

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

CHRONICLE OF PAIN: *THE HALF MOTHER* THROUGH RESISTANCE DISCOURSE

JAN MOHMAD PANDIT

Research Scholar (Ph. D)

Department of Comparative Languages and Culture, Barkatullah University,
Bhopal (M.P.)



JAN MOHMAD PANDIT

ABSTRACT

The protracted Kashmir conflict conjures up heterogeneous narratives, vying unrelentingly in the pursuit of incompatible goals, contradictory needs and interests, in different non-literary and literary genres. This huge gamut of tendentious narratives, written from extrinsic and probative positions, comes up with homophonic voices that revolve around different centers or fall in line with the main stream narratives. Shahnaz Bashir is one of the emerging voices from Kashmir, who with his debut novel *The Half Mother* narrates such a somber tale that busts all the mainstream narratives of all is well in the Kashmir. The novel is a story of Haleema, who represent all those suffering mothers of Kashmir whose son disappeared in the custody of security forces since the armed rebellion started against the Indian rule. It's a sorrowful journey of all those desperate mothers of Kashmir whom the world now knows as the half mothers because they just want to know from the people in power whether their son are alive or dead. The Shahnaz Bashir lives in Kashmir and writes from Kashmir and is witness to the ongoing saga of pain and tyranny unlike others who draw fictitious images by sitting in the far away ivory towers of the world.

Keywords: *The Half Mother*, Kashmir conflict, Pain, Memory, Shahnaz Bashir

The disputative history and political pandemonium has stirred up the imagination of many indigenous writers who translate their first-hand experience of pain and anger in words. Prominent among these voices are Basharat Peer, Mirza Waheed, Shahnaz Bashir, Siddhartha Gigoo, Shafi Ahmad, GN Gohwar, Rahul pandita etc, all of them paint the different shades of the conflict conspicuously. These writers come to the forefront in order to paint the horrendous picture of the valley in an alien language so as to reach out the whole world. Shahnaz bashir accomplish with dignity the role of Edward Saidian intellectual who "...challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power, wherever and whenever possible ... visibly represents a

standpoint of some kind and articulates the same without barriers. He is neither a pacifier nor a consensus- builder but someone who is staked on a critical sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas or ready-made clichés or smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmation of what powerful have to say and do." (pp. 31) In the aforementioned discourse, this paper reads *The half Mother* written by Shahnaz Bashir as a chronicle of incessant pain and excruciation through the ambit of resistance narrative.

Born and brought up in Srinagar, Shahnaz Bashir scanned the cataclysm from 'acritical stage' to 'liberation stage' of the evolution of critical consciousness. Shahnaz Bashir in *The Half Mother*

invigorates the epoch of the 90's when extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, illegal detention, rape, humiliation were the norm of the day. Prior to this he has written an essay demonstrating the same banality "A Crackdown in Natipora" (2013). Shahnaz Bashir says about the novel "In strife-torn Kashmir, I have always been tormented by the feeling of indefinite and eternal uncertainty. *The Half Mother* is an outcome of those feeling" (Greater Kashmir). It echoes the same cathartic response of Fanon about his book *White Skin Black Mask* "This book should have been written three years ago... But these truths were a fire in me then. Now I can tell them without being burned" (Fanon: 2). In the very onset of the novel, Shahnaz Bashir sets forth his intention to portray the chronicle of pain and suffering unleashed on the protagonist, Haleema; as she embarks on grueling search for her missing teenage son, Imran. The novel opens with a reverie that brings out antithetical elements of suffering-hopes, miseries-patience, and uncertainties-quests into her mind in a way that the nostalgic impulses align with the present consciousness in a surreptitious manner only to aggravate her melancholic tendencies. Haleema's mother died when she was eight years old, and soon she left school because of economic crisis and on this occasion the teachers give her tearful adieu with these words "Our beloved Haleema, we wish you a very beautiful life" that proved ironical. (10) She lives in a dilapidated house and takes part in household chores that become part of her being. Haleema married and then soon got divorced, and after three month she gave birth to a baby boy, Imran.

The 1987 water shed election not only added fuel to the long existing conflict but also in the midst of insurgency and counter-insurgency, Kashmiris arouse to the 'critical stage' of consciousness – challenge the dictum that Kashmiris are the expressionless and have been historically reduced to silence. On the pretext of counter-insurgency hell was loosened on the people with the clear consciousness of occupying forces, and crackdowns, enforced disappearances, torture, detention, killings, fake encounters, curfews were norm of the day. The first encounter/confrontation

between the outsider and the insider create a deep psychological trauma among the natives. The troops were making a bunker near Joo house upon which Abjaan perplexed and shivering with both rage and fear, roared at them, "The bunker will be a nuisance – you will always be intruding into our homes. Our women can't come out of their houses. Please take the bunker a little away from here" (26). The trooper pushed him back with the butt of his rifle and he fell on the snow with black karakul tilted over his eyes. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* says,

"Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together – that is to say that the exploitation of the native by the settler - was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons"(28).

The gruesome acts of violence, previously unknown, were inflicted on the people as *Shafiq's* daughter *Rukhsana* was beaten and stripped by troopers in front of her parents. In the midst of this chaos, Imran has his own way of learning things, and His questions and arguments irritate the teachers. Imran once asked her teacher 'Why we were never taught the history of Kashmir?' (34), when we study about Mesopotamia and Indus valley. On this, MrsTeja tweaked his ear; a suggestive gesture to remain silent; incessant expunction of their identity and, thereby discourage every endeavour to know thyself. At this critical juncture *Abjaan* came to his rescue –"Until we stop oppressing ourselves others will never stop oppressing us. Remember this. Mark my words...Everything has a history. And we have a firm history. Our own history. Except the fact that it has never seen the light of day" (34), he further adds, "We have to indulge in alternate education...Read besides your school curriculum. I have an old copy of *Kashmakash* (35). Kashmir history is wrought up with the conflict in the most intricate and intriguing way only to left 'tinctures of decay' in the present. Through the mouth piece of Ab Jaan, Shahnaz Bashir tries to highlight the intellectual bias of the outsiders and the indigenous rapacious state functionaries - incessant endeavors on their part to erase memories, distort facts, monopolize narratives, substitution of historical facts by the myths/ hypes strategically that lay bare

the harsh realities of Kashmir conflict. This reminds us of Edward Saidian statement at the very beginning of *Culture and Imperialism*:

"Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present.... The main idea is that even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other and, in the totally ideal sense, each co-exists with the other" (1-2).

One evening a sudden gun fire started and in retaliation the troops begun to beat the people and set shops and houses ablaze. Agha Shahid Ali writes,

"...Black on edges of flames,
It cannot extinguish the neighborhood,
The homes set ablaze by midnight soldiers.
Kashmir is burning..."

(The Veiled Suite, 179)

Next morning they arrived outside the Joo's house and callout the male members when Abjaan opened the gate he was beaten, Haleema ran down crying and begging the major to let them go. The major slapped Imran and ordered his men to take him outside. Abjaan argued bravely yet trembling that "You beat everyone. There are civilians in the locality, yet you burn down our shops, you snatch away our living and now you are torturing us. Don't you have any shame?" (48) The major held Abjaan by his collar. Haleema screamed for help "*Kuni Kahn Chhuna?*" "Anybody? Help! Please don't kill him! Please!" (49) Three bullets were pumped into Abjaan, one in the heart, one in the neck and one in the stomach. After killing him, Major Kushwaha still abuses him 'Sisterfucker!' (49) Blood began to gurgled out of Abjaan's throat, Haleema slapped her face and chest pulled her hair and fainted. This gory act of barbarity is minutely and meticulously depicted. An old woman pleaded with the army, 'Let me give some water to him' (49), but all in vain. When Imam requested to drape his body, the Major left by

saying, 'No, Let everyone see this! See what happens when you rebel against us.' (50) The collective punishment and the 'theatrical elements' of it has become an instrumental tool of the authority to sabotage, hoodwink and silence the whole population. In *Discipline and Punishment* Michel Foucault says,

"...Punishment is a ceremonial of Sovereignty; it uses the ritual marks of the vengeance that it applies to the body of the condemned man [Le corps du condamne]; and it deploys before the eyes of spectators an effect of terror as intense as it is discontinuous, irregular and always above its own laws, the physical presence of the sovereign and of his power." (130)

Late one night the army arrived at Haleema's house and picked Imran for Imran Bhat. Imran cowering in horror. Haleema begged for his innocence but all in vain, 'you killed my father! Leave me someone to live with! How could you be so cruel? ...Please, brother, I have no one except him. Leave him for God's sake! *Gaed ha kaertham, patro!* I am a perforated soul, my son' (57). Haleema knelt in front of the army vehicle breathing hard, begging, crying collapsed on the dirt road barefooted, bareheaded. It was the longest night of Haleema's life. Pale face like a corpse, Haleema went to the *Sadder* police station to launch an FIR. Miss governance, helplessness and state apathy become evident when the constable said, "It has been long time since we filed an FIR. A long, long time. Actually, we cannot lodge an FIR against the army." He adds "Our job is now confined to identifying, carrying, delivering dead bodies to the families. That is the job of the police now." (63) The suspension or abatement of law in the name of emergency and securing the 'national integrity' is used to create a "binary division" between those who are included in it and those who are excluded. Haleema went to another camp named 'Malaysia.', there she pleaded but of no avail. She sold her cattle, jewellery, copper utensils so that she keeps her search continue. The words of Natasha Kaul are highly relevant who says:

"The women of Kashmir are in the tens of thousands of widows and half-widows; wives of killed and disappeared men; as well as mothers and grandmothers of missing children. Vulnerable, often impoverished, the sorrows, struggles and humiliation of these women of Kashmir are a catalogue of charges against the occupation of Kashmir." (*Of Occupation and Resistance: Writings from Kashmir*, 253).

She often take out belongings from Imran's trunk; talk to them, smells the pages, feel the letters with her fingers, ironed Imran's uniform and put it in the trunk. She kissed and converse with them and sniffs them for his smell, crying and wailing alternately and melancholically sung:

"Kyazitscaa'iroodhammaah-i-
namkehilaaltai?"

*Dohgoumpyaaraan, chhinatsalaan mala al
tai?"*

"O crescent moon, why do you hide from
me?"

Sulking as you are, why have you kept me?"
(70)

Haleema went to radio station, there she saw larger- than- life – portrait of Gandhi looked distressed and disappointed which is ironical to the present state of affairs in the valley. Governmentality is highlighted when the news producer on the phone said. "Yes. Yes, we have carried Governor Sahib's full statement; you can surely cross-check on our broadcast." (71) The media has become instrumental tool in the hands of the government, for it not only valorizes the brutality in the name of 'national integrity' but in a scheming way efface and erase the brutality of brutality, seriousness of the serious issue, naturalize the unnatural, rationalize the irrational so that everything look justifiable and of commonplace to the common people. When Haleema approaches the producer to broadcast the news of his son he said stiffly, "Radio doesn't air this kind of news." (72) At TV Station she was told that this kind of news is "dangerous and unconventional." (73) This unholy nexus of government and media has choked the voice of voiceless. Violence, torture, custodial killings were

termed as "unconventional" and priority was given to those minor events only to prove normality in the valley. While in an interview Arundhati Roy stated that India media "failed to highlight the plight of the ordinary Kashmir's who were being tormented and brutalized by security forces every day in the name of freedom and peace." She further adds "India media is suffering from schizophrenia as its reports portray zero reflection about the reality in Jammu and Kashmir. India media is busy painting a rosy picture of normalcy, which is absolutely false." Haleema gets little hope when she meets the BBC reporter who assures her to publish the news. A month ago a parcel-bomb exploded and *Mushtaq Ahmad* (photographer) becomes its victim. There is a vague line between the fiction and the fact because a photographer *Mushtaq Ali* was killed in a bomb blast in 1995 actually intended to kill a veteran journalist, Yusuf Jammel. Here it is important to note that even media is not spared from the wrath of the authority, and is under constant pulls and pressures from different directions. According to Gramsci theory of ideological hegemony, mass media are tools that ruling elites use to "perpetuate their power, wealth, and status [by popularizing] their own philosophy, culture and morality" (Boggs, 1976: 39).

Structured violence and torture become the structure of the novel as in *Badami Bagh* cantonment, *Haleema's* eyes met with gory and macabre scene of violence and death, and the encyclopedia of torture and death is revealed to us with a panoramic detail. There she saw "limbless, fingerless, nail less, hairless, toothless, eyeless, earless, detainees – a variety of wriggling, howling, yowling amputated souls" (80)

At mortuary Haleema met Khizir post-mortem who has executed over ten thousand post-mortem, share his horrific experience with her, "I have stitched heads on bodies; heads, which anyway failed to form a face – so defiled, so disfigured" (134). He was overwhelmed with the nightmares of the deceased soul who encroached upon his dreams as one of them thanked him "for sewing his bullet-torn face back on his head" (134). He narrates a pathetic tale of a young boy in whose stomach he had found coals, strips of cloth, his gut smelt of

kerosene, and nails stuffed with his own skin. Basharat Peer in his path-breaking memoir *Curfewed Night* has given a veracious account of the torture meted out to the boys at different torture centers, like one at notorious and infamous torture centre, papa 2:

"I was asked to undress, be naked. The first time I resisted, I was beaten, undressed forcibly and tied to a chair. Then they tied copper wire to my arms and gave me electric shocks... I fainted a few times. They brought me back to my senses and inserted a copper wire into my penis" (146).

Haleema went to the court where she came across a teeming population whose wards have been disappeared. Enforced disappeared has become routine of the day. She became the head of Association of Relatives of the Disappeared Person (ARDP). She acquires a new identity as the half-mother which is tormenting reality that torments her with the each passing day. She searched Imran in Army camps, torture centre, police station, jails, wet lands, and mortuaries but truth remained lost in the shadow of war. At court room Col. Ajit Kumar suggests Haleema to think of 'alternatives' and offers monetary help of two lakhs. 'In plain words ...it is not wise to dig up the past. It won't yield anything. Let us start a new beginning from today. We can't bring you your culprits.' (153) Police intimidation and orchestrated attempt by the forces create irreparable schism. Haleema retorted, "What would I do with the money you are offering me? Would it assuage my pain? No. I don't want any justice from you. Not really. You are incapable of justice. If you honestly want to help me, tell me what happened to my son?" (153-54) In *Power/Knowledge* Michel Foucault has rightly said:

"...my hypothesis is not so much that the court is the natural expression of popular justice, but rather that its historical function is to ensure it, to control it and to strangle it, by re-inscribing it within institutions which are typical of a state apparatus." (Foucault, 1)

The novel foregrounds the colossal cataclysm not only of Haleema but thousands of

bereaved families. These families confront incalculable overlapping of social, economic, and psychological problems. An 'ineffaceable wounds' has been inflected on their psyche which result in plethora of psychological disorders e.g. obsessive compulsive disorder, hypochondria, schizophrenia, insomnia, aneroid symptoms and suicidal obsessions. Wet patches on the cement surface appear to her morphed into ghostly shapes with open mouth seemingly shout back at her. Her dream begin to mock or taunt her existence in a crude way as in a dream she tries to climb the barbwire-topped wall, but she slips and tumbles down, hitting the ground. Every image in real life or in a dream manifest sorrow e.g., a cat pounced on its prey startles Haleema. Abjaans rusty Hercules bicycle with deflated, punctured tyres creates another allusion of defeat. Her woes and neurotic impulse are highlighted when she begins to talk with wooden ladle, clutter of steel tureens. The thoughts of Imran always take hold of her as one evening she laded the rice onto two plates totally unaware about his absence. After coming to the reality she began to wail that echoes in the desolate house. This sense of longing prevents her to remember to do the prosaic things. She lives a life without life. Haleema run out of medicines and other particulars. Haleema sold her orchard to keep her search for her son continuous. Hope and despair are her constant companions and tussle between them torn her apart.

"I am broke. I don't have a penny now." she adds "But I have hope. I wish to die but this hope pulls me back. I have spent everything looking for him. I have not let my feet rest anywhere. It seems I have just walked all my life. After Ab Jaan, I have only one reason to live and that is Imran. I don't know what will happen to me. I might faint and fall on a burning stove someday or I might not wake up one morning. But while I exist in this world, I have one reason to live" (109).

The battered hope inside her was still alive. She waited and waited and waited...

"...The night is tired now,

The old moon, hanging in the dark sky, is tired too,

The roads are tired,
Your footprints are tired,
The candle, the windows, the doors are
tired –
I am still waiting,
Come now..." (156)

Both, her conscious and unconscious are evaded by the memories of Imran. She became indifferent to this world. Battered and baffled, she attains a stature of a poetess who sings the songs of longing and separation. Her last words before death are-

"Imran Saeba? Aakha?"

"Imran, Have you come?" (178)

Conclusion

Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* - challenged and spurned the prolonged silence, 'solitary fetish', 'spiritual hungering' of the early writers; insistently and solemnly looked for sub-situational alternative to the nightmare of their wretched condition and tortured history in self-sacrifice, fostering subduedness, pacifying influence and contemplative inner life - attuned with what Salaman Rushdie necessitates for the writer, "...a genuine need for political fiction, for books that draw new and better maps of reality, and make new languages with which we can understand the world." ; moreover, cognizant to what B. Brecht stated, "In the Future, they won't say the times were dark! /Rather they will ask why their poets were silent?" The novel underlines the lancinating pain and manifestation of dissent distinctive flavor of resistance narrative, to quote B.Harlow, "The resistance narrative is not only a document, it is also an indictment" (98), and this indictment with protestation is well expressed through the mouthpiece of the fictional character- Izhar: "... I feel like making portraits of a seven-years-old battered by the police and hanging them on the walls of the politicians and their galleries. I want to encircle New Delhi with Badami Bagh Cantonment. I want to collect tears of the half mothers and sprinkle them on the faces of Indian journalists. I want to rinse the brains of blinkered Indian elites

with the blood of seventy thousand Kashmiris. I want to gift lice-infested blankets from prison cells to the youth in KFCs, McDonalds, Baristas and Café Coffee Days. I want to put up pictures of a flimsy old father tumbling over the stretcher-laden corpse of his dead young son (in a police chase) around two words – Hey Ram – on Raj Ghat" (177-78).

WORKS CITED

- Bashir, Shahnaz. *The Half Mother*. Noida: Hachette, 2014. Print.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. The University of Minnesota Press: United States. 1996.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. Penguin Classics England, 2001.
- Frantz, Fanon. *Black Skin, White Mask*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. Pluto Press: London, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/ Knowledge: Selected interview & other writings (1972- 1977)*. Ed. Colin Cordon, Trans. Colin &etal. Pantheon Book: New York, 1980.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Vintage Books: New York, 1979.
- Harlow, Barbara. *Resistance Literature*. London: Methuen & co., 1987. Print.
- Joshi, Sandeep. "Withdraw Army from Kashmir: Arundhati Roy." *The Hindu*, 31 Aug 2005, www.Thehindu.com/2005/08/31/stories/2005083112711600.html. Accessed 15 May 2018.
- Kaul, Natasha. "Everything I Cannot Tell You About the Women of Kashmir." *Of Occupation and Resistance*. Ed. Fahad Shah. Westland, 2013. Print.
- Peer, Basharat. *Curfewed Night*. Random House India, 2009.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books: New York, 1994.
- Said, Edward. "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals." *The Public Intellectual*, edited by Helen Small, Blackwell Publishing: USA, 2002, pp. 31.