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# MERC TIMES



**MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE  
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR**

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## ART IN PERIL



**Manzar Abbas** | Srinagar

**K**ashmir since earlier times has been a place known for its rich art and traditions. It is for these traditions that Kashmir is known all over the world apart from its scenery and climate. But with the onset of modern machinery and change in tastes, some of the traditional art works are losing their sheen as they are on the verge of extinction.

Pottery is one such traditional art work of Kashmir which is losing its value with passing time. Once a large scale business, both in urban and rural areas, this culturally rich art work is craving for revival. The economic condition of the people associated with this art is dwindling, thus forcing them to look for alternate jobs.

Pottery products were made almost across entire Kashmir valley, but Budgam is famous for having a distinction of making specialised pottery.

"The pottery is living only among those who make kilns for bakers. Most of those who make other products like kitchen utensils have stopped their work," Noor Mohammad, a resident of Bapora said.

"We cannot take this pottery business forward as it has no economic value now. We are preparing to establish other businesses in future," Ghulam Hasan, another resident of the village said.

A peculiarity associated with pottery is that women also join the men in the manufacture of earthen goods and contribute mainly in door to door selling of these products.

"We have stopped going door to door because pottery utensils have least takers and modern day kitchens are filled with steel and aluminium products which are available at cheaper rates", Khadija Bano of the village said.

"This is not the only cause behind the decline, our new generation is also not interested in pursuing this art", she added.

However, the Department of Handicrafts continued to ignore our calls till late evening.

## Poor facilities irk railway passengers at Hiller Shahabad

**Shahid Habib** | Anantnag

**A**bundance of basic facilities, including drinking water, waiting hall and washroom, are causing huge inconvenience to the daily passengers at railway station Hiller Shahabad in south Kashmir's Anantnag district. People who come from different areas to board the train have to remain under open sky during rain or snow as the station lacks a roof as well as waiting hall.

Passengers complained that despite being one of the high revenue stations, lack of basic facilities puts commuters to lot of difficulties. Recently, few such incidents were reported at station where passengers slipped on platform because of snow and received injuries.

Ishfaq Ahmad Wani, a regular commuter from Hiller said, "We are being forced to sit on floor due to lack of proper sitting arrangements. Particularly, in winter when snow is frozen and becomes slippery, it becomes too dangerous to walk on the



platform."

There is only a small building that houses the railway station and it has no station master as well. Residents say that this station is also a favorite haunt of anti-social elements. They are demanding a full-fledged railway station and appointment of a permanent station master. Security at the station too remains a major concern. There is no security check of people and their baggage. There is a total lack of seriousness on the part of authority to upgrade the station.

"Lack of basic amenities is causing huge inconvenience especially to female passengers, at times there is huge rush of people and there is no separate counter for females," said a female commuter, Shazia Nabi.

"The condition of road leading to the station is also bad and during evening hours there is lack of transport facilities as well," she added.

A senior railway officer said, "We have sought the intervention of higher authorities to improve the basic facilities at the railway station."

The locals of Hiller demand a self-sustained railway station which has all the basic facilities for the boarders.



# Anantnag villages without ATMs

**Aasif Rashid** | Anantnag

Residents of various villages of south Kashmir's Anantnag district namely Devipora, Hardtooru, Bantooru, Teliwann and Kawarigam villages, are without ATM facility.

According to locals they are without ATM facility from past several years. In fact no ATM has been set up ever in their areas. Locals alleged that despite their repeated attempts to reach authorities, their problems remain unresolved.

These villages are adjacent to each other and over 2000 houses reside in these villages. Non availability of ATM services is creating lot of inconvenience to people, especially senior citizens and women. There are three banks in the area where huge rush of people is seen but no area has a single ATM.

"I have to travel 5-6 kilometres to use



ATM service and there is no such transport facility available to go there, it takes so much time to reach there by foot," said

Aakib Ahmad Khan, local resident of Devipora.

"It is really difficult to travel to bank and then stand in long queue for hours", said Ghulam Muhammad Itoo, a senior resident of Bantoru village, Anantnag.

While talking to Secretary, Awaqaf Committee, Tawseef Ahmad Allie said, "We have approached the bank authorities many times but they don't seem interested in solving our problems."

When bank authorities were contacted, they assured to take up this issue with higher authorities.

It is really difficult to travel to bank and then stand in long queue for hours

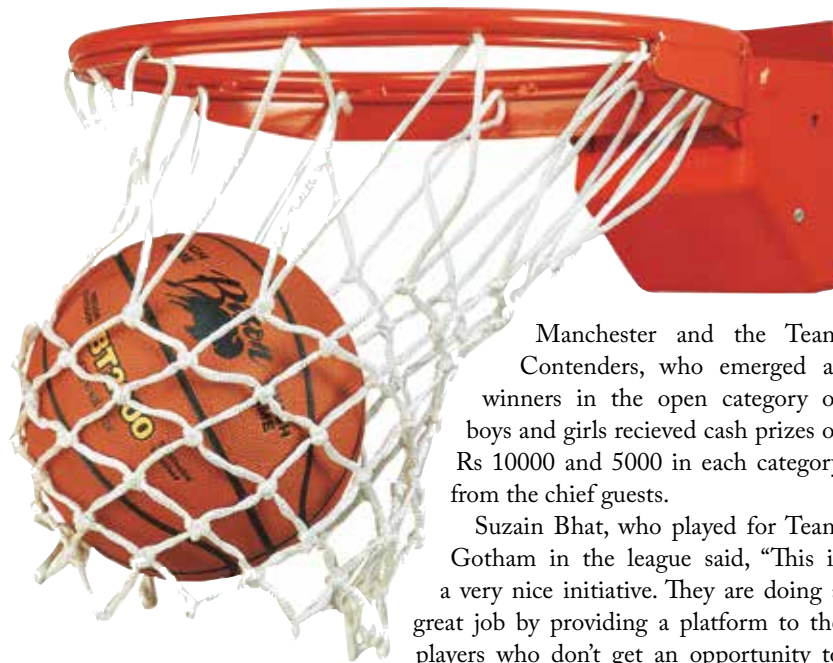
# Kashmir catches basketball fever

**Hakeem Farshita** | Srinagar

Football craze may have witnessed elevation with the home coming of Real Kashmir football club. Basketball has also started to enter Kashmiri hearts, as a 3-day basketball league sponsored by JK bank concluded at Indoor stadium Srinagar.

Wasiq Ashraf and Danish Pandit, two young entrepreneurs, both from Srinagar were the ones who kick started this basketball tournament in the valley. Till now, they have executed three basketball tournaments in which more than 40 teams from both boys and girls have participated. The overwhelming response probably may be because no such inter-valley basketball tournament had ever seen so many teams participating with different age groups of both boys and girls.

Danish Pandit, one of the organizers of this league said, "These kinds of leagues and tournaments are put forth to find talented athletes. We aim to provide a platform for the players who can then represent



Kashmir at higher levels."

"Hopefully we will get more teams from different districts of Kashmir. We already have a team from Baramulla and teams from other districts have also shown interest as well. We feel we are on the right track to promote the game that we love," Wasiq Ashraf, another organizer of Kashmir Basketball League said.

DC Srinagar, Doctor Shahid Iqbal Chaudhary and Tehsildar Budgam, Nusrat Aziz were present on the occasion. Team

Manchester and the Team Contenders, who emerged as winners in the open category of boys and girls received cash prizes of Rs 10000 and 5000 in each category from the chief guests.

Suzain Bhat, who played for Team Gotham in the league said, "This is a very nice initiative. They are doing a great job by providing a platform to the players who don't get an opportunity to showcase their talent."

The league has been able to attract a good number of audiences throughout the course of these three days.

"Before this league, I had seen basketball only on television but watching it live is totally a new experience," Mohammad Yaseen, a white bearded elderly audience member said.

But it still remains to be seen what would be the future of such Basketball leagues in the valley.

# Young artist pledges to make Kashmiris laugh

Saaifah Amin

With a mission to spread laughter among Kashmiri people, a young comedian has taken it to YouTube to entertain people.

Back in 2018, Mudasir Farooq, a 26 year old felt the need of creating a platform where from he could entertain his people living in distress. It was after he got caught in clashes in Qazi Gund area of Banihal brought about by the news of an encounter of a militant, which raised alarms in his mind, to act in retaliation to the distress and tension which he witnessed upon the faces of the people.

It was then that he came up with the idea of creating a YouTube channel. Thus, the stage was set for Kashur Kalakar, a YouTube channel which now has a following of 187k. Its videos get viral on social media continuously. People have

been showering immense love upon it and sharing its content on their social media handles.



“The best part is the satire used while addressing an issue that really makes you

burst in laughter.” Mohammad Arsalan, a Kashmiri studying in Delhi University said.

From social to political issues Kashur Kalakar touches everything in a satirical way. Mudasir had realized that conflict had revealed havoc upon the psychology of Kashmiris. So, he felt a need of creating a source of entertainment for the people of Kashmir to reduce the negativity brought forth by the circumstances of Kashmir.

Mudasir makes a good use of his journalistic skills as evident from the professional camera work. He has been collaborating with his friends to make people laugh.

“We lack a proper medium to showcase our talent and entertain the people.” Mudasir Farooq said.

“But my team is doing its level best to make the best use of the platform and relieve people from their daily stress.” He added.

# Tuesdays with Morrie

Book Review

A true story of a man’s rediscovery of his mentor

Abdul Mukeet

Tuesdays with Morrie is a biographical and philosophical book written by Mitch David Albom. It was published by Doubleday in 1997 and consists of 192 pages. The book topped the New York Times Non-Fiction Bestsellers of 2000.

Mitch David Albom is an American author, journalist, screenwriter, dramatist, and radio and television broadcaster. His notable works include, “The Five People You Meet in Heaven,” “Have a Little Faith”, and “For One More Day.”

The book is a memoir by Mitch Albom about a series of visits he made to his former sociology professor, Morrie Schwartz, who was suffering from ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) or Lou Gehrig’s disease.

From the onset, Mitch’s cognition of what Morrie used to look like are dwarfed by the reality of just how deeply aging and terminal illness has affected his once jovial and lively professor. When he arrives at Morrie’s home in Boston, he sees a frail and aged man waiting outside a wheel chair, a far cry from the

dancing fool he remembers him to be. Mitch sees that even at the age of 78, Morrie is “generous and living as an adult while taking and receiving just as a child would.”

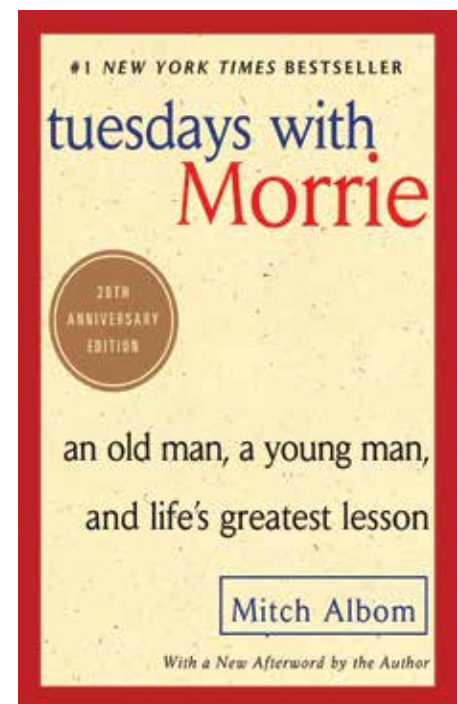
The book is a true story revealing a sweet relationship between a coach (Morrie) and his player (Mitch). A coach who teaches him the meaning of life and shows him how to live life beautifully. The notion of dependence (birth-childhood)-independence (teenage-adulthood)-dependence (late adulthood-death) seems to be resounding tone throughout the book where life is a set stage of transitions from birth-maturing-aging-death. We care for people when they are young, nurture to foster mature adults and then again care for them when they age.

My favorite quotes from the book are: “Everyone knows they’re going to die, but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently.”

“Love each other or perish.”

“Love is how you stay alive, even after you are gone.”

This is one of the most beautiful and thought provoking books that I have ever



read. It condenses all the simple and key messages of life. I would recommend this book to everyone for the numerous and invaluable lessons it imparts upon its readers. Albom has made me change the way I see the world and now, I see aging as a wonderful and beautiful part of life. He imparts a sense of hope with his witty and jovial aphorisms.



# Nationalism

## Book Review

A compendium of lectures delivered by Tagore

Danish Noor

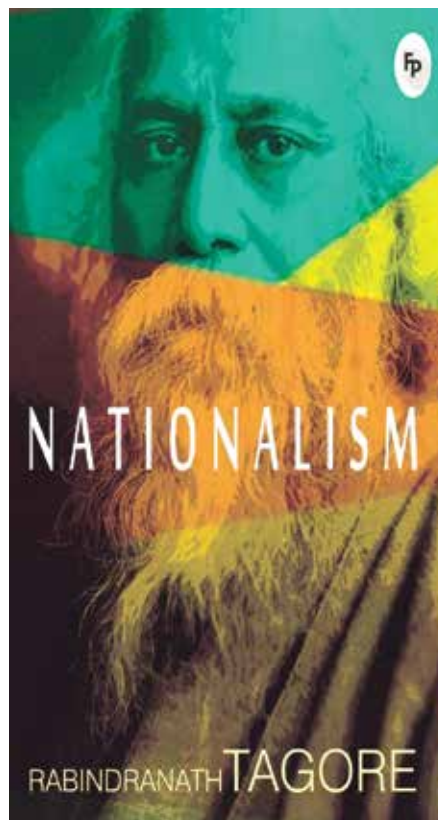
Nationalism by Rabindranath Tagore is a compilation of lectures delivered by Tagore during the First World War. Originally published in 1917, Nationalism can be considered as a critique to the concept of nationalism and nation itself. The original focus of this book are the people who consider themselves to be nationalists without knowing the actual meaning of it, especially in Asiatic Societies, believing that people of Asia are full of lives but what they carry with themselves is a dead fragment and following the dead is death in itself.

The opening part of the book mentions Japan in golden words which author believes holds a special place as they fought the impractical western values and replaced ambition, and greed with love and sympathy. Comparing it with the Indian society, Tagore contemplates that due to different ethnicities in India, it has a social problem rather than a political one. But accompanying it with the

words of unification, Tagore remarks that India has diverse culture where everyone has made some contribution whether they are Dravidians, Greeks, Aryans or Mohammedans. Creating a room for readers to meditate, Tagore signifies that if nationalism becomes immune then it will become slavery, and slavery will be unbreakable.

Today's reader can consider this book a path of knowledge, demonstrating how a nation can be held together not by force but by empathy, a true form of nationalism. Stressing that unity and harmony are the core values of any nation, Tagore elaborates that diversity is the treasure in itself and if utilized it can create a society which will be far greater than the world has ever witnessed making a silent attack on Indian caste system.

Nationalism ends with a Bengali poem "The Sunset of the Century" giving out the message that people should stand against injustices that are sacrilegious to their pride and freedom. Nationalism by Tagore cannot



be considered as a bias against West or Europe it only cautions that transformation without review can be a danger for complex societies like India.

# Bottle of Lies: Ranbaxy and the Dark Sides of Indian Pharma

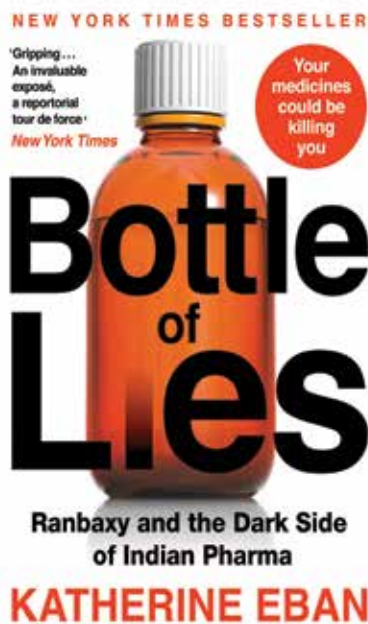
## Book Review

The discovery of a terrible Indian Pharma secret

Qaisar Amin

Bottle of lies: Ranbaxy and the Dark Sides of Indian Pharma, written by Dinesh Thakur and Katherine Eban is about the drug quality challenge in India. While the book focuses on medicines planned for American consumers, the actual and ongoing victims of the failings described in the book are consumers in developing countries including Indians.

"Bottle of Lies" is the result of multi-year sting operations that followed the conviction of erstwhile Ranbaxy Laboratories in American Court for selling drugs mixed with impurities. It starts with Dinesh Thakur exposing an elaborated array of fraud that wrapped all of Ranbaxy. He found falsification everywhere about the quality data reinforcing the company's drugs in other countries. In one of the comic scenes of the book, Thakur asks a workmate how much of data supporting the company's Indian drugs was deceptive. The colleague tells him the number is 100%. Thakur ultimately then shares his



findings with FDA (Food and Drugs Administration) leading to the Ranbaxy conviction.

Readers will jot down an upsetting fact here that in spite of the significant facts

and observations against Ranbaxy, FDA's Indian Counterpart, and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) never found problems with the company's drugs in India. The blatant deviation and disagreement between FDA's and CDSCO's replies to quality problems is a recurrent theme in the book. While journalist Eban's inquiries give both agencies a tag of ill-equipped and under-funded organisations, the FDA does redeem itself at many times. Ranbaxy Laboratories terminated paying a record of \$500 million fine Workhardt's manufacturing planes are blocked from exporting drugs to the U.S. In 2018-2019, 15 Indian companies received FDA import warnings.

This book is a good piece on sting operations in Indian Pharma and presents to create general interest to the reader. The events are not exaggerated but it might make you angry as the level of corruption and fraud and complete lack of concern for patient safety is appalling. I recommend this book to everyone I would rate this book 3\* out of 5\*.

MERC TIMES



# Maps for Lost Lovers

Book Review

An exploration of cultural tension and religious bigotry

**Toiba Bashir**

**M**aps For Lost Lovers is a tragic novel written by a Pakistani writer, Nadeem Aslam. This is Aslam's third novel after "The Season of Birds" and "The Wasted Vigil." It was published in 2004.

The novel is set in one of the nameless British towns where the Pakistani immigrants happen to settle and name it as Dasht-e-tanhayi (The Desert of Solitude). The novel moves around the story of a family who is trapped in religious bigotry, nationalism and the differences in the attitudes of its characters. It is a story of two young people, Jugnu and Chanda, who fall in love with each other and run away from their families, fearing their bigoted attitudes. This fills both of their families with grief and discloses a legacy of incomprehension among them. The novel ends in a very tragic mood, filling reader with timeless emotions and the differences that part us apart.

This novel is densely imagined, beautiful and at the same time deeply

troubling, witnessed with heightened prose and sensuous imagery. It is full of poetic matter, richly descriptive, filled with tender passages. The lives of the characters are explored in-depth. Their loneliness and despair are instantly recognizable, resulting in a novel which is affecting as well as provocative.

The novel's real power derives from the two main characters, Kaukab and Shamas, both soul mates and immigrants in England, who are offered an immensely complex life. Both of them are fascinating and memorable where one is sensuous, intelligent and political, the other domestic, fierce in her loyalties and religious beliefs.

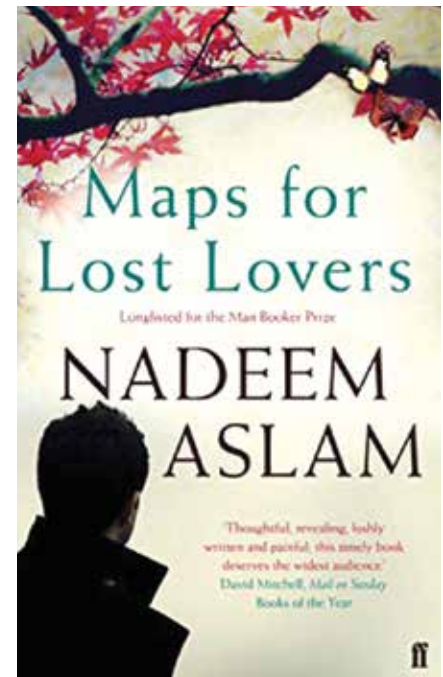
This novel also gives a vivid and tender portrait of the strict Islamic family trapped in the bigotry of their religious ideas and followings.

The best lines from the book are:

"It is a story of love. The caravans of the lovers of Allah are being ambushed again and again and looted."

"We should realize that we are weak and should bow down before the

strong." I think this book is worth of everyone's time. The one who believes in falling with love and connecting the threads of every human emotion must go through it once.



# A Separation

A thrilling domestic drama offering acute insights into human motivation

Movie Review

**Malik Nauman**

**A** Separation is a Persian drama film written and directed by Asghar Farhadi. It was released in the year 2011. It won the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film and the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2012. It was the first Iranian film to win the Oscar Award.

Asghar Farhadi is an Iranian film director and screenwriter. He has received two Oscar Awards for his films, "A Separation" and "The Salesman". He was included on the annual Time 100 list of the most influential people in the world in 2012.

The movie is about two married couple, Nader and Simin, who live in Iran with their daughter, Termeh. Simin wants to move out of the country but Nader is reluctant to do so as he wants to take care of his ailing father who is suffering from



Alzheimer's disease. It is a compelling drama regarding the dissolution of a marriage and the negative effect it has on

a child.

The movie focuses on the disappointment and desperation suffered by their daughter due to the egotistical disputes and separation of her parents. It also highlights the conflict that arises due to the hiring of a lower class caregiver for his old father by Nader.

The movie reflects Iranian religious culture, honor of a man, faith, stubbornness and a struggle of a middle class family. The ensemble cast is simply fantastic. The depth of characterization and their realistic acting is unusual and engrossing. Viewers will be hard pressed to pick sides.

The direction, cinematography and locations are worth commendable. Strong acting and intense story makes it a perfect example of what drama film really is. It is full with aspects of character and revelations that require close attention. I would wholeheartedly recommend this film to everyone. I would give it 4 stars out of 5.



# Super 30

Movie Review

A true story of a teacher who triumphs over several life challenges

Imran Malik

**S**uper 30 is a 2019 Hindi biographical drama movie directed by Vikas Bahl and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala. It is based on the life story of a mathematician, Anand Kumar, and his educational program "Super 30". His role is played by Hrithik Roshan in the movie.

Vikas Bahl is an Indian film director, producer and screenwriter. He is best known for his 2014 movie, "Queen", which fetched him the Filmfare Award for Best Director.

Anand Kumar, a mathematician from Patna, India, works his way through challenges towards success before running the Super 30 program for IIT aspirants in Patna. It is a remarkable achievement-Anand Kumar's commitment to ensure that education does not remain the exclusive privilege of those with more money- and it is the one that deserves to be celebrated.

This movie fits very well on the current



scenario of the education system in the country where massive growth of coaching centers has turned into a business hub. No one cares about financially impoverished students. The movie is inspiring and motivational for the student community. However, the love affair and the item song (Paisa), seem to be an unnecessary stuff in such a movie.

Also, there are few jokes in the film which brings smile on the faces of audience. Although, the movie is emotional and heart touching which brings tears in the eyes.

However, Hrithik Roshan, playing the role of Anand, is slathered with brown face and body paint, thus reinforcing the embarrassing Bollywood stereotype of the dark-skinned 'poor Indian'. The actor nevertheless imbues the character, especially in the film's early bits, with charming innocence.

Overall, in my opinion the movie is a must watch especially for student community. I would rate is 3 stars out of 5.

# Lagaan

An arrogant British commander challenges the harshly taxed residents of Champaner to a high-stakes cricket match.

Movie Review

Parrey Babar

**L**agaan is a bollywood film directed and written by Ashutosh Gowariker. It was released in 2001. The word "Lagaan" means payment of taxes to a feudal lord from a portion of serf's harvest of crops.

The film is said during the British colonial rule in India in 1893. There is cricket battle between the village team led by Bhuvan (Amir Khan) and the Britishers. The theme is based on the moral, "United we stand, divided we fall."

The story takes place in Champaner village. The villagers are burdened by high taxes (lagaan). They are unable to pay lagaan due to prolonged drought.

Bhuvan, an enigmatic young farmer with courage born of conviction, accepts a challenge made by the British commanding officer Russell that if the villagers defeated them in the cricket match, their three year lagaan will be

cancelled and if they lose they have to pay thrice the actual amount.

But the villagers think that Bhuvan is insane and had put them in more trouble as cricket was not their cup of tea. It was a game of British origin and played only by them.



Bhuvan is faced by many challenges like the varying ideologies of the villagers. They were divided into many social and religious classes. His courage and belief that God has created every human equal and there is no superior or inferior, brings

villagers from different religious and social class under one roof and they form a cricket team.

The unity brings fruits of success after defeating the British in the cricket match. Happy faces start dancing and chattering the slogans of victory. And the nature also replies to the prayers in the form of rain which they were waiting for long time to overcome the drought.

Director has done a brilliant job in its direction and selection of characters. The music is composed in an excellent manner which fits according to the storyline of the film.

The movie will have been more entertaining if the director had used the drone shots in the cricket match rather than bringing the two dimensional camera angles.

I suggest people to watch this film and get a message how to fight against tyrannical domination through unity.



# Torn Apparel

Creative Fiction

Asif Khan

She was bold, beautiful, innocent as Mary, who gave birth to a child in her virgin state. Her chaste body dressed in torn red apparels was hanging from an old-aged bald tree indicating that it had been living its climax. That's how I found her, in a sparkling state; her blood drenched tresses were curtaining her face and from the long vertical gaps in between of her tresses came forth a moaning halo light. The light rays emancipating from her face were escaping through these narrow lanes formed between her tresses to reach me and to guide me towards her. She was the lone source of light in that dark jungle, her intense hiccups, torn apparels and half naked twisting legs hiding behind one another could easily reveal her story.

I had never seen anyone in such brutal and beautiful form. She was half-naked yet perfectly modest, her body had scratches and cuts yet her innocence looked unquestionable. I wasn't expecting such an enthralling remuneration in return of the killing of some wild beasts. I freed every neck from the bodies of those blood thirsty beasts who tried to get a piece of such a divinely beautiful hanging creature. My sword shined red with the blood of the beasts paying homage to gorgeous lady hanging.

I approached her broadening my chest in pride with each step, which I took close to her before swiping my sword over the rope that was holding her neck to the old tree. I took her down gently, it felt as if she had

no weight; she was soft upon my hands as if I was placing down a newly born baby. I removed the tresses from her shiny face to see her and to my surprise she was Kashmir, once called the paradise on earth. The sword immediately fell off my hand and I hugged her with whatever strength which was left



in me. She was known to me, had brought me up and made me a warrior. The blood running inside my veins was making its way up towards my eyes, to come out and fall upon the troubled condition of my beloved. We both were sobbing, looking into each other's eyes. She was unable to recognize me with her partially conscious eyes but I was

very sure that she was all I had got.

Suddenly, the earth began to shake and the birds started to vacate in fear. The moon in the sky turned black as the giant black shadow of a strange one-eyed monster blanketed it with its dark shadow. It was as if the moon hid itself because of the fear of the monster. The things worsened as I saw an army of different gigantic monsters approaching Kashmir and with each gigantesque step that they took close to me, Kashmir quivered holding my hands firmly, demanding a promise of saving her from these predators.

I was overcome by emotions and her faith in me, so I picked up my sword and decided to fight instead of leaving her and running away. It was getting darker indicating that they were close to me. Suddenly, it felt as if someone stabbed me in the back and I cried in humongous pain as blood started dripping down from my body relentlessly. My eyes were turning blur but I turned back holding onto my sword just to see everything was black behind me but I had a go in the dark to kill the back stabber but my eyes slowly turned drowsy before I could spot anyone and I fell on the ground with a thud!

After sometime, as my eyes retained some consciousness, all I could see were the monsters devouring the shiny body parts of my beloved while the one-eyed monsters dragged the major body part of my Kashmir. All others were having their part as if they had been waiting for such a feast since a very long time.

# Eats, Shoots and Leaves

Book Review

A book presenting the issue of dwindling punctuation usage in a humorous way

Yasir Rather

The book Eats, Shoots and Leaves is written by Lynne Truss. This book was first published in 2004. Eats, Shoots and Leaves spent 25 weeks on New York Times bestseller list.

This little book is about the rules of punctuation. Although, in the very beginning one may find this book very boring and worth not spending any more time on it, but when read further, this book is really of great help and fun as well. It carries moral lessons for every writer.

This book gives a message for every new English learner not to worry about following the writings of others. Write what you're enthusiastic about.

This book also gives us basic knowledge of grammar, its proper use, examples of offensive punctuation, and the cheeky attitude that every writer should carry.

Truss is a Britisher. Some of her funny allusions may go over the head of American readers, but most are understandable on both sides. And she has noted down the differences of American terminologies with the British ones, such as the fact that what Americans call a

period is a full stop in England.

People who really care about punctuation should go through this amazing book. This is extremely easy to grasp. The book imbibes the fact that getting mixed up with diverse things is the greatest solecism in the world of punctuation. You must go through this book once. It gives us deep understanding about punctuation, grammar and learning English language properly.

If you haven't read it yet, I will recommend you to read it. It's really funny and a useful guide to English language lovers.

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e-mail: editor.merc@gmail.com | website: www.mercs.uok.edu.in