

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

**16** YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

**VOL. 16 ISSUE-2, APRIL 2025**

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**

Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**

[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **A Heart-Wrenching Narrative Unfolds from the Valley: A Story of Love, Loss, and Resilience**

**Bisma Shameem**  
Independent Researcher,  
Aligarh Muslim University,  
Aligarh.

The valley has always been beautiful; its tall mountains embraced the towns tucked away in their shadows. The fields opened forthwith golden harvests, the rivers once sang gentle tunes as they ran, and the trees murmured secrets in the breeze. However, echoes of lives lost too soon brought grief to the valley, and the world changed.

Fatima pressed her palm against the cold glass and looked out at the mist hanging over the valley in the early morning as she stood at the window of her small cottage. Where she had always trusted in the region's calmness and the peaceful strength of its people, now there was fear in the silence.

Shabnam watched as the first people emerged into the day, their gazes downcast and movements hasty. Across the small lane, she could see Shabnam's home, a space that had once been cozy and lively but was now simply another home plagued by loss.

Shabnam had always been a resilient woman, capable of carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders. But her strength began to unravel the day they took her son. The men had come in the dead of night, their boots heavy against the wooden floor, their voices low but sharp. Just a few questions, they had said. He'll be back soon. That was three years ago. Fatima vividly recalled the night when it happened. Awake and staring at the ceiling, she had heard the commotion, the muffled cries, harsh orders, and desperate pleas. Peeking through her window, she saw Shabnam standing on her doorstep, trembling hands reaching for her son, who had

looked back only once before being shoved into the waiting truck. Shabnam had changed since that time. Fatima frequently visited her, bringing peaceful companionship and warm tea.

Amid sorrow, words held no value and could not alleviate the void left by those who were missing. That evening, Fatima discovered her friend sitting in the faint light of a flickering candle, stroking the edges of a faded image with her fingertips as she traversed the small alley to Shabnam's house.

She set down the platter and said quietly, I brought some tea. Shabnam looked up; her eyes were distant. He loved tea, she murmured. Always asked for extra sugar, just like this. Fatima reached for her hand, squeezing it gently. Maybe he'll come back. Shabnam let out a sound that was neither a laugh nor a sob. And if he doesn't? Fatima had no answer. In the face of such uncertainty, hopes were fragile in the valley, easily shattered.

Outside, life continued uninterrupted: the river flowed, the mountains stood firm, and the trees swayed in the wind. But for those who had lost, time seemed to stand still. The next morning, the village awoke to an eerie silence.

A body was discovered near the riverbank. As Fatima approached the gathering, she heard the whispering. Pulling her shawl over her shoulders, Fatima went outside. She followed the whispers to the town square. Something weighty, something unsaid, hung in the air. Her breath caught in her throat as she forced her way through the crowd of locals. The body lay twisted, limbs bent at unnatural angles. The face was battered and swollen, and it was unrecognizable.

There was no doubt about it. The shawl was unmistakable, familiar, and worn. It belonged to Shabnam. Shortly after, Shabnam appeared with a pale face and unsteady feet. As she came closer, the locals stepped aside; it was a quiet sign of respect and grief. At the edge of the riverbed, she paused and gazed down at the dead body. She didn't say anything for a

while. Then, she made a sound that made the audience quiver because it was so unfiltered and full of pain.

She dropped to her knees, her hands gripping the ripped garments as if she could bring him back to life with a single force of will. Fatima knelt beside her and placed a trembling hand on her shoulder. The villagers stood in sad silence, their heads down and their hearts heavy.

They had seen this before. They had previously stood here, lamenting fathers, brothers, and sons whose names had been lost to the wind, the earth, and the river. The village was in mourning that night. In every house, candles flickered their gentle light, a weak defense against the night.

Shabnam sat silently, her sadness too great for words, her face inscrutable. Fatima remained by her side, providing only the silent camaraderie of suffering together. Do you believe they ever find tranquility? Shabnam's question was barely audible above a whisper. Fatima gazed at the vast expanse of stars in the night sky. I hope so. But the valley held a different truth. The valley had witnessed too many agonized cries, too many futile searches for loved ones, and too much-anguished suffering. Its land, rivers, and winds, which murmured names no one dared to pronounce out loud, bore the burden of the past. Days went by, and the delicate flow of rural life returned. People continued to go to the marketplaces, gather water from the river, and worship at the break of day. However, something had changed. There was a stillness that screamed more than words could ever because the grief that had taken root in their hearts had grown deeper and layered on top of previous scars.

Fatima was walking across the fields one evening when the sky was tinted pink and orange, the grass wet underfoot. All day, she had not seen Shabnam. She knocked softly on the wooden door of her friend's house. When she arrived, there was no response. She pulled it open and stepped inside. The wax from the extinguished candle had solidified on the table. There was no sign of the teacups from the previous evening. Beside them was the picture. But there

was no sign of Shabnam. As Fatima went outdoors and looked around the little alley, her heart was racing. A terrible sensation twisted in her abdomen. She rushed to the riverbank. Fear propelled her forward, despite the villagers' warnings against walking alone at night. As she reached the water's edge, she spotted Shabnam. Shabnam stood on the riverbank, her shawl trailing in the wind. Her gaze was fixed on the water, on the spot where her son's body had been found. Fatima called her name, breathless, desperate. Shabnam slowly turned, her face inscrutable. I keep thinking he's still here, Shabnam replied hollowly. That I would hear him call for me if I paid close attention. Fatima took a step forward. We should get home, Shabnam. Shabnam grinned a little, a shattered smile. House? She scanned the area as if looking for something she had long since lost.

Without him, there is no home. Fatima grabbed her hand and held it firmly. You're still here, though. Shabnam's eyes were closed. A solitary tear trickled down her face. They remained there for a long time, the valley murmuring anguish, the river streaming past them.

Then, silently, Shabnam turned and left the river, moving slowly but steadily. Fatima followed. The valley remained the same, its mountains untouched, its rivers flowing, and its trees swaying in the wind. But something had changed.

Neither the land nor the sky. But the women who walked through the valley bore the weight of grief with unyielding resilience. And in that resilience, there was a quiet kind of strength that the valley remembered. It encompassed every grief, every whispered name, and every tear shed in the middle of the night.

However, as Shabnam and Fatima slowly but steadily left the riverside, they brought something that even death could not take away from them: hope. Hope had let her down too many times, so Shabnam stopped talking about it.

Sadness went unspoken. Instead, she lived in the liminal space, in the silent fortitude of a mother who persevered after losing and sacrificing everything. In an increasingly unstable

environment, Fatima stayed by her side, her presence an anchor. Fatima made no hollow promises or statements. To make sure she wasn't alone in her grief, she just walked by her. Meanwhile, the village also progressed. Through their hands occupied with labor and their faces adorned with tales of the missing, the folks continued living their normal lives. Rather than fading, the quiet that had descended upon the valley took on a new form, both a monument to perseverance and an echo of sorrow. Fatima discovered Shabnam sitting outside her house one evening as the last of the sunshine illuminated the sky in shades of gold and fire.

The wind gently tugged at her shawl as she gazed out at the horizon. Fatima sat beside her, placing two cups of tea between them, and remained silent. Shabnam's fingers curled around the warmth of her cup as she lifted it. She closed her eyes and took a drink. Too sweet, she whispered. Still too sweet, she murmured. Fatima's face softened into a gentle smile. Just the way her son liked it. It had been a long time, but for once, Shabnam did not cry. In the valley's tranquillity, where the rivers were still flowing and the trees were still whispering, two women sat together, mourning, remembering, and surviving.

#### **Author's Bio:**

Bisma Shameem is an independent researcher specializing in English literature. She holds a master's degree from Aligarh Muslim University. Her research primarily focuses on feminist narratives, prison literature, life writings, and non-fiction, particularly examining themes of resistance, identity, and marginalized voices.