

A Review of The Last Knot by Shabir Ahmad Mir

Nazir Ahmad Wani

Senior Lecturer, Department of School Education, Jammu & Kashmir, India

Abstract

This review expatiates on *The Last Knot* by Shabir Ahmad Mir as a deeply versified and philosophically fraught novel set in the evocative and politically laden landscape of Kashmir. Through its earie symbolism, cyclic narrative, and profoundly metaphorical diction, Mir tells a story of memory, identity, trauma, and resilience. The “knot” becomes a pivotal image—evoking conflict, continuity, and hope—while Kashmir itself becomes both setting and character. Emulating from modernist and postcolonial influences, the novel mirrors universal human facts through a peculiarly Kashmiri voice. It is a powerful contemplation on endurance, rebellion, and the undaunting pull of history.

Keywords: Identity, Kashmir, Knot, Memory, Magical realism, Non-linear narrative, Resilience, Trauma

I. INTRODUCTION

Shabir Ahmad Mir’s *The Last Knot* is a mystifying and involving narrative which excursions a reader to the territory of Kashmir through a profoundly human and culturally effervescent conveyance. The novel is a portentous contribution to contemporary South Asian literature. At once charged with lyricism and hypnotically emotive, the novel essays on the themes of memory, identity, and endurance. It focuses on themes of memory, identity, and resilience with a poetic yet incisive precision.

II. SYMBOLISM OF KNOTS: LITERARY ECHOES

The ‘knot’ in the title of the book encores the symbolic tradition of “knots” in literature right from the Gordian knot of Greek legend, standing for ineffable and inexplicable conflict, to the “knot of marriage” in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. The refrain also calls to the mind Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, where the psychological “knots” entangling the Ramsay family’s ambivalent silences and cravings.

T. S. Eliot in his famed *Four Quartets*, the metaphysical image of time as a knot - scrambled, mysterious, and sacrosanct, paralleling Mir’s study of a people trapped in the looping cycle of history and tribulation. The “last knot,” of course, then becomes a compelling metaphor for conked out continuity, for lost unity, for ties—political, personal, or spiritual, brought to a grinding halt.

III. STRUCTURE AND STYLE

Structurally woven like a Kashmiri carpet, the novel’s knotty warp and weft is not simply a stylistic choosing but to strengthen a consonance between thought and form so that the themes are brought home. For Mir life is itself snarled like knots. He dashes off this intricate nature of life in the novel: **“Knot after knot, this tree grows. The Tree of Life – that is what it should have been. That is what grows on every carpet where the seed of that blessed, bountiful tree of Paradise is planted in the soil of the**

warp and weft and nurtured by drop after drop of knots.” This persistent metaphor symbolizes the cumulative nature of human experience where each moment is dovetailed to another and each action shapes the larger cosmic pattern and plot. The narrative's in the novel transpose in time's flux simulating the structural density of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, presenting a nuanced depiction of how the past creeps into the present. This non-linear framework mirrors the psychological disintegration inflicted on a people by a prolonged upheaval. Absorbing modernist influences like Faulkner and García Márquez, Shabir Ahmad Mir switches effortlessly between timelines, engaging the reader to experience history as alive, and always repeating. This structure makes memory not simply a device but a character in its own right.

IV. KASHMIRI VOICE IN A GLOBAL AMBIENCE

The *Last Knot* resonates with the postcolonial tradition typified by Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, delving deep into fragmented identities fashioned by place and displacement. Its criss-crossing of personal and political histories reminiscing Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, while its mythic, circular narrative style calls to the mind the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Mir's novel encapsulates the personal in the midst of political tumult, stressing how history shapes as well as maps the lives of masses with bizarre resilience. Yet in its own right, *The Last Knot* stands tall as distinctively Kashmiri—a voice exuding from a piece of land, both of breathtaking splendour and of inescapable conflict.

The characters emerge round and candidly real, obsessed with longing and wrought by history. One young weaver, gaping into his mentor's eyes, quietly asseverates his dream: **“I can see white flecks of snow in the brown of my wusta's eyes as I tell him, ‘I am going to weave a carpet that will fly.’”** These words, ordinary in tone, become a potent declaration of aspiration embedded in cultural pride and creative rebellion. Such instances, although positions the characters in their context, cruise them beyond it.

V. MAGIC REALISM

The landscape of Kashmir has been made a vehicle to transport Memory and Myth. Mir brushes the Kashmiri landscape and ambience with such evocative meticulousness that the locale becomes a character per se. From the snowy summits to the babbling lakes, Kashmir pulsates with a life that is both mythic and genuinely intimate. This magic realism is by no means ornamental or forced. It grows like a wild tree naturally. It reproduces the characters' inner distress or felicity like García Márquez's *Macondo*. In one such moment: **“The man smiles. A bittersweet smile like a hailstorm on a summer noon.”** It flawlessly reflects Kashmir's paradoxical beauty—awe-inspiring and sorrow-laced. At another place in the novel an influential image is presented in: **“Seven bridges try to stitch this wound that is the Jhelum across the old city. Seven bridges separated by distance and time and history. Seven bridges, seven kadals.”** These bridges—recurring across space, time, and conflict—symbolize travails to nurse back what history has severed apart. It is a delicate yet robust observation on resilience, not only of infrastructure but of the human spirit. Like characters in *The God of Small Things*, Mir's protagonists breathe amid ruin and wreck yet remain calmly rebellious.

VI. DREAMS AND IDENTITY

The novel time and again comes back to memory as both an asylum and a torment. In one flash, a character depicts the past with sweltering physicality: **“The memory of light is now a pustule in my eyes. I close**

my eyes and there it is – a turgid, foetid mote of pain. I open my eyes and there it remains. As painful as before, if not more. It hurts. Oh, it hurts so bad!” The simplicity of this admittance lays bare the emotional topography of the novel. It is a reminder of how the past does not give up the ghost easily, how it hemorrhages into the present—an idea also explored with poignant beauty in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*. Mir’s diction is fraught with metaphor and symbolism, serving as more than ornamental idiom. It is a lively mode of storytelling that grows deeper and augments the novel’s evocative and philosophical impact.

VII. PHILOSOPHICAL AND EMOTIONAL OEUVRE

The surreal presence of a sparrow becomes a microcosm of authority and judgment: **“The Sparrow that picks up a pebble and drops it like a curse from the immense height of its power and contempt.”** Another metaphor, palpable but haunting, vociferates of ordeal: **“I scream and swear as their laughter slides and slithers and coils around my body like a python around its prey. The more I shout, the more it coils around me, stifling me, choking me, crushing me. My lungs are about to burst. I can’t breathe ...”** Even apparently commonplace objects are pregnant with grave philosophical tone: **“Secrets of all kinds that have been shaped into traditions on Time’s anvil and passed on as inheritance, like the cauldrons themselves.”** A contemplative instance on creative quest brings both silence and obsession: **“To be precise, it is the colour blue that I had been after for years.”** And when the reader leafs through the pages, a blow of comic disbelief sneaks in the plot: **“But ... how! ... Where? ...’ Abli Bab fumbles his words as his voice hits the crescendo of incredulity.”** These images efface the borders between physical and abstract, inviting the readers to encounter the inner lives of the characters with raw vehemence.

As the novel nears the close, Mir offers a spark of hope donned in a striking metaphor: **“But that abyss of white, that void of light; it is no void at all! I can see it now. It is a knot. A knot of light. It is my last knot. And yet the first as it weaves itself into one more knot. It spreads on the loom, the knot of light, it spreads like a spark of light at the end of a dark night. Knot after knot. Each one weaving another.”** In these pithy sentences, the novel plods toward clarity, toward the prospect of light even within darkness. It is a commanding testimony to survival, to the chase meaning in places where no meaning is assured.

VIII. EXISTENTIAL DESPAIR

One of the most unforgettable philosophical ruminations shows up in at a point of existential despair: **“In the vacuous emptiness of the universe, what folly it is to knot something into being and leave it to the mercy of the cruel meaninglessness. What idiocy it is to assume that a knot – any knot – in this godforsaken cave could be of significance when the only language of a sky full of stars is insignificance.”** And yet, the novel sticks gently to memory: **“Why rake up the ashes? Why disturb the dead? Why undo a burial? It isn’t too bad, after all, to be buried under the snow. A stillborn sleep in a white, unconscious womb. The stillness of blood so absolute that no thought can perturb it, no memory can disturb it. Not even a dream to delude it.”**

IX. CONCLUSION

The Last Knot is far more than a novel—it is a fictional weaving of Kashmir’s soul and history, yarned with splendor, loss, and resistance. Shabir Ahmad Mir has produced a work that is catapulted beyond its

local focus, capturing universal truths about the human condition. It is a deeply affecting, unforgettable novel that invites readers not only to witness Kashmir, but to feel it—knot by knot, memory by memory, thread by aching thread. The novel reminds us, as L.M. Montgomery asserts, “**Nothing is ever really lost to us as long as we remember it.**”

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