment which is usually seen in Kashmir. Raising slogans, stone pelting, political gatherings- these are the tactics which are used during the period of elections by the political parties, although the candidates are chosen without the consent of people beforehand. Political hooliganism is what happens in Kashmir even today. The reality of Kashmir in the present times is the clashes, conflicts, biases which left the land scattered with corpses. People suffer from atrocities inflicted on them by so called elected governments. Even children and women are the sufferers of this type of situation in Kashmir. All these factors have been portrayed in Akhtar’s short stories in a very dramatic way. The stories like *Thus Baba Spake*, *Atankwadi* (*The Terrorist*), *Smile of Jali* and *Darkness*, gives us the picture of not only on the psychology that works in character, but also shows the social and political evils. *New Diseases* also show the environs that Kashmiri have been forbearing for last two decades. “…the day they started search, everybody seemed to be sick. Some are trying to search their own selves and enter…” (22).

The present situation of Kashmir is depicted in Akhtar’s stories. The ‘bullets’ ‘bombs’ and death is dramatized so realistically that the reader feels it by his heart. *Jali Hind Dand Phali* (*The Smile of Jali*) is the best example of such situations in Kashmir. Akhtar’s another collection of short stories 71799 is another example of such situations in Kashmir. Likewise, his story,*Trauma* which is ironic about the very same circumstances. This story got a great acclamation throughout India and was widely translated. Noor Mohammad Bhat’s article on Akhtar which was published in Greater Kashmir on 27th May 2000 says that, “--- *Chaes* (Trauma) is based on compassion. The main character of the story exhibits towards a chick which is tortured at the hands of many especially its own beings.” The story philosophizes the situation of Kashmiri people who is been tortured by everyone especially by his own people. This story depicts the reality of how Kashmiris are being treated by different political ideologies and their reaction to it. The viewpoint of Kashmiris is depicted through the chick, when the saviour of the chick himself says that when this chick will “grow up nicely and then we would slay him and eat his flesh” (122). and then continues:

He was sitting away in the nook _crestfallen._ I picked him up. He didn’t run away, nor did he struggle, he was only moaning, feebly. He was saying
something. He was saying, probably ‘well, I am passing off. Does that gladden your heart? I am passing off. I will not cry cock-a-doodle-doo! I will not lay eggs. I will not do anything at all. I will do what delights all__ I will die. (123)

This Does Not Happen, I Couldn’t Do Anything, Frizz, Artificial God, Tortoise and Dandavazun are the stories drawn from reality and in one or the other way having a satiric tone on the social problems of day to day. As Shafi Shauq comments, “This Does not Happen, I couldn’t do Anything, Frizz and Tortoise are written under the influence of a movement in which realities of life like two or two makes four are made understand.”

The short story, Tortoise is a satire on simple common people. In this story it is shown that Kashmiri’s are not to be underestimated although they do not take decisions in the big meetings like as the thinkers and philosophers of the world do. They also think and talk about the world around, at barbers’ shop, tailors’ shop etc: “… on Rasul tailors shop the decision was made that whenever country tries to disturb the peace of world, such people will be defeated at last, because all the people over the world want peace…” (31). A great critic Ratan Lal Shant comments on Tortoise “…Tortoise is a satire on common simpletons, who do not believe on life’s internal forces and evolutions of civilization” (14)

The Frizz is about the father of a daughter who is trying hard to make his daughters’ marriage possible. How a skilled and modest girl’s marriage doesn’t get matured. Kashmiri culture is very beautifully depicted in this story. The story starts in the household of Gafoor Khan and ends there only. In this story through go-betweens lie the marriage proposals. Through these go-betweens we have deep look into the materialistic in-depth and interests of the people, who have no consideration for the honesty, modesty or the good qualities in a person. They only think in terms of money only, that they can have in the name of dowry including the girl being employed.

As the progressive movement gave realistic portrayal to Kashmiri stories, the inclusion of sexuality is also seen directly or indirectly in these short stories, which is true of every other language of the world. Akhtar also gave space to this thing in his short stories. He sometimes directly or indirectly tries to explain the obscenities of sex. His short stories like, Red Silken Trouser, The Insult, The Houri of Paradise and The Times are concerned with this psyche. In
*Houri of Paradise* the scene between the servant and the Zaildar’s daughter depicts how she is trying to seduce and entrap her servant in sexual intimacy. In *The Insult* the affair and intimacy between a Muslim man and a Hindu girl indirectly depicts the same thing. In *Red Silken Trouser* Akhtar shows that sex and its thought can make you happy. An old couple Nabir Shaala and his wife living contentedly enjoy their life in spite of poverty, old age and deprivations. Nabir Shaala, is however painfully aware of his conditions. He merely made out a bare hand to mouth living for himself, only following others who monopolize the trade. Oblivious to the miseries he is giving mouth to songs and loves life and its environs that provide stuff to his soul. He enjoys all this in his wooden shack overlooking the Jhelum. His wife too, in spite of the death of all her male children in their childhood and the distressing memories therefore is unbroken and alive in as far as she relives her past intimacy in donning the only remaining red silken trousers of her bridal outfit to regale her husband. The influence of scandalized son-in-law only provokes to assert the inviolability of his private life:

As Khotan Dyad stealthly and softly moved to avoid Nabir Shaala’s gaze till she would sit, without being aware of it, she tripped up her great toe of her foot in the cord of the mat and fell down flat, face forwards. Nabir Shaala gave a start. He saw her lying prostrate like a wild bird. Feeling apprehensive, she gave a shriek, but soon she lifted her profile up, cast winsome smile on Nabir Shaala and he, holding her arms around her while trying to lift her up, “Yuguy may Kyenh”. (79) Khotan Dyad told him that she had not, while her eyes were still downcast. “Now, get up, will you!” She looked at him, her head which was still lowered. Nabir Shaala, insisted that she must stand up. Khatoon Dyad obstinately declined. He was all out for pulling her up. They even relapsed into obscenities and ribaldries like a newly wedded couple. Khotan Dyad, too, became oblivious to the fact that she was mother of married children and a grandmother too. Nabir Shaala on his part was quite dead to the fact that even his son-in-law was an old man. In this exchange of ribaldries, they forgot the whole world; Nabir Shaala pulling her by the arm, while sat tight. He pulled her at hem of the pheran and up at the shoulders only to see her stand up. (79)

In the exchange of love they forgot the whole world.
But soon there was a knock at the door and it was their son-in-law who had watched all this in the corridor. Khatoon Dyad felt absolutely mortified. The son-in-law left the room without wishing them back. Khatoon Dyad felt ashamed as if she had been caught red handed. She cast a guilty look at her husband, who pounced upon her saying: We are not convicted of any felony! Everybody is a king unto himself in his domain. (80)

*Quest* a Mumbai based magazine wrote about this story, “this is a poem of love eternal and deserves to be included in the world anthology of short stories”. Nabir Shaala darns the clothes of people and in case needs scissors and while searching for scissors he drops bundle of clothes and the bridal trouser fall out of it. He recalls the days of his marriage and then insists upon his wife to wear those trousers. As Noor Mohammad says in Greater Kashmir:

Akhtar describes the scene with master touches. This story revolves round the print which is apparently of very little significance. When viewed in the context of two elderly persons who had crossed the barrier of age at which sensuousness no longer hold snag…

Akhtar Mohiudin in *Madanwar and Padmaan: A love Story* shows the intensity and seriousness of their love and their pledge to live it up, keeping the torch of their love aflame and bright as it faces the fiercely raging storm of the different truth perception of their fathers.

Madanwar’s heart felt gladdened at reading the stories and so would Padmaan after she went through them. They would look at each other with amazement and wordlessly convey to each other, “Did you understand this? I understood all there is to it”. One day they conveyed these ideas to each other in words rather than looks. That day, the skies got as it were clear and it was cloudlessly sunny. The birds thrilled so profusely that deafness took leave of the deaf as if the very breeze honeyed their lips and the crescent moon shone bright on their foreheads.(88)

Then in the loftiness of their love as from heights they perceive that though perceptions of their fathers apparently look different but have the same root. Initially they felt pleased and promised that they will tell their fathers that their different perceptions had the same root. But
with the passage of time they do not guard the flame of their love against the wild wind of different ideologies. With the passage of time their flame of love starts cooling down as both are pulled towards the ideologies of their respective fathers. So their inherited ideologies proved stronger than their love till they even impressed upon their children to believe in their respective ideologies. And this ultimately led to their disconsolate death.

Madanwar and Padmaan were anxious. Madanvaar now wanted to show the children the falsehood of their truth and show the light of the truth which formerly was his father’s truth and now also his own. Padmaan on her part also tried to bring home to them the falsehood of their truth and wanted them to own the truth which had formerly belonged to her father and now to her. The confrontation had created a silent turbulence in their surroundings. This confrontation put on layer after layer and anybody knew which vein to follow. Meanwhile, Madanwaar passed away and Padmaan got released. She had a mind she would bring her children close to her with love and sift the fact from fiction so that ice was broken and dark clouds of confrontation were dispelled. (89)

As M. Siddiq Beigh comments on the story:

It is neither a traditional nor a photographic representation but an eye opener to our own plight; how, in spite of awareness bring these, it is not lived up to its logical conclusion, not outstanding the awareness it presenting time and again people relapsing into what they had striven so hard to get released from. This is true of men and situations with awareness and safeguarding the values that matter are abdicated and soporific routine, where through sheer boredom, there is complete reversal of values, much to the distress in which human situations get intertwined and choked. (20)

In another short story of Akhtar Mohiudin, Thou Art, Thou Alone Art, he is acutely sensitive to the atmosphere pervading many last decades. He boldly and wittily represents the beginning of hopelessness when Nimrood is disillusioned after the intoxicating optimism of success. This phase, he feels, repeats itself in every age and each illusionary success springs back, making men believe that they felt short of expressing their inner feelings tries to see ‘on the
other side of the wall as a dim perception’. In this dim perception of ‘what died then when there was nothing?’ When Nimrod had shot an arrow towards the skies blood dribbled. Akhtar visualises the clear situations that a human life comes across and when the darkness is undiminished, it can be resolved only by the ray of light.

A tremendously big show is being played on this as well as on other side of wall. Age after age, I grow new skin like a serpent and doing again what I had tried myself in the ages bygone. In each new life, I believed in good faith that had done something entirely new, so new that I had never done before. In every age, I threw a sling to the skies and struck my head against the lamp post; recognizing in every age the only colour which according to my lights is the crown of all the colours…… the darkness. (84)

The theme of the story is interpreted by M.Siddiq Beigh in his own words:

The indistinct perception of the other side of the wall has happening all along as one system gives way to another, and one vision is supplanted by the other. There is a necessity of weaving of myth if one is to live and not to lose heart in this endless desert where your feet are rewarded by blisters. The way farer has to find a meaning if only to retain a semblance of sanity. Myth is not just a fiction but a great energiser, and by the fell of wholeness that it gives to a limited being, it drags him on to new constructions and new visions, only to reveal that we have run aground getting soreheaded. It is a negative teacher because it every time, after initial optimism, reveals to be vulnerable and limited. But does man learn? (21)

Akhtar Mohiudin in his story Does Anyone Have the Strength is written about how the situation in Kashmir changed with the eve of armed rebellion against the Indian rule. The people in Kashmir, even if they belonged to different religions, used to live happily together. They used to live in complete harmony without doubting each others sincerity before the event of the armed turbulence. He shows how the circumstances changed the outlook of other sects who are afraid of every Muslim, in Kashmir. The narrator is in the bus, he saw a child stepping into the bus and asks his mother for a seat near the window, which narrator willingly and happily gives him:
He stepped into the bus and it seemed that a rose had suddenly bloomed in it, as if a shining star had torn a hole through the clouds and emerged to dazzle. The first thing he did on entry was to demand the window seat. He got it— I vacated it for him. Now I was seated between him and his mother, who sat on my left… (51)

The narrator also tells us about how the child is looking at things and is filled with the sense of wonder:

To him everything was a novelty, a colourful entity, a mystery to be explored. It might be his mother that he kept glancing at, but the message was for all of us, urging us sightless people to see all the things that were so clearly visible to him. To me his chatter was the essence of wisdom. More than the substance, I was his manner of speaking that was full of meaning. He marveled at each and every facet of life around him, excited by everything. (51)

While seeing all this, a thought comes to the mind of the narrator that some time back, a news came in a paper that two little kids were killed by some criminals on the roadside. He also remembers that the other news adjacent to this was that human beings have made the progress in the technological field and new discoveries and inventions that had hit the scene are quite contradictory. No doubt, the progress has raised a man to the maxim, on the one side and on the other side, humans have regressed towards the bestial activities and co-humans have lost faith in being humane. Likewise humans of Kashmir have lost faith in each other as the narrator realizes that people of different religions of the state have lost faith in each other. He is hurt and pained when he saw the child and his mother a Hindu, are trying to hide their identity from the narrator:

The child’s understanding is pure, unclouded…he certainly sees the monster, the demon lurking inside me. But I appeal to you all, my brothers, my friends, will someone please speak up for me? Will someone who still has strength of utterance left, tell this child that he is the morning star of my firmament, he alone the mark of obeisance on my brow? (55)

The writer here tells us how people of different sects are suffering from distrust towards each other. The story is the depiction of pain and pathos of the narrator for not being trusted, as a
common, loving human being. The story is the protest against the evils of that period in the turbulent Kashmir.

*Death and the Grapevine* is another story in which critical realism can be explained well. The narrator in the story gives us the detailed versions of the different people while describing the same event. Five different men have five different perceptions and five different approaches towards the same happening or event. The narrator says that if the sixth person would have been given chance he would have given his own view point of the ‘happening’.

Thus along with the major novels Akhtar presents an equally important aspects of critical realism in his short stories some of which such as *Man is a Strange Breed* is most pathetic and full of helplessness in the economic realities faced by the characters. He describes the sordid reality and the emotional breakdown of his protagonists on account of continuous pressure working on the minds of the characters as depicted in the stories. This means that his stories are the precursor to the critical realism which he successfully follows in the later works.