

The Poetry of Disintegration: A Postmodern Perusal of Shafi Shauq's "Remembering the Skies" Poem

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Abstract: *"Remembering the Skies" by Prof. Shafi Shauq is recognized as one of the most significant poems in his poetry collection (Remembering the Skies). This poem is considered a prominent example of postmodern poetry due to its innovative use of language, structure, and themes. This paper examines "Remembering the Skies" as a postmodern piece of poetry, to prismatize it through the post-modern method will manifest how it challenges traditional literary forms and conventions, questions authority and established norms, and employs a fragmented, non-linear style to reflect the fragmented nature of modern society. Through a close reading of the poem and an exploration of its semantic, thematic and cultural context, this paper offers a comprehensive perusal of "Remembering the Skies" as an avant-garde flair of postmodern literature in Kashmiri language by scrutinizing its themes, structure, and style, and considering its place in the broader context of Kashmiri art and literature.*

Keywords: Remembering, Collection, Postmodern, Prismatize, Semantic, Perusal, avant-garde, Kashmiri, Scrutinizing

1. Methodology

Methodology is a chain of approaches and techniques used in the research process. It offers guidance during the research by providing principles and rules to conduct the research in a proper way. This research is about the qualities of postmodernism found in the poem "Remembering the Skies" by Shafi Shauq. Postmodernism challenged the notion of universal, rejected the belief of absolute truth and was a departure from the hopeful pursuit of modernism, which focused on clarity and simplicity. It deconstructs "the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject" which is the foundational idea of Enlightenment. Modernists sought to open a window onto a new world, whereas postmodernism's fundamental principles were complexity and contradiction. While modernist objects suggested utopia, progress, and machine-like perfection, postmodern objects were viewed as coming from a dystopian and far-from-perfect future. Nevertheless, both modernists and postmodernists experimented with their works, using self-consciousness, fragmentation, generic mixing, ambiguity, and the breakdown between high and low forms of expression as an experiment. For the modernist, fragmentation feels like something is lost or broken. But for the postmodernist, it's exciting, which indicates that we have travelled beyond strict and rigid systems of belief. Contrary modernists mourn fragmentation, while postmodernists commemorate it. Postmodern artistic forms can thus be seen as an extension of modernist experimentation. Postmodern poetry, as a literary mode that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, is marked by scepticism toward universal truths, fragmentation of narrative and form, self-reflexivity, irony, intertextuality, and a self-conscious engagement with language. Unlike Romantic or Modernist poetry, which seeks either transcendence or psychological coherence, postmodern poetry often undermines meaning, revels in contradiction, and challenges institutional authority, whether religious, political, or aesthetic. Shafi Shauq's "Remembering the Skies" stands as a paradigmatic postmodern poem, not only for its stylistic heterogeneity and formal deviation, but also for its ideological subversion, intertextual dimensions, Temporal

Disjunction and Non-Linearity, deconstructive meaning, ironic juxtapositions, and meta-reflective handling of memory, death, and cultural remnants.

Summary of Poem "Remembering The Skies"

Prof. Shafi Shauq's "Remembering the Skies" is a postmodern meditation on death, memory, and the absurdity of human existence, written in January 1999. The poem begins with a critique of death as a fabricated myth "a clumsily told tale" Ritually repeated by generations out of fear of the unknown. Religious practices are depicted as mechanical performances driven by collective anxiety. A recurring "swishing shadow" symbolizes death, memory, or time ever-present, shapeshifting, and mocking. The poem moves through fragmented yet vivid imagery: tribal life, temples, missiles, political scandals, and ancient ruins. These images critique both primitive belief and modern violence, portraying history as a cycle of destruction and loss. Despite scientific excavations and documentation, all that remains are unreadable letters, rusted artifacts, and moth-eaten fragments. Yet, the poem gradually shifts tone introducing delicate moments of renewal: a butterfly's emergence, a sparrow building its nest, a rain drops nourishing roots. These tender symbols contrast the earlier decay and remind us that creation persists amidst chaos. The closing lines reflect on the passage of time and the fallibility of memory suggesting that even as photos fade and walls are repainted, the act of remembering however faint endures. Ultimately, the poem affirms memory's quiet resistance in a world marked by forgetting. So "Remembering the Skies" is a meditative, fragmentary, and symbol-laden poem that navigates death, memory, political violence, history, decay, and eventual renewal. The speaker reflects on mortality, ritual, and collective human behaviours, while also evoking personal and cultural residues of suffering, loss, and remembrance. The poem is structured like a stream of consciousness, moving freely through images of ancient rituals, decaying artifacts, political metaphors, and moments of sensual and spiritual awakening. This is analytical as well as descriptive type of research. I have analysed different articles related to Postmodernism and made a critical evaluation based on the study and concluded how "Remembering the Skies" is a postmodernist poem.

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Critical Postmodernist themes and features of Poem.

The poem is considered a postmodernist work due to its qualities that challenge traditional conventions, orthodox form and style of Kashmiri poetry. Shauq experiments with language and form, incorporating multiple voices, fragmented narratives, and a mix of high and low cultural references. The poem cogitates on meaninglessness of institutional rituals in terms of religion and ritual. The poem weaves internally through the fear of death and the unknown. It also emphasizes the incompleteness of historical understanding and inevitability of forgetting. Through its profound post-modern tint, it's not emotional in a romantic sense, but intellectually pained and ethically self-aware. With some contemplation there is clear reflection of post-modern traits like; irony, fragmentation, loss of transcendence and absurdity of existence. The poem obscures the boundaries between the personal and cultural and the literal and metaphorical. The instantaneous use of allusions and symbols adds to the complexity and ambiguity of the work, allowing for multiple interpretations. The poem both critiques blind religious ritual, war, and historical futility, while appreciating moments of natural renewal, intimate beauty, and the enduring power of memory amidst decay and absurdity. It balances cynicism with quiet hope.

Structural Fragmentation, Intertextuality and Cultural Pastiche:

Prosperously the poem has nixed the conventional form of structure. It spurned the traditional rhyme scheme; there is dearth of uniform stanzaic division and metrical regularity. In lieu, it unfurled as a stream of discontinuous images and ruminative of a rended consciousness. These novel developments of amorphousness and Structural Fragmentation echoes what Fredric Jameson described as the "death of the subject" in postmodern aesthetics: the unified speaker gives way to a shifting, destabilized voice, more observational than confessional. The sudden leap from "*Miss Lewinsky bears white drops...*" to "*hieroglyphics are made by the inside heat*" not embellish narrative progression but associative, non-linear thought which is acknowledged as badge of postmodern disjunction. By enticing intertextuality and cultural pastiche Shauq's poem willingly evokes global, cultural, and political references; such as *Miss Lewinsky*, *Cruise missile*, *Truth Defender*.

.....I see in the eyes of the "Truth Defender".

The cruise missile swishes in space to the target.

Miss Lewinsky bears whited drops on her red lips.

The abrupt use of irony has been used to disclose the coarseness behind modern powerful structures and institutions. Poet blends the local with global and personal with political through these symbols which alludes to a famous political scandal (*Miss Lewinsky*), evokes modern warfare and possible parody of ideological or religious fundamentalists. Such references are tortuous, penetrated in language as fragments in a cultural collage, destabilizing meaning and flattening historical depth. This is vigorous manifestation of pastiche, defined by Jameson as "Pastiche is like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of linguistic mask, speech in a dead language." Although there is an echo of various symbols and vague

voices but the language of poem failed to give them a limpid resolution.

Irony, Deconstruction and failure of epistemology

Death:

a clumsily told tale

by some cave- dwelling primitive,

repeated generation after generation

by hordes of people, rubbing

their foreheads on the ground

and raising their hands to the sky;

frightened of the unknown dark,

Mocking death, at the start of the poem depicts it not as a solemn spiritual reality but as a "clumsily told tale by some cave-dwelling primitive." This is not the religious and ritualistic reverence but a rebellion and tedious act of petrified consent:

"Rubbing their foreheads on the ground and raising their hands to the sky." Postmodernism doubt big stories as the foundation of everything and believe knowledge as fragmented and relative not meta or universal. Hence this doctrine of iconoclasts divulges a trait of postmodern scepticism toward grand narratives (J.F Lyotard), especially religious and metaphysical ones.

At the entrance gate of the temple of sins,

the musk-willow blooms besotting.

Din of unruly children of a school.

The symbol of venerated places is getting shape of irony. This juxtaposes sin with bloom, temple with intoxication, blending opposites and defamiliarizing spiritual spaces. The surreal irony in these lines unveils the reality, how corruption is being celebrated and treated as a normal practice. It is moral inversion. Postmodernism embrace irony as a significant tool because it reveals the instability of truth and question dominant ideologies. It values the paradoxical images, because it is not in the interest of postmodernism to resolve the irony it intensifies it to empower the absurdity.

Postmodern works often engage with ruins and traces not as the physical evidences of past, but as significant symbols of fragmentation, memory and impossibility of totality of meaning. This is limpid corroboration of epistemological fiasco.

"Remembering the Skies" poem is filled with images of degradation, that haunts the present and discloses what has been silenced. This evokes Derridean principal, presence of absence.

After having dug the whole mountain,

and having rummaged the oceans' bottom,

the yield: skeletal remains, jaw bone,

potsherds, wrecked boats,

rusted daggers and moth-eaten birch leaves.

The letter written, not sent, in a script not readable.

Albums, certificates, friends' letters,

and many important documents,

preserved in the box.

A memorable photo hangs on the rusted peg in the wall.

Skeletal remains, jaw bone, potsherds, wrecked boats, script not readable, albums, certificate and photo hangs on the rusted peg in the wall. The spontaneous use of these fragments in the poem are non-reconstructive. The presence of all these elements in the poem encapsulates that they do not form a coherent history, but mark the irretrievability of origins, in line with Derrida's idea of *différance*; a meaning always deferred, never present. The poet does not rue these fragments; he like an expert of archaeology ironically enumerates them for cultural absurdity. Moreover, the use of fragments in this portion of the poem is made it self-reflexive in its awareness and nature of its language, writing, and memory. Fragments like "*The letter written, not sent, in a script not readable*" and "*Albums, certificates... preserved in the box*" point to the failure of language and archival forms to fully preserve meaning or presence. This signals the text's awareness of its own limitations, echoing Derrida's notion that writing always involves absence and deferral.

Temporal Disjunction and Non-Linearity

The mark of temporal concept in the poem lacks chronological order. There is no proper sequence of events which pushes the speaker to jump from ancient myth to contemporary war, sway from personal memory to natural metaphors of rebirth.

*"You shall come, yes you shall surely come"
"the loose garment... shall silent drop"
"Or a butterfly... Or a lute-player... Or a rain drops..."*

So instead of the development of a formal link there is temporal overlay between these events in the poem. This postmodern technique divulges synchronism and baffles linear chink.

Language as Problem, Not Medium

In the perspective of postmodern theory poetry and language is often viewed not as a pellucid vessel of truth, but a flawed, unstable and deferred system.

"*The letter written, not sent, in a script not readable*" is a paragon metaphor for linguistic failure. The impossibility of communication across time or trauma. Meaning is lost or arcane, reflects Derrida's critique of logocentrism. Even the title, "*Remembering the Skies*", is ambiguous. Considering the title are we remembering skies as they were? As imagined? As lost? The poem does not resolve this confusion; it exists within it.

Deconstruction of Meaning

Prof. Shafi Shauq's "*Remembering the Skies*" is rich in deconstructive elements that challenge fixed meanings, essential truths, and binary oppositions. The poem begins by deconstructing the concept of death, portraying it not as a sacred metaphysical truth but as "a clumsily told tale," Socially constructed by primitive minds and repeated out of fear. This demystification of death exposes its reliance on narrative, ritual, and repetition highlighting Derrida's idea that meaning is not inherent but constructed through language and culture.

The poem constantly shifts tone and imagery, resists any unified perspective. It juxtaposes sacred with profane, erotic

with innocent, and violent with lyrical, refusing to privilege one over the other. For example, the image of a tribal woman's breast flows into a missile's swish, and into Miss Lewinsky's scandal disrupting coherence and deferring substantial interpretation. This textual play (*jeu*) reflects Derrida's *différance*, where meaning is endlessly postponed. The poem also questions presence and memory: photographs fade, letters remain unread, artifacts decay emphasizing the absence at the heart of what we call presence. Even "remembering the skies" is not a truth but a trace of something lost. To this extent, the poem enacts deconstruction in its meaning, theme and structure.

2. Conclusion

Prof. Shafi Shauq's "*Remembering the Skies*" emerges as a profound and multifaceted postmodern poem that interrogates not only the grand narratives of death, religion, memory, and history, but also the very mechanics of meaning-making itself. Through its stark juxtapositions, shifting tones, and layered imagery, the poem refuses to stabilize into any singular moral, message, or metaphysical truth. It critiques institutionalized rituals and inherited myths especially those surrounding death and salvation. It is revealing how such beliefs are culturally constructed and endlessly repeated, not because they are true, but because they serve as a defence against the untold. Rather than offering a single moral or epiphany, the poem accumulates fragments, making readers work through multiplicity, contradiction, and residue. This is the very spirit of postmodernism: not clarity, but complication.

Simultaneously, the poem enacts a subtle celebration of the fragile, fleeting moments of beauty, intimacy, and renewal that persist amid decay. In this sense, it balances irony with tenderness, cynicism with remembrance, embodying the postmodern aesthetic of plurality, fragmentation, and self-awareness. In the end, what lingers is not a clear moral, but a poetic meditation on the act of remembering in a world where everything like belief, text, and self is subject to change, erosion, and reinterpretation. Thus, Shauq's poem stands as a vital contribution to postmodern Kashmiri poetry, blending aesthetic subtlety with philosophical depth.

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