

## A Study of the Kashmiri Short Fiction from Ethno-Nationalistic Perspective

Abid Ahmad \*

### Abstract

*The Kashmiri short story has some peculiarities which are unique to it. It took birth in the violent context of the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947. Compared to other genres, the Kashmiri short story is the ace reflection of the rich cultural and social life of Kashmir. It depicts the socio-cultural landscape of the Kashmiri ethnicity which has been looking upon itself as a distinct identity.*

*It is also reflective of the ethnic and cultural consciousness of Kashmiris as a community. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse the Kashmiri short story through the four broad ethno-nationalistic parameters of mythology, history, contemporary conflict, distinct ethnic consciousness and the collective behavioural patterns of the Kashmiri community.*

**Key words:** Short Story, Ethno-Nationalism, Mythology, History, Contemporary Conflict, Ethnic Consciousness, Cultural Consciousness.

Kashmiri language, despite being rich in poetry and drama has been less privileged in having a strong tradition of the prose writing. There were sporadic prose pieces by way of translation of some religious classics which were available in Kashmiri. Interestingly the Bible was translated into Kashmiri much before the holy Quran. It was because of the proselytizing missionaries that the Bible was translated into Kashmiri as early as 1821. After that there was a long lull as no serious effort was made by any writer at writing prose. Though there were some isolated attempts but they were inconsequential as they made no impact on the language in any significant way.

It was in the mid-twentieth century that some writers under the progressive writers' influence started writing short stories in Kashmiri. Initially, they wrote in Urdu language for the reason that there was no tradition of story writing or novel writing in Kashmiri but very soon they switched to Kashmiri as they realised that this language had the potential to accommodate the modern genres like the short story.

The Kashmiri short story has some peculiarities which are unique to it. It took birth in the violent context of the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947. The partition led to the division of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. In this context, the genre was initially adopted as a tool of propaganda. "Yeli Phol Gash" by Somnath Zutshi and "Jaweabi Card" by Dina Nath Nadim, both published in 1950 in *Konge Posh*, the official organ of the Progressive Writers' Movement of Kashmir are the specimens of the fact (Shouq 11). Almost all writers of that age were progressive writers. Somnath Zutshi, Akhter Mohi-uddin, Tej Bahadur Bhan, Sufi Ghulam Mohammad, Ali Mohammad Lone, etc believed in socialist understanding of art.

However, more than the genre it was the medium, the Kashmiri language, the principal identity mark of the Kashmiri community which created a furore among the literary circles. The adoption of the Kashmiri as medium in these stories created enthusiasm among many writers who switched from the Urdu to the Kashmiri, leading to its further growth and expansion.

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\* Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar

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Though the genre has multiple angles to look at, it is deeply rooted in its ethno-nationalistic mores. There are four ethno-nationalistic parameters through which the Kashmiri short story can be analysed. They are elucidated below:

### **1. Mythology**

Mythology is one of the dominant motifs of the Kashmiri short story as it is one of the lasting sources of the Kashmiri identity. Kashmir is abundantly rich in mythical lore. Its landscape is the landscape of myth and mystery. Its topography looks like that of a distant fairyland. The mythological lore adds an antiquarian aura to its character. There are innumerable mythological signposts spread across the valley. In fact, many of these signposts have assumed a historical character. A few of them come out prominently. They include its creation myths including those of Kashyap Reshi, Sharika Devi and the Prophet Solomon's throne, in addition to its ancient mythical characters like Heemal Nyagray, Aka Nandun and the mythical locations like those of Balle Pur, Yarwan, Sindmat Nagar, Damodar plateau, etc. All these myths refer to a rich pre-historic legacy of Kashmir that survives by its own narrative, rich in plurisignation, multiplicity and diversity of meaning.

Mythology has been treated broadly in diverse ways in the Kashmiri short story. Bashir (Bahir 2008: 132) has identified three main strains of the treatment of the myth in the Kashmiri short story. However, these strains need modification and can be described as follows:

a. Borrowing the myth as it is: the first strain is that an existing myth is borrowed and developed through the medium of the short story in the same pattern without any change in its construction, plot and theme. The myth is only set in a particular locale and is given specific characters to make it immediate and relevant.

"Jahannami" (originally titled as "kafan cchoor"), a short story by Amin Kamil is an example of this. This story is essentially based on an indigenous myth of Kashmir whose moral is that the known devil is always better than the unknown devil.

b. Borrowing the idea from a myth: this is the second strain of this device whereby some myth spawns some story. The idea is essentially borrowed from a myth but the story has its own independent existence. It has a separate structure and only its theme echoes the prehistoric mythical theme.

"Khashir lad hooen sindis ardalas manz akh safar" by Gulshan Majeed, and "Kohi qafas peth akh jin, pari te hero saze langhis ghindan" by Farooq Masoodi are the specimens of such stories.

c. Adapting a myth: the third strain is more challenging as it tries to integrate the prehistoric myth with any contemporary phenomenon. Such a strategy has been employed in the stories like "Shraz", "phari", "Chekre vye", etc by Hriday Koul Bharti. The purpose of using such a methodology is manifold, one of them being to exhibit the human experiences as a single continuum.

### **2. History**

History is one of the most formative influences on the Kashmiri psyche. It is the most fiercely contested site and has multiple versions. Therefore, its appropriation is a political act. Kashmir's history is very torturous as most of its rulers suppressed the local populace. This oppression has crept into the collective memory of Kashmiri community and has given birth to most of the creative expressions, anecdotes and parables in Kashmiri language. Such historic memory has always been in the background of its creative literature.

Amin Kamil's "Phatak" and "sawal cchu kaluk" and Gulshan Majeed's "Afsane" give expressions to some of such anecdotes. They are the literary expression of some tragic happenings, thereby preserved through the medium of literature. Nazir Jihangir's "gober cchu mujrim" also belongs to the same category.

### **3. Contemporary Conflict**

The raging conflict in Kashmir that has taken a heavy toll on the Kashmiri community in general has also been reflected in the Kashmiri short story. In fact some of the poignant stories which emerged as masterpieces in recent past were the direct outcome of this conflict.

Akhter Mohiuddin's stories like "Atank Wadi", "now bemaer", "Jalli Hind Doonde Phel" and "election" poignantly bring out the traumatic experiences that Kashmiris had to undergo in the face of the brutal oppression. Arjan Dev Majboor's "haaras ti koren wande" and Rattan Lal Shant's "A pair of spectacles" bring out the Hindu perspective of the Kashmiri suffering and their displacement from their motherland.

### **4. Distinct Ethnic Consciousness**

There are many stories which underscore the distinct ethnic consciousness of Kashmiris who look at themselves as a distinct race. Such a consciousness has gone a long way in preserving their distinct identity and a strong sense of community. Stories like "Samah" by Farooq Masoodi typify the frantic search of Kashmiris for their lost identity in the face of the changing times. Equally important are the fault-lines within this ethnic consciousness, especially the divide between the Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. This faultline is dealt with in stories like "Taaph" by Hari Krishan Koul.

### **5. Behavioural Patterns**

Behavioural patterns exhibited by a community in public and private life are an important landmark in its cultural and literary life. This behaviour has been consummately portrayed in stories like "Dande wazun" and "Daryayi Heund Yazar" by Akhter Mohiuddin. While the former depicts a social response to a particular situation, the latter depicts the personal crisis of an aged couple in the face of an untoward incident. Similarly, "Koker Jung" by Amin Kamil brilliantly shows in action the local standards of ethics and propriety through a verbal brawl between two women.

### **References**

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