

# Translations



CAESURAE: POETICS OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION  
Combined Volumes (3: 2 & 4:1)  
(ISSN 2454 -9495)  
2019-2020

## *Calamity from the Clear Blue Sky*

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The festival of Eid was coming very near and notwithstanding the atmosphere of fear and terror, the people were busy in buying and selling things. Beyond the din and commotion there was Asma, a plain-clothed woman, sweeping the courtyard of her house, with the expectation of joy and happiness. Asma's husband and his three sons, Manzoor, Aijaz and *Chotu* were busy in making the carpet inside the house and the clattering sounds could be heard outside. Rashid, Asma's husband, was loudly reading the *Taleem*<sup>1</sup> and his sons were working with soft little but skilful hands. Asma entered the room with a Samavar<sup>2</sup> filled with tea. This family lived in a *kaccha* house, under a roof of grass and often gladly bore the torments of hunger.

"*Accha, accha*, come on boys. Stop the work and have tea." Wiping his hands, Rashid asked the boys to get up for tea while Asma looked at the boys with love and affection and said.

"How much labour and sweat you put into the work!!.....Still you don't get a stomach-full of meal and each day you have to drink this tea without milk. I wish we were not poor so that we could live a full life and you could get milk to drink.....You could go to school and after

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<sup>1</sup>Literally it means "education." This is the name for the special kind of instructions written on paper on which is the code for making the carpet.

<sup>2</sup>The traditional pot used to prepare the salt, pink tea. It keeps the tea hot. The story has it that it has been imported from the Siberian area into Kashmir.

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getting education you would make it big in life.....You would earn lots of money But there is bad luck for us Our life has got entangled in this poor, miserable life.”

Seeing Asma in this sorrowful state, Rashid said.

“Children, you take this warm steaming tea and listen to the mournful words of your mother from one ear and take them out from the other ear. You know your mother.....She is very ungrateful and does not see that God has given us three darling rubies, whose hands carry oblique and angled lines which bear the secrets to the treasures of this world....Keep a note of this, a day will come when they will get all the wealth of this world...Just that....once this carpet is ready....Then you will see.....This time round the Eid will bring lots of joy to our home.”

It appeared as if Rashid’s eyes began to glimmer.

“*Accha, accha*. I understand you and feel the joy of spring from your description ..... Now focus on your tea, it is getting cold.” Asma broke into the flow of his words. She poured some hot tea into his cup and said.

“God knows how much time it will take in making this carpet. All the purchased items are coming to an end. The tailor will give the shirts and trousers of children only if he gets the money for sewing. All this trouble is because of Eid. Only eight days are left and I am thinking that I should get some earth ready to plaster the house.”

Rashid looked at the distressed face of Asma and said.

“*Arrey*, who is talking about just plastering the house, you colour the entire home. By using the sky-blue colour. Exactly like the deep blue colour of the sky.....The colour which is used in this carpet....Just wait for the day when this carpet will be ready, and then

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see ..... the kind of pink flowery *pheran*<sup>3</sup> and trouser I will get for you!.....How good you will look in that!!!.....Then I will say....Beautiful, the queen of flowers ...Come here towards me!”

Asma stopped the oncoming hand of Rashid. She put a cup of tea in his hand and said.

“Children are in front of you!! You are getting old, but childhood has occupied your head....Forget about my clothes...Think about your *pheran*. You have developed holes in your fingers by fixing your tattered *pheran* with pieces of cloth. This time there is no way out. You have to go out of the house to visit the merchant. Leave me and my clothes. Amid the raw walls of this house who comes to see me except the blue sky that I need a pink flower *pheran*? This time round you will sew a *pheran* for yourself.”

“Mother, get up, get up.....get going....Allow us to work. Talk about spending and expenditure when the carpet is ready .....

Manzoor began to seriously make his mother understand. Quietly Asma got up with the used cups and the *Samavaar* and went towards the kitchen.

Time was running away fast and only three days were left before Eid.....The carpet was almost ready.....The spark of happiness was quite clear in the eyes of each member of the house.....From the raw walls of the home, one could smell the scent of joy and happiness.

Manzoor was spreading his hand over the soft carpet and began to say. “Now this ghost of poverty will go far away from our home, and for all times to come....Father! The roof of this house will be of tin now....There will be glass panes in the windows We will again go to school and have food to fill our stomachs.”

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<sup>3</sup> It is the traditional outer woolen gear worn by people in Kashmir to keep themselves warm.

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Aijaz broke into the words of his elder brother and said “On this Eid day I will take hundred rupees from you!”

“I will too!..... ” *Chotu* said while putting his hand along the neck of his father.

“Alright.....Alright.....You should get it.”

Rashid’s eyes were fixed on the carpet He was feeling some strange kind of joy while moving his coarse hands on the soft carpet.

“How the colour has bloomed on this carpet!..... Can there be such colourfulness in our dull life?”

He began to muse.

There were still two more days before Eid but it seemed for the family the festival was today itself. The family was relishing the joy.....After all, the hardwork of the young little hands, labour of days and nights, had flowered.....Lost in his thoughts, Rashid was making calculations of money and counting something on his fingers. Asma was also lost in her world. Focusing her sight on the torn mat, she began to think.

“In place of this tattered, frayed mat a colourful....soft....we will get a carpet to sit on.....But the carpet will look good in a solid home, made of *pucca* bricks.....And then our roof is made of grass.....And the walls are also weak and raw.....”

A voice began to come from her mind.

“Asma, forget about it all.....To sit on this colourful carpet, you need to be of a very high status and position.”

When Manzoor saw that his mother was quiet, he shook her and asked.

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“Mother, shall I make a list of the items to be purchased?”

“Yes.....Yes.....Go ahead and make it” The mother replied with joyfulness. Manzoor began to write with a pen and a piece of paper.

“Rice.....Oil.....Yoghurt.....Meat.....”

While writing he paused his pen and asked his father.

“On this Eid we will buy a big rooster....Father....”

Before Rashid could reply, Aijaz and *Chotu* cried from afar.

“Good idea!.....Brother.....How great will be the taste of it all!.....To suck the bones of the rooster.”

Rashid kept the list in his pocket and told Manzoor.

“Dear one, now you be ready to sleep....Tomorrow you will come along with me to the merchant....We have to carry the carpet to him.”

Before the children could get up to sleep, from outside came a loud noise and the firing of bullets and the whole family was frightened. Asma tried to gather her children in her arms. Rashid got up and switched off the bulb.

“Children, don’t be scared at all.....”

He began to console them by putting his hand on their heads.

When the noise of the firing stopped, the very scary and heart-breaking screams of human beings rose in the atmosphere. Rashid got up and began to look through the window.

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“Asma, let us run away with the children. The whole area has caught fire.”

The whole family was trapped in an odd internal struggle. All of them leapt towards the carpet and took it up and brought it outside.

“What is this! Our door is burning!!!” Rashid said with incredulity.

“How can we take the carpet out with all these flames of fire?!” With innocence on his face, Manzoor began to ask.

Aijaz and *Chotu* began to scream.....The room was full of smoke.

“Let us jump out with the children.” Rashid began to tell Asma.

“No.....No....How can we leave the carpet here!” Asma said, holding the carpet with both hands.

Rashid looked around quickly and said.

“All of you lift the carpet...Be quick.....And jump out....” Then amid the blaze of fire the whole family jumped out.....All of them were in the courtyard.....But the carpet.....

The carpet had come in the clasp of fire. The whole family was weeping and screaming. In a few moments, the roof made of dry of grass was all ash.

It was the morning of Eid. All of them were staring at the cinders of their broken desires with eyes drowned in tears. There was this sentence on the lips of Rashid.

“The devastation from the blue sky has ruined us.”

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## **\*About the author**

Dr.Nighat Qureshi is professor of Urdu in Government College for Women, Nawakadal, Srinagar. The present translation is of an Urdu short story titled “Qahar Neelay Aasman Ka”, and it is from the short story collection of the same name, published in 2009.

## **\*\*About the translator**

Javaid Iqbal Bhat is working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, University of Kashmir. He has completed his Master of English and Master of Philosophy Programs from the Center for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He completed his Doctor of Philosophy Program from the Department of English, Ohio University, USA. He specialises in Literary Theory and Criticism, British Fiction, South Asian Fiction and Romanticism.