

Mahmud Gami (A.D.1765) born in Kashmir nearly a century and half after Haba Khatoon, upheld the tradition set by his predecessor of making Kashmiri literature rich and significant.

Writing predominantly in the *vacun* form, Gami also introduced new forms like *ghazal*, *mathnavi*, etc. in Kashmiri literature. His treatment of the language is masterly: with one stroke he creates a world of beauty which accommodates both the physical and the spiritual with equal ease. His poems, created to be sung, present a pagantry of cultural features in a language which flows with ease and apparent spontaneity. The striking imagery as well as the symbols and metaphors woven intricately in the poems are the work of a master craftsman interpreting his reality with originality and wit.

Muzaffar Aazim (b. 1934) is the author of such collections as *Zolana* and *Man-I-Kaman* both of which won the 'best book of the year' award of the Cultural Akademi, J&K. He has also translated *War and Peace*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Yaruingam*.

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From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

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Mahmud Gami

Muzaffar Aazim

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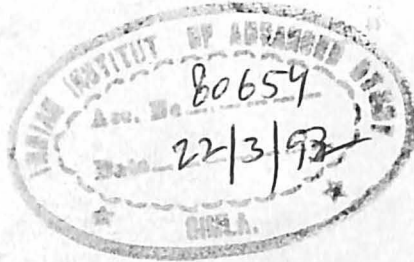
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Preface

Mahmud Gami has been regarded as an outstanding poet by the critics of the Kashmiri poetry but no adequate critical study of his work has been published so far. This booklet, based partly on the relevant comments on him scattered in various articles and mostly on my own humble effort to approach and appreciate his monumental contribution directly, must therefore be lacking in many respects. I am thankful to Professor Qazi Ghulam Mohammad, Head, Department of Mathematics, Kashmir University, for his valuable suggestions which were a great help in this work.

Professor Devinder Kohli, Head, Department of English, Kashmir University, was kind enough to read through the script and suggest improvements. Shri G. N. Khayal made a copy of Karl F. Burkhard's Latin translation of Mahmud Gami's *Yusuf-Zulaikha* available to me. Shri Sheikh Bashir Ahmad, Lecturer, Institute of Foreign Languages, Kashmir University translated for me the prefatory note of Burkhard's translation which is in German. I express my sincere thanks to them all.

Saida Kadal
Srinagar

MUZAFFAR AAZIM

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Introduction

Mahmud Gami is one of the most prominent Kashmiri poets of the medieval period. He emerged as a genius who had feasted his eyes and ears on the unique natural beauty and the colourful folk-lore and myths of his native land and who, simultaneously, had awakened and sharpened his intellect by generously drawing upon Persian literature and culture. He sang love songs in a tone closely bordering on that of folk-songs. He wrote *mathnavi* (love tales in verse), tried his hand at the *ghazal* and both these forms became the most important forms of poetic expression of his language in future. He composed *n'at* (eulogies) in praise of Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.). And thus, blending the old with the new themes and forms of expression, he became a legend in his own lifetime and a leader for the future. Directly or indirectly, his influence is evident even today.

Mahmud Gami was born during the Afghan rule in Kashmir. He lived for about ninety years, seeing the whole of the Sikh rule and also the first few years of the Dogra regime, when the latter occupied Kashmir through the infamous 'Sale Deed of Amritsar'. For Kashmir this was an age of oppression and despotic exercise of power. At the cultural level the standard of judgement was the Iranian aesthetic taste. Its dominating influence, though naturally not conducive to the growth of the Kashmiri language, had an incidental advantage in the shape of its hybridising effect on the local talent. Not only had the Kashmiris made a proud contribution to Persian literature in the centuries preceding Gami, but they had also generated a culture-consciousness, which found expression in his lifetime when the grip of that influence had somewhat loosened. The new forms and new themes which this interaction had introduced and which Mahmud Gami had generously owned were

consequently exploited to widen the horizons of Kashmiri poetry.

The Persian influence had established itself in Kashmir by the middle of A.D. 1400 and it is perceptible in the language of Lal Ded (14th century) and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din (14th century) also. After the Sheikh we do not find any significant name in our poetry till Haba Khatoon appeared on the scene more than a century later. By then Persian was already the language of the court and it appears that in spite of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin's (1420-1470) interest in the development of Kashmiri, alongside Persian and Sanskrit, Kashmiri had to remain contented with its place among the illiterate masses, away from the official and intellectual spheres. Haba Khatoon was not cut out to adopt for her self-expression the content or the forms of *vaakh* or *shruk* of her great predecessors Lal Ded or the Sheikh. She took to the romantic lyrical form *vacun* (*vatsun*). The *vacun* had been employed by the Sheikh only occasionally, though dexterously, for his mystical compositions, but Haba Khatoon gave it a character and identity. The *vacun* does not have a comparable form in other languages but, essentially music-based as it is, it is akin to the Hindi *geet*. The taste for music cultivated by the Persian Darbar might have contributed to its power. We find this form being used by Hubbi (Habib-ullah Noshehri, 1555-1618), a junior contemporary of Haba Khatoon, who must surely have witnessed her popularity and fame; but very little of his contribution has come down to us.

The period of about a century and half intervening between the death of Haba Khatoon (1606) and the birth of Mahmud Gami seems to be barren and devoid of creative activity. Arni Mal, Shah Ghafoor and Momin Saeb appear only towards the end of this dark age and were all Gami's contemporaries though senior ones. Momin's importance lies in his having written *Manteq-ut-Tair* in Kashmiri under the influence of Farid-ud-Din Attar, a famous Persian poet. Through this work he steals historical priority over Mahmud Gami as the first *mathnavi* writer of the language, but historical priority apart, Gami is certainly the first master of the art, who contributed substantially, and enormously influenced the subsequent *mathnavi* writers.

Though reliable records are not available, Mahmud Gami is believed to have been born in A.D. 1765 in village Aravaer in the Shahabad area of southern Kashmir. The village has been renamed as Mahmudabad after Independence as a token of homage to him. He died in 1855. He was of a family of *pir* (priests),

and received his early education in Arabic and Persian in accordance with the prevalent system of his time. His proficiency in Persian was enough to enable him to compose some poetry in that language also, but he devoted his entire life to the development of his mother-tongue and its literature, and used the other one as a source language for enriching the same.

Nothing is recorded about his personal life but tradition holds that he was an intelligent man of a genial temperament, who spent most of his time wandering from place to place throughout the length and breadth of the Valley. This is supported by the internal evidence of his poetry as we shall see later. His love affairs are also talked about. He rose to fame in his early life. His poetry shows that he was aware of his popularity, and he himself says:

*Mahmud Gami adores you,
The famous one of the country of Kashmir.*

So also were his contemporaries aware of his enviable success as a poet. One of them, Wali-ullah Matoo, pays his tribute by calling him the "Master". He also says:

*Particularly the well-known man
Mahmud Gami
Who is no mean poet among Kashmiris
in this age.*

There are several stories regarding his adoption of the *nom de plume* Gami, the most probable, being that by doing so he got the satisfaction of using, with pride, a Kashmiri word (meaning a villager) which on the one hand appealed to his spirit of self-assertion and regional commitment, while, on the other hand it rhymed with the names of great Persian masters whom he admired—Jami and Nizami. He has expressed his admiration for them and his desire to be like them on more than one occasion. He says:

Mahmud: He is Nizami of Kashmir.

Again in one of his eulogies addressed to prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) he mentions these poets with reverence:

*Nizami extols you,
Jami eulogizes you,
What can Mahmud Gami add,
Prophet, peace be upon you.*

It was during his lifetime that the hold of Persian began to lose its grip on the cultural scene of Kashmir, later to yield place, not to Kashmiri, but to Urdu as the official language. His conscious and tireless effort to add to the wealth of Kashmiri poetry to raise its level and broaden its borders is a proof of the quality of his leadership and his healthy and openminded patriotism. On such historical turning points one is prone, more conveniently, either to float with the current or to yield to the reactionary tendencies and resist change. He wisely and successfully avoided these negative extremes and achieved his laudable goal by exploiting the local verse form *vacun* almost to the limits of its capacity and by simultaneously introducing new forms of *ghazal*, *mathnavi*, etc. His attachment to both the languages was naturally balanced. Persian was loved and revered as it was the chief vehicle of the teachings of Islam, a religion which over centuries had been adopted by the majority of Kashmiri people. It was on this account that the language, though known only to the educated classes, had made much of its vocabulary available to the common people through religious preaching etc. Mahmud Gami's attempt, therefore, was a search for the soul in the Kashmiri genius. This he did, not by resorting to chauvinistic partiotism but by reculturing the 'local land' by using the 'improved foreign seed' in keeping with the traditional openness of the Kashmiri mind. This had an epoch-making effect which continues visibly in our culture-consciousness of today. Haba Khatoon's attachment to Kashmiri for expressing her violent pangs of love was spontaneous, for most probably she had no choice of language open to her. Mahmud Gami had an appreciable hold on the Persian language and his devotion to Kashmiri was as deliberate and conscious as it was natural, also. His language, by and large, is not that of the elite, but the living language of the common people of his time, which of course, he uses as a poet must use it. It is mostly in *mathnavi*, where he draws on foreign sources, that occasionally his language becomes perceptibly Persianised, but even in these compositions he does not fail to introduce a predominantly local colour. Most of the Persian words used by him had become, and continue to be, an integral part of Kashmiri vocabulary. The path paved for Kashmiri by this great poet was followed by other poets like Maqbool Shah, the author of the masterpiece, *Gulrez*, in the *mathnavi* form, and by Rasul Mir and more recently, Mahjoor, in *ghazal* and *vacun*.

One has also to remember the historical limitations of Mahmud Gami who had to compose and write what could be sung or recited in gatherings of illiterate and semi-literate people, because the reading public of his time was enamoured of Persian. This consideration must have forced him, consciously or subconsciously, to avoid some delicacies of expression and imagination with which he was acquainted through his study of, for example, the Persian *ghazal*. This limitation, perhaps advantageously, was also responsible for keeping him close to the folk style in the sense that he adopted the spirit of the folk forms and, by expressing the throbbings of his heart in these widely acknowledged forms, he became a beloved poet of the people. Some of his songs have got mixed with the folk-songs and perhaps vice versa.

Mahmud Gami has a number of creative works to his credit. A *Kuliyat* (Collected works) published by the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages¹ includes the following:

(A) *Vacan* and *Ghazal*—112 in number.

(B) *Mathnavi*—10 in number.

1. *Shirin-Khusrao* – based on the *mathnavi* of the same name by Nizami Ganjvi.

2. *Sheikh San'an* – drawn from *mathnavi Manteq-ut-Tair* of Farid-ud-Din Attar.

3. *Qisai Haroon Rashid*.

4. *Yusuf-Zulaikha*—based on the *mathnavi* of Abdur-Rehman Jami.

5. *Lael-Majnoon* – based on *Laila-Majnoon* of Nizami.

6. *Mansoor Nama*

7. *Yek Hikayat*

8. *Pahael Nama*

9. *Qisai Mahmud Ghaznavi*

10. *Akh Hadith*

(C) *Nazm*—19 in number, being short poems on various subjects.

(D) *N'at*—Eulogies of prophet of Islam.

(E) Persian and Hindi —27 in number.

(F) Miscellaneous —5 songs.

1. Earlier the Academy had published a collection of selections from the books of Mahmud Gami which was edited by G. N. Khayal. Both these collections are prefaced by detailed introductory notes.

The *Kuliyat* under reference has been edited by Naji Munawwar on the basis of a large number of manuscripts, a fact which speaks not only for his dedication but also for the popularity of the poet among the people of Kashmir who have multiplied and preserved the manuscripts with due care. Yet, the classification followed in the book is not to be taken as strictly definitive and further research may show that some of the compositions have been left out. One, for example, which could be mentioned here is the *Shina Shaar*, a manuscript of which is available in the library of the publishers of this *Kuliyat* itself.

The popularity of the poet was responsible for inviting the attention of the Western scholars also. Karl Friedrich Burkhard of Germany worked on one of Mahmud Gami's *mathnavis*, *Yusuf-Zulaikha*. He transcribed it into Roman script, translated a large part of it into Latin and wrote an introduction to his work in German. It seems that his work was cut short by his early death and the manuscript was compiled by his son Karl Lm. Burkhard in 1894, thirty-nine years after Gami's death. This work was published in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgen-Landischen Gesellschaft* in two instalments in its issues. No. 49 (A.D. 1895) pp. 422-469 and No. 53 (A.D. 1899) pp. 551-592.

Burkhard mentions in his introduction that he had obtained two manuscripts, one from Poona Library, which has 60 pages in Persian script (bearing number 789), and the other, from the library of Professor Buhler which has 73 pages. He has expressed his dissatisfaction with both the manuscripts for various reasons. In his own version he has given the text in Persian, as well as Roman script, and has also included his translation of some parts in Latin.

Conceptual Background

In Mahmud Gami's conception of life, love (*ishq*) is the Supreme Power and it is synonymous with God. It is a Limitless and Timeless power or it is Time itself. He says:

*You are the Time and
You are the Era*

and one is reminded of a saying attributed to the Prophet of Islam: "Do not talk ill of Time; He is Time." The most persistent quest of human existence is to grasp and experience this oneness with the Eternal Being and the gruesome tragedy of this existence is the failure to achieve this end. The whole universe is the manifestation of that Limitless power and He is one, though having innumerable names.

*When Man gets in intimate touch with every bit,
He will learn that He is one,
With lakhs of names, though.
How I, an ignorant one, can realize that
He manifested Himself to see Himself.*

He has no colour but He is perceptible in every colour:

*You Colourless!
I seek You in every colour,
In every manner*

or

*Not even a bit is devoid of You
You are robed in Your Self.*

Mahmud Gami was a Muslim by faith. Islam here, as in the rest of this subcontinent, had reached through Iran where the Islamic mysticism or *Tassauf* was the greatest influence working on the minds of the poets and the seers. The doctrine of *Wahdah-ul-Wujud*, the Unity of Existence, was its main philosophy and this is clearly seen in the poetry of Mahmud Gami also. His mind is influenced by another factor and that is the Saiva monism of Kashmir, which has enriched Kashmiri poetry for ages. The line quoted above, "He manifested Himself to see Himself," could possibly be related on the one hand with the Saivistic belief that, He (Parmasiva) simply makes the phenomenon appear in Him just in the manner of a reflection. He does not need anything other than Himself to cast any reflections, but gets His own divine powers reflected in His own pure *Prakash*."¹ On the other hand, it reminds us of the words of the Quran:

*To God belong the East
And the West; Whithersoever
Ye turn, there is the Presence
Of God. For God is All-Pervading
All-Knowing.*

(S-2/115)²

These lines assert that God is not only "the Immanent" but also "the Evident". Brought up in this tradition, Mahmud Gami reflects in his poetry, a deep craving for union with God, and since the whole universe is only His reflection or manifestation, his love encompasses all that is existent. But God is the Whole and Man is only a part, and the part cannot contain the whole. There is, therefore, a deep sense of tragedy clearly visible throughout Gami's poetry resulting from his desire to comprehend the Unlimited through his limited existence. He is conscious of the futility of his effort in this regard, yet the yearning is so strong that he cannot contain and control himself. This approach to the Truth permeates his whole poetic fabric and he has given vent to this feeling related with the sense of tragedy particularly in his *mathnavis*, which are

1. *Aspects of Kashmiri Saivism* by B. N. Pandit.
2. *The Glorious Qur'an* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali

tragic, one and all. In this context we note his painful experience of feeling lonely and tortured by separation, and his realization that his fate is only to crave and never to achieve, for that is the fate of the limited when it aspires for the limitless. This craving, in ultimate analysis, is its own reward:

*The river is fathomless,
I find no bridge to cross.
The river of love,
Sweeps me along.*

This is his understanding of love, love for the Supreme Being, love for God. But since for him God manifests Himself in all visible and tangible forms, the nature of his love remains unchanged in quality and intensity even when it is expressed in terms of human love, the love of a woman for a man and vice versa. There is no antagonism. The eternal and the ephemeral fuse into one, in his aesthetic experience. This is a mystic-poetic conception of love, and to explain it further, we may quote from M. Mujeeb:

Because of its character and history, the poetic tradition evolved its own symbols. The most basic of these was love.

The subject of love is universal. The unique feature of Persian poetry is the organic assimilation of sacred and profane love in a wealth of symbols where the sacred is seen through the profane as light through a prism, and the profane is seen through the sacred as God's light in the nature of man.

Like God, love is essence and attributes, and commands absolute obedience. It is (the) power that creates and destroys, judges and condemns, punishes and purifies, and rewards those who have passed through its ordeal with unutterable bliss. It has many facets. It inspires a wisdom that makes acquired knowledge irrelevant, it liberates the spirit from all external forms of obedience, from all obligations inconsistent with its demands, from the opposites of piety and sinfulness, from concepts of reward and punishment, heaven and hell. It can also take the form of love for a person, and express itself as a passion, a madness, a total surrender to the self. Sacred and profane love can also become one and the same thing, the human beloved can acquire the nature of the Absolute, the Absolute can embody itself in the person of the human beloved. It is all within the power of love. Finally, love can also become a quality of the

lover, a self-perpetuating fire within the heart, an end and purpose in itself, transfiguring the lover into absolute Man.¹

Gami says:

*The 'Arsh' is bearing Your load,
The earth below is Your abode,
You grace it all, the high, the low.
How can I communicate, my Love?*

Mahmud Gami's love songs have to be appreciated against this background, lest his sublime simplicity should fool our critical sense and hide from us the delicacy of his expression and the value of his meaning. In his songs he conveys his deep experience of human emotion, sometimes trivial, often earthly and yet our soul jumps to something higher and something rare, not through any avoidance of any of the demands of the physical existence but through their fulfilment. For him the earthly existence of man is a reality and it rightfully claims and deserves our involvement in it. Much of his love poetry can be read, understood and appreciated simply as the outpouring of a youthful and romantic heart, and this judgement would be justified. But concentrating on the metaphorical and symbolic overtones of words, often the same verses can lead to mystic musings:

*O, my faithful one!
I sought you everywhere,
Spot you I could not.
Nought I want of you
But to have you before my eyes.*

To invite the beloved just for feasting the eyes is not to abandon any part or any form of the desire but the desire at its best, purest and the highest. This is the longest flight of the human imagination breaking all the conceivable boundaries and embracing simultaneously the material and the ephemeral on the one side and the eternal and universal on the other. He refers to the love story of Sheikh San'a who is believed to be a Muslim saint and who was enchanted by the charm of an infidel damsel. On her demand he

1. *Ghalib*, M. Mujeeb.

abandoned, for a short period, his sainthood and his own seven thousand or so disciples and accepted her terms to herd her swine, animals which as a Muslim he was not supposed even to touch. The poet interprets it neither as lust nor as a fall. The lesson he conveys is that physical and material existence is not an antithesis of the spiritual or the supreme existence, but its complement. He says:

The incarnate is not devoid of meaning.

Since God is manifest in everything visible and tangible. He is naturally in 'everyone' also. Here union with Him becomes synonymous with self-realisation and separation with self-neglect for the beloved is within the lover also. One is reminded here of a line from the Qur'an which is quoted along with a comment on it by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, from the *Glorious Qur'an*

*And be ye not like
Those who forgot God;
And He made them forget
Their own soul! Such
Are the rebellious transgressors!*
(59/20)

(Comment: To forget God is to forget the only reality. As we are only reflected realities, how can we understand or do justice to or remember ourselves, when we forget the very source of our being?)

Now, if the beloved is within the lover, the phenomena of separation and union lose their meaning and cease to be contradictory to each other. This results in a mysterious experience because the separation, after all, is caused not by the physical distance but by one's failure to be alive to the Truth:

*Oh my Self!
Neglectful! Blind!
Could you not see your beloved in you.*

This introduction to Mahmud Gami's conception of love identifies him as a representative of a poetic tradition which combined in itself the essence of ancient Kashmiri and Persian

mystic elements, and brings him face to face with the highest values cherished universally by the human mind. The same attitude is evident from his awareness of and allusions to the myths which give to his poetry yet another dimension of universal character. The Sufi way of contemplation on the question of existence and self-realisation had its counterpart in the traditional philosophy of life of the Kashmiris and it formed the unconscious and the mythological background of the poet. The source of some of his ideas and the significance of some of his mythological allusions can be traced to this background. The striking similarity in these apparently diverse elements proves how ultimate truth peeps from above the dogmatic fence. Gami says:

*First to be created was the Word.
Word is the road to the Truth.
Listen to the word, then act.*

One wonders whether this has reference to the Saivite philosophy of Kashmir according to which the first thing to come into existence was the Word or is it the assertion of the Qur'an (as also of the Bible) that God said 'Be', a word first, and then everything came into being? He often refers to the mythological characters and uses them as symbols. An important one is *Kamdev* forming the symbol of the beloved (male). In the poetry, as in the mythology, he is robed in flawless white and is addressed as *Kamiuk* also.

*My Kamiuk, dressed in white,
May he come by evening;
I miss him so much.*

One attribute of *Kamdev*, often mentioned, is his being armed with a bow, shooting arrows. The lover (the woman) offers her head, as well as her heart as his target.

Siva has been worshipped in Kashmir from time immemorial and in the mythology he is believed to be positioned on the snow-clad mountains and particularly on the Harmukh peak. The word Harmukh could mean God's face or All-faced (again an attribute of God), meaning a face which one can see from whichever direction one may look. In Islam the concept of God is purely abstract yet *Arsh* is thought of as the throne of God and is conceived of as something high above. Similarly it is believed that the prophet

Moses had to climb a hill top to receive the voice of God. And one is again reminded of the Qur'an as quoted above that, "Whithersoever ye turn, there is the Presence of God, for God is All-Pervading, All-Knowing."

Mahmud Gami, in many of his verses, refers to Harmukh. One for example:

*My Sanyas,
With his abode on Harmukh peak,
Made me wander through the world;
Genial Gopal am I.*

The word *Gopal* or *Gopalye* (feminine gender) in Kashmiri means a lady-dancer or devotee attending at the *sanyas* or *sanyasye*, which means a hermit, and may, in its origin, be related with Siva's consort Parvati. This word is used for Krishna also but then the gender is masculine. a similar idea has been expressed at another place differently:

*I am His Gopal,
Searching my Sanyas,
In forests deep. (And pray),
Cast aversion off,
And fulfil Your promise.*

In another verse addressed to the beloved, the myth emerges from the unconscious mind in an interesting Saivite image:

*Silver sheen of your forehead,
And the sabre ever on it,
And the serpent on the treasure;
Come to me.*

Apparently all that is meant is the admiration of a charming fair-complexioned forehead, the sabre like bend of the eyebrows (or the dagger-like nose), and the serpentine locks of hair. Yet it immediately reminds one of Siva who is imaged as a bright face with a sabre like new moon on the forehead and a serpent coiled around the neck. A deeper study can reveal much more of this kind but all that is intended here is to show that Mahmud Gami, like many subsequent Kashmiri poets, unhesitatingly drew upon all

sources of knowledge with an open mind and his aesthetic experience did not allow any extraneous considerations to stifle it. This, one would think, is one of the marks of identification of a great mind.

With equal ease, the poet refers to the folklore of Kashmir, as well as to the Persian classics and the myths which he had learnt through them.

*I, beautiful Himal
Am enticed by Naeg Rai,
My youth is fading,
What can sustain me.*

Here, the pleasures and turbulences of love have been depicted in terms of *Himal* and *Naeg Rai*, the hero and heroine of the story of a Naga prince (or the prince of a spring or a serpent-prince, for the word can mean either) and a Kashmiri princess, and this is a popular folk-tale of Kashmir. Similarly, he alludes to another local folk-tale *Bombur-Yemberzal*, the story of the bumble-bee which is in love with the narcissus flower, but tragically reaches the garden every year too late in the season, by the time the flower is already withered. This incidentally is one of the finest allusions of our folk-lore symbolising unceasing love suffering the pangs of eternal tragedy as its thirst is never satiated.

Mahmud Gami's allusions include reference to characters of love stories like *Laila-Majnoon*, *Yusuf-Zulaikha*, *Sheikh San'a* (or *San'an*), *Henziyaen* or *Henz*, *Shirin*, which he had adapted from the Persian. These characters, though not unknown before him, came to be the permanent symbols of lovers in our poetry mostly through his adaptation of these love stories. He also alludes to many other historical or fictional characters of Iran and Arabia with whom he had become familiar through his study of Persian literature. Impressing the transitory nature of the physical world, he says to his beloved:

*Darling! Don't be proud like Namrud,
Many like you and me have donned this world,
They are no more,
Not even Shaddad or Hatim Tai.*

The legendary characters named here are, Hatim Tai who was

famous for his generosity, Shaddad, the king who claimed to be God, and Namrud, again a king notorious for his exaggerated sense of pride. Thus drawing upon a variety of sources, Mahmud Gami builds his stature as a major poet and this is one of the important features of his poetry. He confronts the Variety of Existence and finds a Unity permeating it all. He cannot breath in a dismal dungeon of dogma and so he looks for the soul and spirit within. He approaches the life and the universe not through cold philosophy but through love, through aesthetic experience, through poetry. For him:

*The aroma of an earthen cup
Is better than any perfume.
Brimful wine of realization
Am I given to drink.*

We may close this discussion on a riddle Mahmud Gami poses to us. When we pray to God, we bow towards Ka'ba, conveniently, so long as we are outside it. But our yearning to be one with Him gives rise to an enigma. The poet says:

*You are someone if you know
What may mean this riddle of love.
He who reaches the core of Ka'ba
Witherto shall he bow?*

LOVE SONGS

Mahmud Gami used *vacun* (*vatsun*),¹ the traditional Kashmiri song form, for his self-expression with superb craftsmanship. To understand the nature of this form in historical background let us quote from J. L. Kaul's book *Kashmiri Literature*.

The dominant poetic art-form of the first literary period (1300 c. to A.D. 1555) is, what we call, the *vaakh* (Sans. *vakya*). A *Vaakh* is a 4-line stanza, complete and independent in itself, with a variety of rhyme-schemes, *abab*, *abac*, *abcb*, or no rhyme at all. The metre is qualitative, a loose stress accent, four accents to the line generally, and not a strict short-and-long quantity measure. It is, obviously, a compact, aphoristic, a sententious gnomic verse, a fit and adequate expression for a mystical insight or a didactic exhortation.

The poetic compositions of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali of Tsrar-i-Sharif, the Patron Saint of Kashmir, a younger contemporary of Lal Ded are called *shrukh*, but it is not possible to differentiate these formally from the *vaakh*. In the second literary period, 1555–1720, the "mystical *vaakh* continues to be written in Kashmiri as by Rupa Bhawani (1625–1721 c.) and even by some of those who usually wrote in Persian like Habib Ullah Nawshehri. There is, however, a pronounced change in them. They become longer in the length of the line and the number of lines, and a refrain is added to them. We call them *vatsan*, stanzas of three lines followed by the refrain (*Vooj*).

As we have said in the preceding chapters *vacun* form was

1. Plural would be *vacan* (*vatsan*)

occasionally used by the Sheikh also, but, thematically, *vacun* has two recognizable strains. One we may call mystic-*vacun*, using the epithet rather loosely, and in this group we may include some compositions of the Sheik and some of our later Sufi poets. Another strain we may call love-*vacun*, where the poet sings of secular human love. The trend of writing the love-*vacun* was established by Haba Khatoon of the 16th century and continued by Arinmal of the 18th century. The two strains may sometimes overlap in one and the same composition. The poet's imagination may travel from human emotion to the quest for the spiritual and metaphysical and vice versa. Mahmud Gami's creative works include both these variants which differ only in content and not in the form. In our attempt at the appreciation of his poetry we will treat them together. But, first, let us sample the variants.

*Friend! His love enchants me,
I pine for him,
Will he not come?*

*He burnt me in the cravings fire,
Naive am I,
The rivals scoff at me,
Will he return?*

*I pine for him,
Will he not come?*

Here the whole import is simple and casual. The warmth of the sensual love dominant. The images of captivation, languishing and burning are all of the sensual life, with no claims to any symbolic dimensions which could carry them beyond the earth. On the other extreme, we may take:

*Oh my Self!
Neglectful! Blind!
Could you not see your beloved in you?

Before, behind, in deep, on high,
See the evident light of God;
It is one—the Immanent and the Obvious.*

A heavy meditative tone, indeed. And then there can be songs

in which the mood varies from the sensual to the reflective and *vice versa*.

*Pour me cupfuls of the wine of love,
The wine of realization;
Over and over again.
May I sacrifice my life for you.*

And the beloved who can pour the wine of realization is addressed in more earthly language in the same song:

*I will lull you in the cradle of love,
Lovely mine!
Oh! If I could see you face to face.
Smiling blossom-mouthed!
May I sacrifice my life for you.*

But soon in the same song the poet is again reflective:

*The river entered the drop,
The drop was named river,
A seed furnished a granary;
May I sacrifice my life for you.*

So we have a *vacun* not embodying the same mood throughout, but oscillating between the sensual and the reflective extremes, that is to say, between the 'beauty personified' and the 'beauty abstract', for love knows no boundaries. The poet in his love songs gets into the mood of a skylark unburdening his heart by simply singing and soaring high in the open air and in his mystic-*vacun* ponders on the issues of Life and Death, not by abandoning the warbling mood but by imparting a meditative depth to his compositions. Whereas the mystic-*vacun* puts him in the tradition of his great predecessors like Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din, his love-*vacun* keeps him close to the folklore of the land. In no case, however, can you read a *vacun* without unconsciously getting into a mood to hum, for his songs have their own music and dictate their own tunes.

*Katyoo chhukh nunda bane
Walo mashaqa myane*

or

*Kar sa myon nyay ande
Maer mande madanwaro*

The quotation is in original and its music can be felt even without understanding it. In fact Mahmud Gami has done a great job in composing his songs in a variety of metres, employing a number of popular folk-tunes, and thus ensuring their preservation for the future generations. His songs include the folk forms of *rov*, *wanawun*, *nyendabaeth*, and also some nursery rhymes.

It has been mentioned earlier that in *vacun* woman is the lover. There are, however, some exceptions to this rule also, but the male and female addressees in these songs are discernible by their attributes.

The male is visualised by the female lover as a master-rider *Shahsawar*, in the attire and the fashion of a Kashmiri bridegroom:

*Master-rider!
Where do you go?
Hoyden I will chase you there.*

He wears a turban, with a *Shimla*, with a part of it trailing down on his shoulders, perhaps in the fashion of the Afghan ruler of Gami's time. He drinks wine and looks drunk. Yet he is described as tranquil at heart and pure and noble in character. He enjoys flirting to the torture of his jealous lover. He is a wanderer and does not stick to a place. Physically he is vigorous and heroic, *Bohodur*.

The female, on the other hand, is conscious of her beauty and her body. She is tortured by the very consciousness of her bewitching and robust body and her desire to unite for the sheer physical bliss. She waits, decorated like a doll, bathed clean and perfumed with saffron, camphor and musk. She accepts the undisputed superiority of her male partner and longs for the privilege to wait on him, even to wash his tired feet and call him the 'Master'. She poses herself as a sufferer, rejected by her family, but persistent in her love, and faithful to her lover.

*The roses are blooming in the garden,
Where shall I wait for my Master,
To decorate his turban with fresh flowers,
Unsmelt.*

The feeling of unbounded love is reflected in the woman's desire to decorate the turban of her lover, and her sense of respect for him is evident in her determination to use the roses which are 'unsmelt', because to benefit from their smell before presenting them would in her opinion mean to make them stale.

To a woman, to be herself, her ornaments are as important as her body. She thinks of her lover in terms of her ornaments and personifies them to mean him, symbolically.

*Oh my pearl-necklace!
I will adorn you with the gold of my earrings,
And evaluate you in the jewel-market.*

or

*Come my earring!
You out-wit me.*

Here, as everywhere, Mahmud Gami will sing of love, drawing for his tunes on the folk songs and for his symbols on the paradise of his habitat, the valley of Kashmir—its beautiful landscape, its customs, traditions, beliefs, and even superstitions.

THE LOCAL COLOUR

Mahmud Gami was known as a wanderer; the lover in his poetry also wanders from place to place, pursuing his or her beloved. He mentions places with their attributes and through a casual mention of hills, rivers and hamlets, he makes known the locale in which he is writing. Pampore is the only place in this part of the world where saffron is cultivated. The reader can feel himself in Kashmir when he hears Gami saying:

*My Love had gone to Pampore for a walk,
The saffron flowers hugged him there.*

In one of his songs he will take us to our famous gardens around the Dal Lake, to Nishat, Telbal, Naseem, etc. to provide a visual image of a wandering soul. These places, through our memories, are interwoven in our romantic fabric.

*The goblets are full at Ishabar,
Softly come close to me.*

*Pretty you are, groom the hair,
Sit before me for a while.
In Naseem, among the chinars,
I thrill with joy to see my Love,
My condition is well-known to you,
What, my sulky one, shall I tell you.*

Thus while talking of love, he gives us a feel of the local environment and simultaneously pronounces that:

*In separation my body I consume,
You are at the far end of the vale of agony,
Do let me see you.*

The 'vale of agony' is an image of the extreme suffering as also of physical distance because the word *nai* translated as vale here actually refers to small valleys, in the far off hilly areas, away from the main habitation. In another song he names some eighteen hamlets, spread over the area from Tral to Sangam, impressing upon the reader his attachment with the Kashmir landscape, picturing his restless soul, and arrives at a mysterious conclusion:

*Mahmud! my Love is near here,
In the vale of agony,
Happy in hiding,
The robber of my heart.*

Feeling the beloved to be very near and very far off, simultaneously, creates a sweet confusion. We may look at only one more song of this kind, where the lover roams in the valley of the river Sindh. Here again, places far and near are mentioned to bring home the fretting nature of love and the evasive character of the beloved.

*Seeking him I reached Lar,
Till the dusk I ran and ran,
Whom to tell what I endured,
I lingered in the forest, long.
Will he ever realize this.*

And so, in many of his songs, the reader enjoys with him the

sight of so many beautiful sites of the valley and every time gets a closer feel of the sweet torture of his love. In Mahmud Gami's beloved the earthly and the abstract get mingled, one becoming the metaphor for the other. In his unending journey, the mirror of his poetry reflects the variety of flowers donning this land, not as isolated objects, but employed as symbols of the beauty of the beloved.

*With cups yellow and petals white,
I am the heaven's narcissus.
Do I look drunk?
'Tis of your love.
Why did you turn my head?*

The flowers of the land become a fit medium for the expression of beauty and delicacy in his poetry. Some more similes and metaphors may be seen in the following lines:

*Aarwal am I,
Fine in colour,
I bathed my hi-like body for you*

or

*Lovely hollyhocks,
Pomegranate flowers,
Her cheeks are red.*

or

*Maswal I wait for you,
In the best of my adornments.*

or

*Roses laid on your couch,
I seek you in every colour.*

This is a simple and not an exhaustive list and it shows clearly that the poet is involved in his surroundings, knows all its details intimately and has the requisite ingenuity to pick up his metaphors

from its colourful landscape. His beloved is not simply like a flower, she is likened with specific flowers of the poet's locality for their particular attributes. The red rose or the pomegranate flower is the cheek, the soft *hi* is the body or the bosom, the narcissus is the eye, the *sombul* is the tress and so on till finally she becomes the flower Personified:

*Seeking will I come,
Wherever you bloom,
In the garden of love.*

The snow-clad winter, a significant reality of our environment, has a deep impact on our life and has therefore influenced Mahmud Gami's imagination also. For him this land, in all its shades, reflects the mysteries of love. What a boisterous moment when the lover contemplates playing with his buoyant beloved on the cold but dazzling surface of the snow.

*Crazy, tipsy, wanton cup-bearer!
I will play—
But only with my vibrant Love;
To frisk and prance
On vast swards, snow-bedecked.*

In Kashmir skiing and skating are sports only recently introduced. The snow in Kashmir is, by and large, a sign of discomfort, even trouble. It could only be a vibrant lover who could cherish the idea of leaping over the snow in the company of a vivacious beloved. This one line, a very unusual line in our literature, is a vital clue to the temperament of the poet: active, sportive, genial and bubbling with life. Yet this ever-green mind has its less jolly moments also and the same sight of snow arouses a variety of emotions on different occasions.

*Like the snow in Shravan or Har,
I melt in the heat of love's sunshine;
I wail, I cry, I glide like a brook.*

Resisting the temptation to multiply examples on a particular aspect, one can think of anything naturally beautiful in the environment of Mahmud Gami and instantly find it in his poetry,

enriching his medium for the expression of his emotional and reflective experiences. The chirping and warbling birds are no exception and what impressive symbols they make.

*O Poshnool! Melodious!
Neither flute nor the sitar can rival you.
Chang and saz, well we know what they are worth.*

*Falcon mine!
Be I a sacrifice for your name,
From your heights show yourself to me.
You tore the snare off
And flew away from me.*

Poshnool, the bird loved in Kashmir for being one of the first birds to sing in the morning, is made the symbol of the soothing and charming voice of the beloved and the falcon that of the majestic, manly and evasive attributes of the (male) beloved because of its habit of soaring high and not sticking to a place.

Gill is a small thrush found in the rice fields for which traps are often set by children. What emotion it arouses in the lover's heart:

*You are bobbing up and down,
Oh! You stole my heart;
I am like a gill encaged.*

The birds are a living reality of Mahmud Gami's world of poetic imagination. The beloved talks the 'parrot-talk', and flits from branch to branch like a *bulbul*. The images of sweet singing and of flying convey the enchanting, as well as, the flitting nature of the beloved.

We have seen some manifestations of the beauty of nature and the way these are transformed into fine poetry. In this connection the treatment of the brooks and the rivulets of the Valley also attract our attention and these seem to evoke a curious emotion in the poet. The rivers, in Mahmud Gami's poetry are the unnegotiable blockades on the highway of love and their appearance deepens the apprehension of an everlasting separation. In Kashmir the rivers have been violent sources of devastation in the past, often taking the lives of wayfarers when in spate and it is possible that this has influenced the way we regard them. Or there

may be better explanations. In any case, the famous rivulet Rambe Aara intercepts the lover's path only to force separation on him.

*He saw Rambe Aara and swam across.
Where is he gone?
Where shall I run to?
He makes a vagrant of me.*

Similarly, another river Sendh comes in his way and causes in him a fear psychosis and he mentions this river in one of his songs only to commit suicide by drowning himself in it if his cravings of love are not satisfied. And, finally, Veth (Vitasta or Jhelum), the biggest river of Kashmir frightens the lover out of his (or her) wits.

*Can the river of love ever be crossed?
My boat, on Veth, is caught in the tempest.
In the surge I may get lost.*

Viewed from the angle of his involvement in the surroundings, Mahmud Gami emerges as a poet of landscape, and unmistakably that of Kashmir landscape. He does not use *gul-o-bulbul* as a cliché, but he knows everything around him intimately and can employ it artistically. He pictures, angle after angle, his land of love and beauty. We are not surveying his total contribution in this field, but we may enjoy a few more of his 'paintings' to get the soothing feel of natural beauty and also to see what purpose these serve as vehicles of various deeper feelings.

*I will decorate him a seat
Under the umbrageous Chinars
(And entreat him)
O my friend!
Sit for a while.
I, Himal, may not live long.*

or

*In countless ways you hide yourself,
You wasted me –
The garden basil that I am.
Where did the spring-sleep overtake you?*

What better expression than the 'spring-sleep' could convey the effect of the sound sleep on a hot summer day beside a cool spring when one can forget even one's lover. The word *hawawas* translated above as 'for a while' also means 'in the breeze' and makes it more appropriate with reference to the umbrageous *chinar*.

... *Deodar*, a green and upright pine tree of the forests of Kashmir, is one of the loveliest trees which, among other things, symbolises youth. Seeing a *deodar* tree being felled is a shocking sight. And here it is:

*I was a Deodar of the forest.
The cruel woodcutter reached me.
Tall I was
He felled me down.
You never came to me again.*

We may, finally, cut this study short at a very typical picture of Kashmir where autumn means complete denudation of the trees which stand naked to be trampled by the winter. The growth is suspended and in a way Death encamps. This is far different from the scene in the tropical zones, where seasonal changes are not so sharp.

*Alas! My youth is fading.
He made me, the pomegranate flower, wither.
The autumn blast entered my garden.
He abandoned me to endure my fire.*

An indepth study could throw further light on Gami's portrayal of this landscape. But limiting ourselves to his love songs (leaving out the *mathnavi* for treatment separately), our endeavour has been to give a feel of how Mahmud Gami has willingly and keenly yielded to the refreshing influence of his surroundings and how he has benefited from it at his creative level in an unrivalled fashion.

To this brief study of the landscape we may now add a consideration of Mahmud Gami's attachment with what we may call the 'culturescape'. Doing this we will find ourselves carried into the society of his time which he, in just a hundred odd songs, will exhaustively and vividly paint for us.

The river *ghat*, where the young maidens have but to come for collecting water, becomes incidentally an important meeting place

of friends. The inherently poetic and romantic temperament of the Kashmiri people has changed this word *aarabal* (the river *ghat*) to *yarabal* which means 'the rendezvous of friends'. The (she-) lover in Mahmud Gami's poetry sings:

*Won't you come to the Yarbal dear?
I would wash your footlings;
My wounds are unhealed –
Come my Love.*

The word *footlings* used for feet and the idea of washing them is to symbolise a willing submission. In his days one had to travel on foot or at best on horseback. This was naturally tiresome. The man returning home from such a journey would get his feet washed with hot water to sooth his tired muscles and this service would normally be rendered by his wife. Hence washing somebody's feet came metaphorically to mean to render humble, dedicated and loving service, to which the verse quoted above refers.

A lover could do anything to win over his beloved and using occult powers is no exception. Emulets and talismans were used to enchant the beloved or to wean him away from the charm of the rival.

*You, in looks, are fairy-like,
Golden dress would suit you well.
Who weaned you away with talismans?
Come my love.*

Wazwan, the famous cuisine of Kashmir, is a peculiarity of our culture. In a verse it is offered to the beloved to bring him round and the plea made also emphasises obliquely that this would bring him to a cultured family with a noble tradition.

*Enter my gate,
I will slaughter a ram for you,
O you scoffer!
I will serve you bakirkhane,
That is the custom at my parent's house.*

Not only the cuisine and its delicacies but, to the lover in rapture, even the fuel for the hearth has got to be unusual. In one of the

verses the lover says that she got a log of sandal wood from the forest to cook *pulav* for him on its fire. She would be fully satisfied only if her bridegroom ate it. Sandalwood, though not growing in Kashmir, was used here for some religious and other purposes, and finds ample mention in our poetry.

People of Kashmir are fond of tea. The salted tea, characteristic of the place needs prolonged boiling which is believed to improve its taste. The bride, in one of the songs, promises:

*I will boil the tea with blood,
And shine the cups clean with eyes,
You drunken one! You wasted me,
Show me your face today.*

Continuing with the culturescape, the severe snow-bound winter in Kashmir converts the habitations into prisons, and as a rebound the effect the advent of spring season has, therefore, always attracted people to the gardens and other places of recreation, chiefly the Dal Lake and its surrounding areas. Mahmud Gami's poetry has many references to these picnics. Such picnics are source of pleasure for the common man, but like most of the pleasurable things, more so for the well-to-do. Skipping over the numerous references to the gardens, we come across a song where the poet meets a group of the upper-class women in a garden. In the Kashmir of his time, the upper-class consisted of the landlords whose women used veils (*purdah*) and were not used to coming out in public.

*Hedonist ladies
Come out in the evening
Stealthily,
Swinging their pearl-necklaces,
Maid-servants waiting on them.*

And 'coming out stealthily' is not all that innocent for they also enchant 'new lovers' during their walk. The attire and the adornments of the ladies have been mentioned creating the impression that the poet is impressed not only by their beauty but also by their social status.

The pageantry of cultural features in Mahmud Gami's poetry is rich and, guessing wildly, one could say that, with his type of talent, he could have made a good novelist. The lover—the

bridegroom—we have seen wearing a turban with its terminal portion, *shimla*, hanging on to his shoulders and the ‘wings’ of his Kashmiri shawl spread on his shoulders fanning the air. When the bride, after her marriage, leaves her parent’s house, the women are shown as following her singing in chorus *rov* songs in specific Kashmiri tunes. The women of the upper-class, not used to moving in public, sing behind the *mastoor* (hidden) forests. The carriage used is *zapan*, a palanquin, which the lover would like to have made of gold, with pearls hanging around it and its pedals made of pearl-shells. The bride waits for her spouse in *Gachha-kuth*, a room plastered with pure white gypsum, with typical Kashmiri floral patterns painted on its walls.

*Gachha-kuth I decorate for you,
And wait adorned like a doll.*

The search for local colour in Mahmud Gami’s poetry can be continued from various angles, all to find him at a level where not many Kashmiri poets can rival him. For example, one can think of some words and phrases which are specific to Kashmir (or, may be, to the places climatically and otherwise akin to it) which have been used by him often metaphorically. *Zeta*, the smouldering charcoal powder, is the best form of fire which can give sufficient sustained heat in the shivering cold of winter here, but which incidentally can be the cruellest form of fire if it falls on the skin. For this reason it becomes the symbol of the fire of love, especially in separation. Or, another word, *aama-tao* is used in a similar way and it means charring of the linen (or even of skin) often caused by the fire of *kangri*—the peculiar fire-pot of Kashmir, made of an earthen bowl jacketed by twigs. We may mention another instance of this nature. The Kashmiri houses of old style have only a few windows as these are designed more to suit the severe winters than the brief though excellent summer months. A porch is provided in the uppermost storey, generally on the front side, where the warm days and the maddening moonlight of the summer can be enjoyed. Characteristic of Kashmir, this porch is called *zoondab*, the moonlight-porch. In richer houses it is glazed and then it is called *aenadab*, the glazed-porch. It is supported from the ground by wooden poles. Now let us see how it works as a powerful emotional image.

*When the silver poles
Of your aenadab will shake,
You will repent for not realizing in time
He whose wit the pain of love confounds,
His ailment no cure ever will no.*

The internationally renowned craftsmanship of Kashmir is yet another local factor depicted in Mahmud Gami's poetry. This also is interlocked here with the romantic ethos. He thinks of a woodcarver who could carve out a statue, the like of his beloved. He talks of *tosa* (or *shah-tosh*), the softest, costliest and the finest wool to adorn the seat of his beloved. Speaking of the fire of love consuming the heart of the lover, he thinks of a very Kashmiri experience of an ember falling into a heap of the *tosa*, which could mean a total disaster to a workman.

There are innumerable examples that show the poet's involvement in the multifarious hues of his land and its culture, but by now we have seen sufficient evidence of Gami's being a true representative of this all. His achievements, at their own level, have gone a long way in keeping the Kashmiri language alive, which was then under the stifling influence of the language of the court. Mahmud Gami was the prominent pioneer, proud of the wealth of his own language and culture, and he gave it the upper hand in his creative adventure. He refused to lay arms before foreign domination, though he did not hesitate to use its influence for rejuvenating his own work. Reading him, one can feel his environment coming alive to unveil its beauty and its significance. The locale 'painted' in his poetry is unmistakably Kashmiri.

The Intrinsic Beauty

Having provided some examples of the local colour, we may now look at some inherent artistic features of Mahmud Gami's poetry. In this connection two major elements of creative activity contributing to his success and fame seem to be of prime importance. Firstly his extensive use of the folk tunes, and secondly, his adaptation of the Persian *mathnavi*.

The reader notes with a pleasant surprise that the songs written by him are spread over a variety of metres. The repetition of a pattern in two or more songs is rare, for if not the metre, the rhyme scheme will be different. We do not have records available to show if he sang and was a music composer himself. But the collection

of his songs is a proud record of a large variety of folk-tunes, which they clearly suggest through their metre. Of his predecessors it is only Haba Khatoon who has a considerable contribution in this field. Kashmiri poetry will always be indebted to him for having used the folk-tunes at such a large scale and thus having ensured their everlasting life by preserving them in a framework of the most appropriate words. It is gratifying to see the same metres and the same tunes being employed by his successors particularly Rasul Mir and Mahjoor, and, only occasionally, more deftly than by Mahmud Gami. The songs have the attributes of simplicity, musicality, earthliness and devotion. The reflective and meditative elements, also present, emerge not as philosophical jargon but more in the nature of a devotional dance. It is unfortunately not possible to illustrate this point in a foreign language. In its support we can only add another statement that his poetry has been sung by the amateur, as well as by the professional with equal gusto ever since it was composed.

In his attempt at metrical variations, Mahmud Gami uses short lines to produce an emotional, jubilant or dancing effect and somewhat longer lines for pensive or mystical themes. In fact, writing verses in short-line metres is a speciality of Mahmud Gami which has not been sufficiently emulated by the later poets, but which, if adopted by a competent poet, can lead to valuable contribution. A queer variant used is in a song where the end-rhymes of the first three lines of some stanzas are the same word or syllable with three different meanings.

Rosha walo dilbaray
Bo sharab khaes baray
Posh zan gos baray

Baray in the first line, a part of the word *dilbaray*, means 'to snatch' (here the heart of the lover), in the second line it means 'I will fill' (here the cup of wine), and in the third line it means 'withering' (of the flower).

The involvement in varying rhyme schemes leads to medial rhyming also for which the Kashmiri language provides a good field, as it has a high proportion of vowels and semi-vowels to its consonants, and in it gutturals and harsh consonants are rare.

Ame hoore mah rokhsar haewith
tsore nyunam dil

*Ame dooreh darshun dith me sorgache
hoore nyunam dil*

Hoore, isoore and doore are the rhyming words occurring medially in the lines and giving them the flow of a rill. Such devices are recognized for their contribution to the artistic beauty and need neither an explanation nor any justification on our part. But for Kashmiri poetry it has a special importance. This kind of device makes it easier to recite and remember the poetry, and but for such inherent merit much of our poetry would have simply perished. Another factor to the musical charm of this poetry is the use of alliterations and assonances.

*Madnas yi waentom zada gaem badanas
Ada kona dodus daedlad taloore nyunam dil*

In just two lines there are 10 *da*, 6 *na*, 4 *ma*, 3 *sa*, and some other recurring sounds and this is just a sample.

The language and artistic excellence of Mahmud Gami is of a quality and a degree which is not normally to be expected of a poet at the early stage of development of any language. In his songs, as well as in his *mathnavi* his treatment of the language is masterly. The same line as has been hummed by a worker in the field for the sheer bliss afforded to him by the sweet, smooth and light words has been an object of serious discussion in the assemblies of our *sufis* and saints, and can certainly be of interest to modern scholars should they seriously turn to it. His use of symbols and metaphors is noteworthy. We have already spoken of 'fire' as one of his symbols. It is employed to convey the burning desire, the consuming nature of separation and also a feeling of energy and life. One more example of its use:

*Smouldering I am,
He set me ablaze,
With the flame of love.*

The following lines taken at a random show some of his fine metaphors and symbols:

The fire of love burnt out my main wing.

*

*Hard is the earth and far the sky,
I broke my wings of falcon-might.*

* * *

*One day I will make repent
The thief of love,
The man-consumer.
I will make him forget my rival,
The enemy of us two.*

The images of love as 'the thief' (of rest and tranquillity) and as a 'man-consumer' reflect the extreme rapture and the sweet tortures associated with it. Ghalib described the *wine of love* as man-destroyer and wondered who could rise to prove worthy of it after he himself was no more. Mahmud Gami calls love 'the man-consumer' and hopes that he would one day win it over. Some similar expressions used by him are captivating, like for example *bremgar*, a compound word coined to mean one who can charm you out of your wits, *sokhmar*, the destroyer of tranquillity, and so on.

In the story of Yusuf-Zulaikha we hear that the rivals of *Zulaikha* injured their hands with the knives they were holding for peeling the fruit, when they saw the beauty of Yusuf, who suddenly entered the room. To depict the effect of a similar confusion our poet creates a picture much finer and more natural. Imagine a naive girl with a key-ring in her hand, about to open a lock and she suddenly perceives her lover approaching her. Bewildered she is unable to locate the key she needs. Now read this line:

*Oh I muddle keys and locks
In your love.*

Have you ever fondled with love a charming bird and in turn been bruised by its claws?

*Oh you entered my compound,
Thief of love!
Bruised me with cuckoo-claws
And darted off.*

The images of the key and the locks and the bruising with the claws have, psychologically, ecstatic overtones and so have these

simple and short lines:

*Everyone does pull the border
Of a youth's robe.*

* * *

*With strings of my hair
I will make a sitar,
And play on it for him.
Tedious is the test of love,
What can sustain me?*

Sometimes Mahmud Gami develops his symbols rather in detail, as, for example, in the song 'Under charm he led me to the boat'. In this song the journey (or the voyage) of love is pictured fully in the symbols of the lake, the boat and other related things. In Kashmiri, 'to lead to the boat' means to get somebody artfully involved deeply in something.

*I went round the garden,
My Love is at the centre of the fount,
Swinging like a lotus.
Under charm he led me to the boat.*

*Sailor! The boat is but a sham,
Master-Sailor does ensure the sail Himself.
Hold the ore
And mind direction of the boat.
Under charm he led me to the boat.*

*I went round the lake,
I thought I would cross it through
For my Love,
But I found no way.
Under charm he led me to the boat.*

The real 'poetry' of the verses quoted above is what is lost in the translation, but perhaps one can get an idea of the feelings of craving, wonder and pathos of the poet. One of his more famous songs has the refrain, 'Love for you will never fade in me'. The whole personality of the lover is involved in entreaty and inviting the beloved, and the request is severally repeated on different grounds.

*We are not to live for ever,
Burial ground will devour us,
And oblivion will follow death.
Love for you will never fade in me.*

*If you hear what I endure,
I entreat you be with me.
Let me gaze and gaze at you.
Love for you will never fade in me.*

*Live as long as Ruma Reush¹ did,
I crave for you. Who crave for you
Do only weave a rope of sand.
Love for you will never fade in me.*

*I won't wait in hush and lull,
The pain in me does not abate,
Come to play me chang, rabab.²
Love for you will never fade in me.*

*Think what we are born for,
See how crazy is Mahmud,
Don't play so unconcerned.
Love for you will never fade in me.*

We have mentioned earlier that the traditional poetic art-form *vacun* has been used by Mahmud Gami with a variety of metres. Another important aspect of variations employed by him deserves mention, and that is in respect of the stanza-structure. *Vacun*, typically, consists of an opening couplet followed by a varying number of four-line stanzas in which second line of the opening couplet is used as refrain (*voj*). Sometimes there may be two opening couplets, the second line being the same in both. The first line of the opening couplet may or may not rhyme with the refrain. The rhyme-scheme and the use of refrain provides a number of variants in Mahmud Gami's poetry, showing his interest in experimentation to enrich his art. Some of the more important variations are:

- (a) the rhyme pattern followed is *aaab*, *abab*, *abac*, and sometimes *aaaa*.

1. A legendary hermit of Kashmir who lived a very long life.

2. Names of musical instruments.

- (b) the fourth line of all stanzas may be the same and that is the way he often uses the refrain.
- (c) the rhyme-scheme followed may be *abab* but the first word of the line of refrain may rhyme with the last word of the first and the third line.
- (d) the second line may rhyme neither with any other line of the stanza in which it occurs, nor with the corresponding lines of the other stanzas.
- (e) with the rhyme-scheme *abab* the last word of the first and the third line may rhyme with some medial word of the refrain and not in the usual manner with its last word.

By using such artistic devices a simple art-form has been tamed to accommodate such a variety that it has become quite colourful. And, there are other forms employed by him. He adopted the exotic form *ghazal* with fair success though the influence of the traditional form is evident in it. Some pieces, merely by rearranging the lines can be confused for either form. His spirit of experimentation is active even in the poetry of religious nature. He is the first poet to give us a considerable number of eulogies of the prophet of Islam, called *N'at*, and some of these are recited in the mosques. In one such *N'at*, he divides the line into two parts, ending the first part with *ya Mohammad* and the second with *ya Rasuul*, and this pattern has been followed throughout in the twenty-four lines of the *N'at*. Similarly his *Pompaer naama*, *Mearaj naama*, etc. are the pioneering attempts in writing continuous poems on one theme, the *nazm* form. He is reported to have composed a number of humorous poems also but these, for various reasons, have not come on record and are passed down through verbal tradition only. His *mathnavi* compositions include some very impressive elegies, one of which has gained enviable popularity, but this form of his poetry we will discuss in the following chapter.

ADAPTED WORKS

The rich folk-lore of Kashmiri language includes a large number of very interesting tales but we do not have any record of such tales in verse prior to Mahmud Gami. This fact, however, does not necessarily rule out the existence of such compositions for we know that our story-tellers have a tradition of telling some stories, short ones though, in songs (other than the *mathnavi* form). Or, they may introduce songs in the narration in between various episodes to make them more pleasurable for the listener. Some famous local tales like, for example, *Akanandun* have been composed by various poets in verse forms but the recorded ones are comparatively of recent origin. *Mathnavi*, i.e. narrative poetry in a series of consecutive couplets, was introduced here through the influence of Persian which is rich in this form of poetry. Many such Persian works seem to have been popular among the educated people in Kashmir before Mahmud Gami was born. These were available to the illiterate masses also because traditionally long cold winter nights were spent by groups of neighbours assembling in one house and collectively singing and telling folk-tales and other allied activities. In such assemblies, wherever convenient, these *mathnavis* were recited, translated and commented upon by competent people. This peculiar cultural feature of the Valley was caused by the restricted mobility and virtual imprisonment forced upon the populace by the heavy snow-fall and lack of adequate facilities of transportation. Incidentally, availability of modern facilities of transportation and the resultant changes in the living standards have put an end to this tradition now. Mahmud Gami

must, as a child, have been a witness to, and later on an active participant of such gatherings, and it must have been this influence that led him to write such *mathnavis* in Kashmiri for the first time. In his *mathnavis* we find the story told in a series of rhyming couplets like his source *mathnavis*, but he has, in between the narration of the episodes, introduced songs in Kashmiri folk forms, in the tradition of the local story-tellers. His *mathnavis*, though based on Persian ones, are by all standards his own creative works. He does not translate, nor does he bind himself to the plot or metre or other formal aspects of his source works. We may pick up one of these for a somewhat detailed study to bring out how independent he was in his approach in this regard, and also to point out some of the main features of his works. Let us take up *Lael Majnun*.

Lael Majnun is based on Hakim Nizami's Persian *Laili Majnun* (Arabic *Laila Majnun*). Mahmud Gami's Kashmiri version of the story has brought it to a level of acceptance that the name of its hero and that of its heroine have become synonymous with the lover and the beloved and almost every subsequent poet has used them in that sense. A brief comparison of the Persian and the Kashmiri versions of this *mathnavi* reveals interesting marks of identification, some of which are as follows:

1. The metre of the original has not been used in the Kashmiri version. The metre selected, although a Persian one, seems to be more suited to the story in this language. In fact, the poet here does not stick to one metre and he has altered it in some portions of the narration. The introduction of this variety to reduce monotony is understood better when we remember that it was designed to be recited in selected gatherings rather than to be read as a book.

2. The plot has been selectively used, which in some cases makes it more dramatic. Some episodes of the original, which perhaps would not contribute much to the readability or to the artistic effect of the story, have been altogether deleted, e.g. the marriage of Lael with Ibn-i-Salam, or the battle between the respective tribesmen of the two lovers and so on. Perhaps the poet thought that these episodes would look alien to a Kashmiri reader. Some other episodes have been altered in an interesting manner. For example, Nizami writes of an occasion when Majnun saw a herd of deer ensnared by a hunter in a net with a view to slaughtering them. His heart melted because the cute black-eyed deer reminded him of his beloved and he begged of the hunter not to kill them. Mahmud Gami to produce a similar effect, speaks of Majnun

moving about in a garden, where he sees a wood-cutter felling a beautiful cypress tree and he, reminded of the tall upright Lael, begs of him not to fell it down. For a less selective writer Nizami's material would have been as good. But for more careful Gami the hunting of a herd of deer and ensnaring them in a net was not a familiar experience. Instead the sight of felling down a healthy tree was a common unpleasant experience in this forest-valley. We have, in the preceding pages, heard the screams of a lover in one of Gami's songs where (*deodar*) tree is used as a symbol of youth.

*I was deodar of the forest.
The cruel woodcutter reached me.
Tall I was
He felled me down.
You never came to me again.*

And here the symbol is the cypress and not the pine tree because the lover is in a garden and not in a forest. Similarly at another point, the episode of the organised battle between the tribesmen of the two lovers has been replaced by the description of an accidental quarrel between the members of the marriage party of the bridegroom and the tribesmen of the bride caused by the unbecoming behaviour of the hero, who caressed the bride's pup which happened to enter the hall in which the marriage party was seated. This change again is intended to give the story a local touch. This selectivity and free hand used by the poet in respect of the plot, consciously and purposefully, speaks of him as a writer alive to the requirements of his time.

3. Nizami's *mathnavi* includes some portions, traditionally included in the works of this form by the Persian poets, which are not an integral part of the plot. Here again Mahmud Gami has chosen not to follow them for his own reasons. For example, the Persian *mathnavi* begins with verses of praise to God, to the Prophet and his friends, to the king, tributes to the poet's ancestors including his parents and long (though otherwise enlightening) sermons on many moral and ethical subjects. All these subjects have their own importance, but saddling them on a love story which in itself is allegorical and has a message to convey, is dictated more by the tradition than anything else. It takes Nizami hundreds of couplets, fine ones at that, to cover these subjects, before he introduces his story to the reader.

Mahmud Gami follows the tradition to the extent that he also begins with the name of God but he devotes just three verses to praise Him and His Prophet and to a reference obliquely to the story, and in the fourth couplet the hero is introduced. He is as religious-minded and God-fearing as anybody could be, and the brevity exercised in this respect is only an example of his literary craftsmanship. Then he had no kings to praise or please for they had nothing in them to deserve that. They were only the oppressors and the exploiters who neglected his merit.

Mahmud Gami is not keen to philosophise or to sermonise. He concentrates on the effect to be produced through a certain episode by expressing his feelings in a number of consecutive couplets and establishes his mastery of the art of poetry, and also his sense of drama. For example Majnun's parents on one occasion, deeply shocked and worried by the love-madness of their son, try to bring him round. They want to impress upon him that should they lose him, they, in their old age, would be subject to the miserable plight of the childless people. What follows is a powerful series of twenty-one lines, all but one beginning with words *nepotur* or *nepotris* meaning 'the childless' or 'to the childless'. The fate of the childless people is painted with the images of pathos.

Childless!
Like the lonely post-harvest, forlorn fruit,
(wasting on the tree)
Waiting for a fatal blast of wind.
Childless!
Gazing right at one and all,
'May be this one is my child
'Or may be that one is'.

4. Introduction of songs in between the narration is yet another important innovation of Mahmud Gami, which, as we have pointed out earlier, may be related with the local tradition of the folk-tale narration. *Lael Majnun* with nineteen such songs seems rather overloaded with them, and there are *mathnavis* with fewer or no songs at all also. These songs serve a variety of purposes, the most important being to break the monotony of the narrative and make it more agreeable for recitation in a gathering where the listeners, after hearing a portion of the story, could participate in singing of the songs.

Another function of these songs is to deepen the effect of a particular situation. When the lovers part or unite after a prolonged separation, or suffer some misfortune or bereavement, a song in the mood of the moment is very opportune. It is like the songs introduced in our time in feature films. These songs, though in spirit an outcome of the narrative itself, are not dependent on it for their existence and have a distinct life of their own also. In the original *mathnavi* of Hakim Nizami there is no attempt at a variation of this nature. There are subtitles like, for example, 'So Cries Majnun in Laili's Love', but what follows is an expression of an acute emotion in *mathnavi* couplets and not in any song form. On some occasions he takes help of soliloquy for this purpose. In such situations also a song is generally introduced in the Kashmiri version.

These songs also enable the smooth transition from one episode to another in the narrative. On one occasion when Lael's father agrees to her marriage with Majnun, the marriage party arrives at his house but this joy proves shortlived because Majnun's idiosyncratic behaviour leads to a brawl. Now at this stage, when the feast is on in the bride's house, the poet introduces a song in the *wanwun* form, traditional for such ceremonies. This, apart from other advantages, gives to the reader or the listener a reasonable time to stay in the ceremonial mood and makes his shift to the tragic episode that follows it smooth. Brevity here would have been too shocking to be artistic. The song begins with boisterous tunes.

*Women sang in the banquet halls,
For Majnun—the bridegroom.*

Or

*The marriage party arrived,
At Saedamir's house;
Our gloom is gone today.*

Or

*Deck yourself with wreathes, friend!
The Arab prince has come for you.*

On another occasion the mood is pensive. A frustrated Majnun losing all chances of winning Lael for wife, runs away to the Najd

hill. Lael hearing of it starts for the same hill on camelback, and on reaching near it is baffled by the steep that confronts her. Here the diction, as well as the metre of the song, even without reference to the meaning of the words, successfully conveys the breathlessness and the hopelessness of the situation. Alas! the translation can give only a shade of the meaning of the words used.

*The camel confronted by hill.
Oh! Who knows the sun may set.*

*Camel!
Won't you gaily go?
Slowly we would climb up the steep.
Wish this night could change itself to day.*

In another song when Majnun just reaches the Najd hill, the significance of suffering torment in love is revealed in a melodious song.

*His fate is Najd,
And has to be,
Whose heart the thief of love may take away.*

*Brass is worthless,
Gold is much valued
(To become worthy)
Lie you down like a cripple,
At the door of your Love.
Rent your body with the sword of love.*

In short this innovation of Mahmud Gami of introducing the songs in folk forms in the *Mathnavi* has contributed a lot to the total effect of the narrative, and has brought it closer to the existing local tradition, so that it did not in any manner look alien and was absorbed in our ethos.

5. In dealing with Mahmud Gami's love songs earlier we have discussed his consciousness of the landscape and the cultural environment. More can be said on this subject in the light of his Lael Majnun, for here also it is obvious. For example, like Nizami, he also describes a garden, and though he does not reach the Persian master's artistic heights, he has the credit of painting his picture in local colour, mentioning the flowers, the birds and the trees as

they existed around him.

The portion of the *mathnavi* dealing with the marriage ceremony of Lael and Majnun, which is described more in songs than in narrative, could be studied from this angle. Kashmir was subject to a harsh Afghan rule, and the profile of the bridegroom gets often identified with that of the kings or the chiefs of the ruling class. In fact visualising the bridegroom as a prince is a common phenomenon and hence the use of the epithet *noshah* in Persian and *mahraza* (*maharaja*) in Kashmiri for him. Majnun, an Arab in Kakim Nizami's narrative becomes a *Majnun Khan* in Mahmud Gami's version by this logic. The marriage party has been exaggeratedly shown to comprise seventy thousand guests and then in accordance with the local tradition the ladies assemble to sing *wanwun*—the festive songs.

*Followed by his father,
The 'king' is in the vanguard,
Glowing red in complexion,
And behind him the godfather,
With parasol in his hand.*

In these songs the personal charm of the bridegroom is admired. He is shown as riding an Iranian horse with a golden saddle. The horse can run miles in a moment. He is garlanded with flowers. His party is followed by a *rangamandol* (*rangmandli*, the party of dancers). In one stanza he is described as *Kamdev* (the god of love), wearing a white robe, armlets and metallic armguards and a crown on his head. In all these attributes the Arab prince of Hakim Nizami becomes a Kashmiri bridegroom, and so also Lael becomes a Kashmiri bride in all her shades of appearance and behaviour.

6. An important aspect of Mahmud Gami's art in *mathnavi* is the dramatization of events, and this is achieved by introducing dialogues in the narrative. To quote an instance, when Majnun in frustration leaves his home and takes to wilderness, his father comes to give solace and on finding him in a miserable plight tells him:

*You are the apple of my eye,
My eye-sight,
Who ensnared you in the school?
What black serpent has embraced you?*

*Who sullied your flower-body so with dust?
Don't be angry,
Come back home.*

Majnun retorts:

*What is your name?
Wherefrom have you come?
Where were you so far?
And why do you cry so?*

The father beseeches again:

*Oh! You charmed one!
Am I not your father?
Oh Majnun!
Come home but for a night.*

And Majnun replies:

*Neither father nor a mother I know,
All I want is Lael my Love and nothing else.
If indeed you are my father,
You get her to me.
And if you cannot,
Leave me alone.*

Dialogues like these occur at many places and lend a dramatic effect to the story.

And thus, referring only to one of his works, representative but not the best, we have seen how Mahmud Gami establishes his artistic genius and also explores the great expressiveness of the Kashmiri languages. We may now proceed to briefly survey his other works.

Yusuf-Zulaikha

Yusuf-Zulaikha is by far the most popular of Mahmud Gami's *mathnavis* and is based on a Persian *mathnavi* written by Abdur-Rahman Jami. There is a series of episodes on the life of Yusuf, a prophet of God (Joseph of the Bible), recorded in the Qur'an, and the story is designated there as *ahsan-al-qasas*, (the

most beautiful of stories). In the *mathnavi* under reference the Qur'anic version has not been strictly followed and the interpretations given to various episodes and the morals drawn are not all in accordance with the holy book.

Yusuf was the youngest (but one) of the twelve sons of the patriarch Yaqub (Jacob). One day he told his father that he in a dream had seen the sun, the moon and eleven stars had bowed before him. This was interpreted by his father as a very good omen and he advised him to keep it to himself. The ten half-brothers of Yusuf heard of it somehow and they hatched a conspiracy. One day they sought their father's permission to take Yusuf for a picnic which he unwillingly granted. They took him to a lonely place where they subjected him to beating and physical torture, and finally threw him into a well. There was a stone above the level of water, on which he prayed to God for three days. Meanwhile, the brothers came every day to see him. After three days a group of traders came there, and on locating him accidentally, rescued him. Yusuf was a paragon of beauty and they were overjoyed to see him for they were slave dealers. The cruel brothers appeared on the scene, claimed Yusuf as their slave and received his price. The unfortunate father had, meanwhile weeping for his son, lost his eye-sight. He was shown a blood-stained shirt and told that his son had fallen a prey to a wolf. He was taken to a slave market by these traders and put up for auction. Among others he was seen there by Zulaikha, a young Egyptian queen. She was beyond herself to see him because she could recognise him to be the same budding youth whom she had seen in a dream at the age of seven and fallen in love with. She decided to bid for him.

There were many bidders and among them there was one Bibi Rabi'a, who highly enchanted by Yusuf's beauty, expressed admiration for him in a rapturous language. Yusuf advised her patience, saying that he was but a ray of the real light and she could better seek the source of that light instead. This proved to be a turning point for her and, highly impressed by him, she took to an ascetic life.

Another bidder was a poor very old woman who had nothing but just one skein of cotton thread to offer as his price, the highest bid in real value because this was all she possessed of the worldly wealth. The stunning effect that Yusuf's beauty had produced on one and all in the auction market tortured Zulaikha whose love was thus weakened to its heights. She bought him and took him

to her house. What follows in the *mathnavi* is a series of songs expressing Zulaikha's mad love and her utter failure to bring him round to a sinful indulgence. The women of Zulaikha's society ridiculed her for falling in love with a slave. To convince them of the merits of her choice she invited them to a banquet where she asked Yusuf to serve the food. When Yusuf entered the room the young beauties were peeling some fruit with their knives. With one look at him they were so blinded that they injured their hands instead of cutting the fruit and thus, unanimously, declared Zulaikha's choice justified. Yet, since the queen could not bring round Yusuf to yield to her yearnings, she complained to the king falsely implicating Yusuf of an attempt to molest her. Yusuf was imprisoned.

Sometime later the king of Egypt (Zulaikha's husband) had a dream. He saw seven ears of unripe grain eating seven ripe ones and seven emaciated cows eating seven robust ones. He was told that only Yusuf could correctly interpret the dream. Yusuf was called and on hearing the dream he told the king that it was a warning that the country would harvest a bumper crop continuously for seven years which would be followed by the complete failure of the crop for a period of an equal length. He advised that the king could avert the danger of famine by saving food during the period of abundance. This was agreed to and Yusuf was made the supreme authority to deal with the challenge, during abundance, as well as famine.

When the famine struck the land, Yaqub one day sent his sons to get their rations least knowing that the whole control was in the hands of his son. When they reached the distribution centre they were recognised by their brother. Replying to his questions they told him that they had been twelve brothers, one of them was devoured by a wolf and ten were present before him. They also said that the youngest one was not allowed by their father to accompany them but they had brought his camel along to carry his ration for him. Yusuf thus confirming his guess ordered them to go and bring their younger brother also along. This was done and finally their father, Yaqub, was also brought there to live with them. Yaqub's eyesight was restored when he touched his eyes with the robe of his son, Yusuf.

They all lived happily thereafter but Yusuf's mission was not complete yet. After sometime he saw Zulaikha who had prematurely aged to a hag. Since she still had not ceased to keep

burning in the fire of his love, he prayed to God for her. She was forgiven giving into her temptation and God turned her to a young beauty again. They properly got married and lived together till Yusuf's death. The *mathnavi* ends with a highly pathetic elegy covering Zulaikha's mourning for her Yusuf. It is a masterpiece of literature.

If we take the two songs generally recorded at the beginning of the book only as prefaces, the story opens directly with the verse:

*Yusuf was Yaqub's son.
With his light he graced the world.*

The first part of the story has been told in a racy style of short lines. The episodes like that of the half-brothers beating Yusuf, or of Yaqub waiting hopelessly for his lost son or of the emotions of Zulaikha on seeing Yusuf for the first time have been told vividly. The tortured father laments:

*Darling pretty mine!
Oh my candle!
Where did you get extinguished?
Your separation is unbearable,
My heart is harshly wounded.*

Deprived of his princely life and being prepared to be sold in the slave market, Yusuf is being bathed in the river Nile:

*While he combed his hair,
The Nile itself was mad for him.
(And as he washed his face)
He struck handfuls of water against it,
Or was he wailing for his snatched pearl-garland.*

The simile used here gives a pathetic touch to Yusuf's getting ready for being sold. In the second part of the book the metre changes to a rather slowly moving one. The story moves ahead and the poet goes on unraveling his philosophy of love and life also. Bibi Rabi'a is told by Yusuf, "All that you see is His reflection in the mirror. He is the body, the soul, the essence and the creator of all these images. As soon as you see the image, forget its existence and concentrate on its meaning." This initiation

transforms her into a saint. Again her picture has been drawn here more as a local saint than as an Arab that she was. She is said to have, "Smiled, wrapped herself in rags and smeared ashes on her silver like body" like a local *sanyasi*. Men are advised to learn 'manhood' from a woman like her.

The treatment is fairly dramatic. At one time when Yusuf's real brother sees him after many long years he, not recognising him, is reminded of his brother. His emotions are expressed forcefully in twenty-six consecutive lines, all starting with the words, "Similar looked" or, "such were".

*Similar looked the sweat-drops on (the face of) my Yusuf,
Similar were his eye-brows too,
Similar was the mole of my Yusuf,
Similar looked his matted hair-locks.*

Imagine the scene. It is a young boy seeing somebody who, for the time being is a stranger for him, but whose features remind him of his dear brother long since reported to have been devoured by a wolf. He gazes at him and in the heart of his hearts thinks all the time of his brother. The repetitive reference to the beauty of every feature of Yusuf's body deepens the tragic effect of the situation and brings forth the feelings of pain suffered by the young boy in their separation of years.

The most forceful part of the *mathnavi* is the elegy at the end, which alone is enough to guarantee the popularity of Mahmud Gami for all times to come as it did in his own lifetime. It has become an organic element of the Valley's cultural fabric. The women of Kashmir, be they singing a *rov* on a festive occasion or toiling in their fields while, say, hoeing the corn land or planting the paddy seedlings, or be it any occasion for collective performance, one of their songs will always be, "Naad laaye myane Yusuf walo" (I call you my Yusuf. Come!)

*When you died
The sun hid its face.
The world turned dark.
And the young beauties tormented themselves.
I call you my Yusuf. Come!*

*The bulbul gave up singing,
The rose its raiment rent.
The sombul hung its neck in grief.
I call you my Yusuf. Come!*

*Death! You are cruel.
You put the blame on something that is trash,
And you fill the graveyards.
'Tis an ordeal of a doomsday,
When the lovers part.
I call you my Yusuf. Come!*

*Your death
Hunched up the vault of heaven,
Deprived me of my eye-sight.
Don't you die!
Bride's henna is yet on my nails fresh.
I call you my Yusuf. Come!*

This elegy, at once particular and general, has been lending pathos and meaning to the personal bereavements of generations of people. Before bringing this discussion to a close, we may recount an important cultural phenomenon. The cultural history of the world is a story of give and take. Mahmud Gami did not just borrow a few stories from Persian and render them into his own language. He grasped and absorbed these stories and allegories embodied in them and then recreated them in a manner that these became an integral part of our ethos. This is an achievement which any one would be proud to ensure in just one life-span. Of particular importance in this connection is *Yusuf-Zulaikha*, the best received of his works. The story has allegorical importance and "The core of the allegory is in its definition of love, the true and the eternal as distinguished from the false and the ephemeral. Life is subject to many changes, and so is what is ordinarily called love among men.... False love is only a toy for self-indulgence. Self, not the Other is the governing motive.... Just as, in human affairs, there is true and false love, so in our inner and higher life, there is a divine love that transcends all human love.... The allegory has sometimes been compared to that of Cupid and Psyche in Western literature.... But the theme of that allegory is not as wide as the theme of the allegory of Yusuf and Zulaikha."¹

1. *Glorious Qur'an* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

Shirin-Khusrao

This one is also based on Hakim Nizami's *mathnavi* of the same name. It generally follows the pattern as discussed in the case of *Lael Majnun* and is a little shorter in volume. The closing lines indicate that it was written in the year 1785 A.D. Here the poet attributes the inspiration to write this book to Habib Ullah Malik, probably some noble of his time. The metre of the original has been retained and, in one of the verses, Gami calls himself Jami or Nizami of Kashmir, thus admiring the greatness of both these poets and expressing overtly his desire to be one like them. This is generally believed to be the first *mathnavi* written by him.

In this story, Khusrao is the pampered darling prince, nephew of the famous king Noshewan. At the age of fourteen he was one day reprimanded by the king for not behaving himself. In his mood of dismay, his friend Shapur sang to him of an ideally beautiful princess Shirin, the niece of Maheen Bano, the queen of Arman. He painted her portrait in an irresistably tempting language. As a result Khusrao, losing himself hopelessly in her love, asked his friend to obtain her for him. Shapur now drew a portrait of Khusrao and pinned it to a tree in the private garden of Shirin. On the following day the princess, accompanied by her maids came to the garden. While the music was at its best and she was drunk, she beheld the beautiful portrait and fell in love. On learning that his magic had worked, Shapur came in the garb of a *sanyasi*, met her and introduced Khusrao to her in absentia. He also gave her his ring (reminiscent of the ring in *Meghdoot*). The messenger, a sun worshipper in Nizami's work becomes a Hindu *sanyasi* in the Kashmiri version with ash rubbed on his body. He disclosed to her that the prince also was madly in love with her and she must rush out to meet him. She took his advice and running the wonderful mare, Shabdez, reached a spring in the forest. There she undressed herself and dived into the spring to take a bath. Meanwhile Khusrao also, overcome by impatience, had set himself on a journey to find Shirin and he reached the same place. While he was still guessing if it could be she, and was collecting himself to approach her, she became conscious of a stranger's presence. She got on to the mare and ran off not to stop till she had reached a lonely fort on a hill top.

Describing Shirin taking a bath in the spring Mahmud Gami uses appropriate imagery and as usual very little from the original Persian source. One of the images particularly apt and inspired by a look at the Dal lake reads as:

*The face,
A lotus at the centre of a lake.*

speaks local language even while using a couple of foreign words. Khusrao, unable to trace her continued to seek her till he met Shapur. Shapur then went to Madain, met Shirin and brought her to Khusrao. She although completely in love with Khusrao resisted all her temptation to yield to his lust. A frustrated lover, the prince went to Rum where the king had a daughter named Maryam, who was offered to him. Khusrao brought her to Madain. The news reached Shirin. She fell to lamentation and deeply yearned for the prince. The prince came to know of it and sent for Shirin asking her to live with him. Shirin, however, could not bear the idea of living as a second to her rival and hence refused the invitation. Meanwhile she called a charming youth Farhad and commissioned him to cut through a neighbouring hill in order to facilitate the flow of a stream 'of milk' from behind it to her palace. As Farhad set to work he was all the time singing of Shirin whose beauty had captivated his soul and he did complete the job to the best of her satisfaction. In this *mathnavi* the treatment of the story at this stage becomes rather sketchy and the sequence of events is not established by the logic of art. Anyway, the prince heard of it and called Farhad to his court and tried to wean him off the love of Shirin by temptation and threat. But Farhad resisted both. The dialogue between Farhad and Khusrao is dramatic.

Said Khusrao: I will recompence you well.

Farhad replied: A hundred worlds I won't take.

Said Khusrao: Cast her off from your heart.

Farhad replied: Only when the eyes may lose the sight.

Some details of the original, prior to the introduction of Farhad, have been left out and by comparison one can see that a selective author could well afford to do so. Khusrao, frustrated by the steadfastness of Farhad, falsely promised that Shirin will be his if he cuts through the hill *Besatun* to enable a road being paved there. Farhad, in the madness of love, agreed and set himself to work. He first engraved the portrait of Shirin on a stone to keep it before his eyes all the time, to draw inspiration and courage from it. While his toil was on, Shirin one day went to see him. The news of this meeting perturbed Khusrao and he, again in his cunning way,

decided to put an end to this hide and seek game. He deputed an old hag to go and tell Farhad that Shirin was dead. He did so and Farhad, shocked by this unbearable news, committed suicide. An elegiac song added here magnifies the tragic effect of this situation.

At the other end Shirin, on hearing of the death of Farhad, wept and wailed and built an *astan* (a dome generally built on the graves of saints) on his grave. Khusrao wrote her a letter of condolence and while mourning Farhad's death simultaneously invited her to come to him. He, by implication, charged her with responsibility for his death and tried to impress upon her that she was helpless now and should, out of compulsion, submit to him. Soon after that Maryam also died, leaving Khusrao alone again. Now Shirin, in her turn, wrote him a letter of condolence, pinching him with the hint that fate had, after all, thrown him also into the misfortune of a lonely life. Khusrao, pained to read it, asked Shapur to go to Isfahan and bring another woman, Shakar by name, for him. He was informed that Shakar was not a reliable woman but in spite of that he went personally to see her. They spent some time together. This episode is followed by another in which a meeting of Shirin and Khusrao is arranged by Shapur but she resists with determination the persuasion of the prince to yield to his lust without proper matrimonial rites. These meetings ultimately culminate in their marriage.

Now follows the final tragedy. While Khusrao was enjoying the long awaited union with Shirin, a son of Khusrao, envious of his own father and himself in love with Shirin, stabbed him with his dagger and killed him. Shirin could not bear to see it and committed suicide.

Shirin, Khusrao and Farhad
None survived,
But the memory of the lovers true
Is evergreen.

The whole story appears to have been told rather hurriedly. It does not reflect much of the artistic beauty of the original. Yet Mahmud Gami's art has shown its power in the portrait of Shirin drawn by him and in the act of moulding the whole plot to suit the poet's local tradition. Shirin has been described in some fifty-seven consecutive couplets, using apt similes and metaphors. This description of the body, bringing out the beauty of various parts

one by one, is called *sarapa* (literally, head-to-foot), and is an important part of the *mathnavi*'s format traditionally followed by almost all poets. Shirin-Khusrao is believed to be the first *mathnavi* written by Mahmud Gami, and if that be correct, the *sarapa* of Shirin is the first ever of its kind written in the Kashmiri language. The diction adopted by the poet for writing the *sarapa* in this and in his other books of this kind has influenced not only the subsequent *mathnavi* writers but also other forms like the *ghazal* and the *vacun*. Some of the important later poets who are thought to have 'freed' our romantic poetry from mystic overtones and given it an earthly touch are in fact greatly indebted to Mahmud Gami's poetry of this type. Of a black mole on the glowing face the poet says:

*Of engaging appearance, a mole ;
On a petal of pomegranate flower.
A grain of pepper, black,
Ablaze on embers.*

Or we enjoy a parable, referring to the delicacy of the beloved's body:

*Nettle like are for her body
Petals of the 'flower hi.*

On one occasion she is shown combing her hair with her delicate fingers, and it strikes to the poet that:

*These fingers are the keys
To open Eden's locks with.*

Shirin, on one occasion, bewitches Khusrao, her lover, with the words.

*O my king!
You circumvented me,
With a sweet smile,
Like midday that ridicules the candle.*

Sheikh Sana'n

'Sheikh Sana'n or *Sheikh Sana* is said to have been composed by

Mahmud Gami after *Shirin-Khusrao*. The plot has been borrowed from Sheikh Attar's book *Manteq-ut-Tair*. The poet has composed it not in the metre of the original but in a racy short line one, which in itself speaks of his confidence as a master of the craft. There are no songs to interrupt the narration but one song has been added at the end. The main emphasis in the *mathnavi* is to impress upon the reader that God, in the ultimate reality, is abstract, yet all that is apparent is not, in any way, unrelated with Him. The Ultimate Truth (*haqiqat*) can be approached through the Obviously Existent or Incarnate Beauty (*majaz*).

It is the story of a Muslim Saint, Sheikh Sana'n, who had a high spiritual standing, and a large number of disciples. One night in a dream, he saw himself bowing before idols. He was much perturbed and he, accompanied by seven thousand disciples, started on his journey for Rum to find the interpretation of his dream. Wandering through the streets of that city one day, he beheld an attractive beauty, sitting alone on a window sill, combing her hair. The girl whom Attar calls a sun-worshipper becomes a Hindu girl in this Kashmiri version. Here she has a *tilak* on her face the glow of which is unrivalled in beauty. She 'talked' with her eyes which were the very cups of the 'wine of realization'. The Sheikh was completely out of his wits. He camped just in front of that window to gaze at that face with all his concentration. People beseeched him that it was unbecoming of him, but he desperately declared that:

*What a fate
For a tranquil Sheikh to meet,
This is fathomless a river for me;
The only bridge to help me cross
Is the beauty incarnate.*

His friends left him and went to Mecca to pray for him. The girl, the stealer of his heart, also begged of him to behave serenely and not in a manner unbecoming of a man of his position. To get rid of him she offered gold or whatever he would ask for, but he turned it down. She threatened him that she, a lady of a famous and respectable family, was being put to shame by him which could result in his death through a rival's dagger. All this failed to produce any effect on him and instead he said:

*Love has turned me insane,
Death can kill but only once.*

She then ordered him to relinquish his faith and, since he could not pay her dower of one lakh *mohras* (gold coins), she desired him, in lieu of that, to tend her herd of swine. He accepted her terms and, as a result, she also was attracted to him. She promised him:

*Verily I have known you now,
I shall give my life for you.*

Meanwhile, his disciples saw their beloved Prophet in a dream and they prayed for the forgiveness of their Leader-Saint. The Prophet gave his blessings and informed them that, annihilating his pride of his personal existence and that of his knowledge, the Sheikh had seen God openly and had become at one with Him. The disciples came back but only to find him as they had left him. They again invited his attention to the high position he held and begged him to come back to his senses. He repeatedly expressed his inability to turn to their world and said that, diving in the ocean of love, he failed to discriminate between Islam and infidelity. "I did follow the path of *zuhd* (total abstinence) but did not find this bliss there", he said. This very unusual situation impressed the young girl and she made an offer to the Sheikh that she was now ready to accept his faith and spend the rest of her life with him. The sheikh, who through his act of total submission to the will of God, had now attained his goal of the highest spiritual tranquillity told her that it was unnecessary now. He advised her that she too should give up her pride of her physical beauty because it was ephemeral.

*If we work to seek
Him and Him alone.
Manifestations all
To oblivion fall.*

Thus swimming through the river of the ephemeral he crossed over to the Real and the Eternal. The short racy metre in which the poem has been composed enables it to be sung in accompaniment of the instruments of folk music and this has

contributed to the outstanding popularity of the *mathnavi*.

Qisa-i-Haroon Rashid

It is a comparatively less famous of Mahmud Gami's works, believed to be written by him in his later period. It is less dramatic and has no songs to support the narration. There are at least two versions sufficiently at variance to show that perhaps the manuscript or at least a sizeable part of it was misplaced by the author and he had later to recreate it.

It is the story of a prince, Abdul Aziz, son of king Haroon Rashid. The prince studied the Quran at a very early age and began to concentrate upon its meaning and implications. One day he discussed a line from this holy book with his teacher who acquainted him with its full import. The line referred to in the *mathnavi*, in its translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali in *Glorious Qur'an* reads:

*Not equal are
The Companions of the Fire
And the Companions
Of the Garden:
It is the Companions
Of the Garden,
That will achieve Felicity.*
(S. 59/20)

The translator comments: "The others the Companions of the Fire, will find their lives wasted and nullified. Their capacities will be rendered inert and their wishes will end in futility." Meditating on the implications of these words the hero of the *mathnavi* found his whole life revolutionised. He gave up his princely comforts and left his home to proceed on a journey. The king was highly worried and he began to wail and cry. The prince was advised to reconsider his decision and it was impressed upon him that relinquishing the royal palace was no wisdom and it brought shame to his majesty. The prince, in his turn, profusely praised the woollen robe worn by the *sufis* as a mark of their asceticism and thereby expressed his preference for the same. He rebutted his father's arguments by emphasising that an ascetic life was the life of the saints and the prophets of God and was far more respectable than the crown and the throne. He bewildered his king father by showing him a miracle when he just extended his arm and, in a moment, a bird came flying

to rest on it. The prince was then recognised to be in possession of spiritual powers and was therefore allowed to have his way. He went to Basrah. There a rich man, Amir, was constructing a house. The prince asked for a job and was put to work with the masons. Thanks to his miraculous powers and his devotion to work he astonished everybody around him so much that Amir offered him a higher wage rate. He did not accept more than the usual rate and went away promising that he would come next week. When he did not turn up even after six days, Amir and the masons launched a search for him and found him lying down emaciated in a lonely place. On enquiry he told Amir the whole story and since he was dying he requested him to spray cold water on his withering face. He also told him that he was wearing a ruby on his arm and had nothing else on him except a copy of the holy Quran and requested that both these things should be delivered to his father, the king, when the news of his death was given to him. He also begged to be buried after his death with his own woollen robe on.

The prince died. Amir, after mourning his death for sometime went to inform the king. The queen and the king, on receiving the news, resorted to mourning. Ultimately, the king went to see his grave where, in a moment of unconsciousness, he had a vision in which he saw his son in the garden of paradise. He told his father that since he had voluntarily given up his worldly pleasures, here in the heaven he was in a much happier state. The king was so impressed that he also gave up his attachment with the worldly life and became a saint.

The confirmation of the episodes attributed to the king Haroon-ur-Rashid need obviously not to be sought in the annals of history. The most powerful part of the *mathnavi* is the elegy communicating the sentiments of the bereaved queen on the death of the prince. In *Sheikh Sana'n* the theme was to seek the ultimate Truth or the Eternal Being through the ephemeral beauty of the human body. In this poem the Truth is approached through total renunciation. Irrespective of the theme it is a successful exercise to provide the Kashmiri language a field of expansion unknown to it earlier.

A feature of historical importance which this *mathnavi* shares with a few other occasional writings of Mahmud Gami is the inclusion of a few lines in Urdu as it had by then begun to establish itself as a language to replace Persian later.

Mansoor Nama and Qisa-i-Sheikh Mansoor

These are two poems in *mathnavi* form both written in admiration of Mansoor Hallaj. Both contain the same subject, but the *qissa* is very brief, while *Mansoor Nama* deals with the subject at a reasonable length. It is also more poetic and impressive.

After praising God and his Prophet in just two couplets, Mansoor is introduced as the 'Crown of the Inspired and the Lovers'. The story, not on the historical authority but on the legendary report, tells that Mansoor, who was a man of religious discipline in the formal sense for some fifty years, got finally absorbed in the love of the Supreme Being so deeply that he became one with him. "The drop fell into the river of oneness: The whole river is accommodated in the drop." He began to talk 'naked' Truth and hence the formalist religious scholars declared him an infidel and decreed that he must be hanged to death and his body cremated. The king disagreed on the plea that he could not become a party to the killing of such a highly placed saint. The whole story is wrapped in a mystery. Mansoor said 'I am God' or perhaps 'I am the Eternal truth'. A crowd of people, who at one occasion tried to mob him, were stunned to see that they all began to look like him. This and his other miracles made them appreciate his spiritual attainments and they got divided into two camps, one in his favour and the other against him. Once he entered the prison, released all the inmates and stayed in there himself. When the authorities came to know of this they tied him down but he disappeared along with the prison. Some great spiritual heads of his time tried to coax him to normal behaviour but to no avail. Meanwhile the king came under public pressure and Mansoor was hanged. He disappeared from the gallows to reappear at his will after perhaps six months. He kept chanting the words 'I am God', and performed ablution with the blood flowing from his forearm when his hands were amputated. The echo of his words was heard from everything he touched, even the river in which his ashes were dropped. Mahmud Gami states that he has only repeated in Kashmiri what had been reported in Persian by Jami.

The theme of the *mathnavi* is *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* or the unity of Existence, a concept which has been so dear to a class of *sufis*.

Qisa-i-Mahmud Ghaznavi

Qisa-i-Mahmud Ghaznavi is a brief *mathnavi*, telling the story

of two lovers, and at the same time admiring the justice of King Mahmud Ghaznavi, in whose time they lived. The heroes and the heroines introduced by Mahmud Gami, which have become a permanent part of our romantic lore, include *Lael Mirjan*, the main character of this story.

Sultan Mahmud, the Emperor of Ghazni, is introduced as a God-fearing and a loving man. One night he, disguised as a night-watch, took a round of the city and was happy to see that the people were all either peacefully asleep or praying to God or enjoying themselves and nobody anywhere was in trouble. He heard some people praying for the king.

During this adventure he came across a young lad suspiciously standing in front of a house. He arrested him on the spot. The frightened boy could not explain himself and begged in vain for his release. The king told him that he could be released only if somebody stood as security for him. On his request he was taken to the house of his father whom he begged for the purpose but the father refused on the ground that his fate was a result of his disobedience of the father's advice. He approached his mother who also turned him away, saying that:

*Even the sun has not seen me so far,
Should I now expose myself to shame for you.*

Then he went to his brother. He was dismayed when even the latter refused to bail him out. The frustrated youth now had only one hope, a friend he trusted. Fortunately the friend agreed to stand security for him. So he ensured his release and put him up for the night. The king eavesdropped outside the window. The youth confessed to his friend that he was madly in love with the daughter of the Vizir, named *Lael Mirjan*. He told him that he visits her every night, but their love is pure and they only recite Quran till dawn. The king on hearing this was ashamed of himself for arresting him.

Since he had not met his beloved that night, the friend allowed him to go right then for a while. He did so and the king secretly followed him. He spied again only to confirm the intensity and the purity of love of these young people. *Lael Mirjan*, on hearing from her lover what had happened that night, was highly perturbed. She expressed her deep concern and told him that she would come to his rescue. She told him that when the court is held tomorrow to try him, she would reach there disguised as a man.

Next morning when he was fast asleep in his friend's house, the friend got up, dressed himself in his guise and appeared in the court of the king. He told the king that he was prepared to pay the fine that may be imposed on him and even to give his life should the king so order. Meanwhile the hero also presented himself and declared that he was the real culprit. The king, who knew the whole truth personally beyond any doubt, decreed that the hero be immediately arrested. In a moment a young handsome man riding a horse appeared on the scene. It was Lael Mirjan dressed as a man. Everyone present there was enchanted to see the youth. The king addressed the Vizir, who was as baffled as anyone present there, saying him that it was his daughter in disguise and that she and the hero were intently in love. The secret meetings, which would have been seen by the society as immoral, were condoned by the king on the basis of his personal knowledge, and they were allowed to get married.

What Mahmud Gami seems to emphasise is that love, the act of concern for, intimacy with and sacrifice for the good of someone else is only a form of real love, the love of the Supreme Being. Its purity and intensity alone are the purpose of life and such love is destined to win. In respect of craft the *mathnavi* is so tersely dramatic that a feature film could be made out of it without much alteration in the sequence of episodes.

Pahael Nama

This, 'the story of a shepherd', is a brief poem in the *mathnavi* form borrowed from Jalal al-Din Rumi, an eminent Islamic scholar, who became 'Rumi the mystic, poet, the ecstatic dancer, whose immense love of life pervaded every line he wrote, every poem he made, every one of his actions.'¹ Here again Mahmud Gami adapts the material in his own manner and does not attempt a translation in the strict sense of the word.

The shepherd, in his ecstasy, was praying loudly in a lonely forest. He was addressing God and offering him all that he could afford. He was not using the language of any formal religion and was expressing himself as if to a human beloved:

*O Bare-footed one!
May I weave*

1. Rumi the Persian, the Sufi.

*Straw shoes for you?
May I apply ghee
To the rent skin of your soles?
I have cooked rice in milk,
And cheese I made for you,
Eat and drink with me,
That would do good to me.*

He was beseeching his beloved thus when Musa (prophet Moses) arrived on the spot and reprimanded him for treating the omnipotent God as a weakling. The shepherd who had never learnt any formal prayers and whose solicitations came from the depths of his heart was stunned into silence.

God, unhappy with this formal approach of the prophet, disapproved his action saying that he had been sent 'to unite (man with God) and not to sever them'. Musa, taking the warning ran in search of the shepherd and on contacting him gave him the message of God that he was free to address Him in his own language. The shepherd replied that he (Musa), by silencing him had already rendered him independent of words, no language was needed now and he had become one with Him.

*Love is the mirror of God's light.
It cuts you off from all the rest.*

Rumi, in an illuminating couplet says: 'For Hindis the proper language (for praising God) is the terminology of Hind and for Sindhis that of Sindh'. Mahmud Gami naturally introduces the terminology of his land, and his shepherd, among other names, addresses God as Kameko (O Kamdev) also. This establishes his total involvement in the search for Truth and this adequately emphasises that the ultimate bliss is the boundless and fearless love.

Yek Hikayat

Yek Hikayat (A Tradition) is a poem written in admiration of the deep and loving concern of prophet Mohmmad for his followers and has been told with great feeling. The moral emphasised is that one should not rest assured of redemption and God's forgiveness on the basis of one's own virtue. The only way of approaching Him is total submission and humility. Even His beloved Prophet does not 'strike a deal' with Him. On the strength of his sacrifice and

the sacrifices of his great followers and the near and dear ones and even he prays for forgiveness and teaches us to do so numbly and unendingly.

This offers only a brief and sketchy survey of the Mathnavis of Mahmud Gami, his voluminous contribution to the Kashmiri language, which has so far been surpassed neither in variety nor in its quality nor in the intensity of its influence on his contemporary and subsequent poetry.

Resumé

To recapitulate briefly what has been said in the preceding pages, we recollect that Mahmud Gami was born one hundred and sixty years after Haba Khatoon, the last important poet preceding him. This intervening period was a long spell of neglect for Kashmiri language and literature. All that survived it, besides her love songs, was the poetry of Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din, mostly preserved by oral tradition till it was recorded much later, and the folk-lore in which this language is rich. This heritage, undoubtedly of high quality, was quantitatively hardly enough to give a genuine literary status to the language. Thanks to the involvement of the educated class first with Sanskrit and later with Persian, Kashmiri had to be content with its position as the spoken language of the masses. It was Mahmud Gami who established once for all that this language is fit and rich enough to be the language of literature as good as any.

Mahmud Gami's field of activities was multifarious. He wrote love lyrics in the traditional *vacun* form and brought the form to perfection. In these songs he sang of love creating a world of beauty which accommodates the carnal human cravings and spiritual longings with equal ease showing that a healthy integrated personality cannot be compartmentalised, and that the ephemeral is only a reflection of the real. He "tried to grasp the unity underlying the objective as well as the subjective universe. Says he:

*The form and reality are like dream and its meaning
The two are like rose and its perfume.
All veils are removed for the seeker who is one with
him."*¹

1. J. L. Kilam in *Literatures in Modern Indian Languages*.

It is the magic of his expression that his songs are hummed by the toiling masses at work and discussed by serious lovers of mysticism and poetic tradition. He was an embodiment of the spiritual heritage of his predecessors for whom this worldly life was a working ground for spiritual accomplishment and eternal bliss, and for whom the ritual and the dogma were not the whole truth.

In respect of his approach to life Mahmud Gami is a representative of Kashmiri ethos as much as he is so in his love for the song and music as such. It is typical of Kashmiris that the farmers in their fields and the labourers and artisans at work all engage themselves in singing to unburden their hearts. Singing is also an essential feature of their religious and seasonal festivals and social ceremonies. Mahmud Gami shared this characteristic at its best and he used and preserved a number of folk tunes in his songs which would otherwise have been lost to us. All his songs are essentially meant to be put to music.

He experimented with new forms of poetry which he had learnt through his study of Persian literature and effected considerable expansion in respect of art forms in Kashmiri literature unknown to it before him. Apart from the variety of patterns which he adopted in the traditional form itself, he was the first to use the Persian forms of *ghazal*, *mustazad* and *mathnavi*, etc. which came to stay and have ever since been used by his successors for their creative work. Persian *Mathnavis* had been known to the people here for a long time but it fell to his lot to adapt a number of these works and make them available and acceptable to the lovers of Kashmiri poetry.

Mahmud Gami's canvas captures the landscape and the 'culturescape' of Kashmir in a vivid and wholesome manner. He draws his similes, metaphors and symbols from the natural beauty of the Valley, its flowers, its fountains and rivers, its warbling birds, its changing seasons and all that he sees of it in his immediate surroundings. Similarly he alludes to the myths, customs and beliefs of its inhabitants. At the same time his mind was open and flexible as he could refer to the Indian tradition of his land, to the Arabic tradition of his religion and to the cultural heritage of Iran, all at the same time.

Last but not the least, we note that his language is perfect and it retains its freshness to date. It is his language that can express anything from the pangs of separation of a young maiden to serene mystical musings and can combine depth of meaning with a

musically and lilt. There is nothing high-brow about him and there is nothing frivolous about him either. Kashmiri has developed further in many directions after him yet one wonders if there is any other poet who can rival him in the sheer musical power of his poetry.

One way of appreciating Mahmud Gami's poetry and its significance is to study it with reference to the contribution of his contemporary poets. Fortunately most of the poetry written during that period has come down to us. If we consider some important poets who died in his lifetime or within, say, twenty-five years after him, we have Momin, Sochha Kral, Karam Buland, Nyama Saeb and Rahman Dar. They wrote mystical songs, often not free from jargon, and most of them too sombre to grip the uninitiated reader. They used the folk forms but none of them has the musicality and the flow of folk-poetry which characterises the songs of Mahmud Gami. They are significant poets whose merit lies, among other things, in raising Kashmiri language to a level where it could express the spiritual experience in a rather abstract manner, and their importance is not questioned. Their canvass however is appreciably narrower than that of Mahmud Gami. In another group in the same period we have Wali-ullah Matoo, Saif-ud-Din, Maqbool Shah Kralwari and Prakash Ram who wrote *mathnavis*. Of them Wali-ullah is on record to have admired Mahmud Gami's art by calling him the 'master' and 'unique'. Saif-ud-Din's language is affected to say the least. Maqbool Shah, of course, wrote the *Mathnavi Gulrez* in a style perhaps more excellent than that of Mahmud Gami but it was written about sixty years after Gami's Shirin Khusrao. The diction of Prakash Ram and Bulbul Nagami show their familiarity with the style of Gami who was their senior contemporary. Parmanand, also falling in this period, represents the *lila* group of poets. He is a class by himself and his excessive use of unfamiliar words limited his influence on the general growth of Kashmiri poetry. In this background Mahmud Gami emerges as a prolific writer who influences his contemporaries and outshines them all. A comparative study can provide sufficient evidence for this statement, sometimes even where it is least anticipated. Modern Kashmiri poetry is breaking entirely new grounds but even today, if any of our poets tries his hand on a love song, Mahmud Gami is the model to follow. He set the trend and made history.

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