

An Expedition from Utopia to Pandemonium: A Study of *Curfewed Night* and *The Half Mother*

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Abstract

The article depicts the current position of the people of Kashmir. It is the study of Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night* and Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother*. Both the novels satirize the political and bureaucratic system, India's tyrannical role and the Military oppression in Kashmir. The title of the paper is the expedition from utopia; means paradise to Pandemonium; means hell. Kashmir is a very beautiful place and was a princely state up to 1953 with its own prime minister. It is why Kashmir is generally known as paradise on earth and this paradise has become not hell but the 'capital of hell' due to mass killing, murder mystery, displacement, disappearance and sexual harassment, by military and paramilitary forces. The paper deals with the struggle of Kashmiri people's birth right of self determination and the oppressive nature of Indian government, bureaucrats and army. The purpose of this paper is to provide a new lens to the reader to view the tyrannical history of Kashmir with the portrayal of some real and true incidents which are highlighted by both the writers. Both the books are based on reality which is a good hard work done by the duet on their turns.

Keywords: oppression, displacement, exploitation, frisking, corruption, murder, killing, rape, disappearance, military and paramilitary

1. Introduction

Basharat peer is a Kashmir born journalist, author, script writer and political commentator, born on 1977 in Seer Hamdan village of the south Kashmir's Anantnag district. He has done his schooling in Kashmir. After matriculation he has attended Aligarh Muslim University to study Political Science and journalism at Columbia University. He started his career as a reporter at Rediff and Tehelka based in Delhi, assistant Editor at Foreign Affairs and a fellow at open society Institute New York. He is the author of the novel *Curfewed Night*, an eyewitness account of the Kashmir conflict, won the crossword prize for non-fiction and was chosen among the book of the year by the Economist and The New Yorker. He is the script writer of Vishal Bhardwaj's Bollywood movie *Haider* with a special appearance in the film. Shiraz Sidhvat said about the novel

"...in his remarkable debut about growing up in Kashmir, Basharat Peer mixes a mosaic of memories with reportage and history to present an intimate and gut wrenching account of one of the most tragic conflicts of our time. It is an insider's view on what it was like to grow up in the shadow of an occupying army pitted against a violent separatist movement. (Outlook).

Shahnaz Bashir is a budding writer, assistant professor of media studies at the central university of Kashmir. He is the writer of the Memoir, an account of *A Crackdown in Natipora* and his debut novel *The Half Mother*. Mirza Waheed, author of the collaborator said about the book, "with delicately drawn characters, Shahnaz Bashir tells the heart breaking story of woman's battle for life, dignity and justice" (Mirza).

"A devastating portrayal of a decadent society and the inevitably violent uprising against it... it is ferocious unsparing and brutally honest" (Anita Desai). The duet both *Curfewed Night* and *The Half Mother* are the tragedies which have satirized Kashmir's political, bureaucratic system and military oppression. Kashmir is the history of struggle, oppression, displacement, killing, murder mystery, rape etc. It was an independent state, having its own prime minister until 1953. The Pakistani people known as *kabails* came from Pakistan to Kashmir for illegal occupation but Kashmiri authorities resisted and asked for India's help. India accepted the request and sent their Army for help but India never left and claims that it is India's crown. All the people of Kashmir want independence from those monstrous *Kabails* and now self determination from India.

The illegal occupation and oppressive nature of India gave rise to a conflict between India and Kashmir called *Jung e Azadi* (struggle for freedom) by the people of Kashmir. The Kashmiri young people crossed the border in order to get trained and guns for the struggle of independence against India

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can the patter out their hasty orisons. (Owen, 01)

The Half Mother is the story of a woman, Haleema who is being divorced by her bad-character husband in a very young age after only three months of her marriage. She was living with her father and only Son who was born Six months after her divorce. Kashmir is the very disturbed state of India and army is making bunkers, beating, killing and cursing people throughout the valley. They posted a bunker right in front of the main gate of Mr. Joo, father of Haleema who objected for the post of bunker and argued. This was the only reason Major AmanLalKoshwaha used to hate him. One day while frisking Major Koshwaha asked him whereabouts of militants. Mr. Joo answered in negative and major used abusive language that all Kashmiri sister fuckers are telling lies, ordered his men to take him aside and slapped the young boy Imran, Son of Haleema who was watching the humiliation of his family. Mr. Joo objected and said, it is not because you are supposed to be here. Major forced him to shut up otherwise you will be killed. Mr. Joo told if you are such an in human then kill me and he killed him mercilessly.

"Three bullets were pumped into AbJaan. One in the neck. One in the heart. One in the stomach. The rapid staccato startled the birds in the plum trees. 'Sister fucker!' Kushwaha said after killing AbJaan, the fevered barrel of his rifle still smoking" (Bashir, 49).

This was the first trauma to Haleema. After three months of Mr. Joo's murder, Imran was also kidnapped by the same army officer and did never release or tell his whereabouts. Haleema was searching for her only son and only purpose of her survival throughout her life but all in vain. Haleema was not helped by anybody neither government nor NGO's, only fake sympathies were given by the authorities. She did not lose her hope, was searching for him from place to place, jail to jail throughout the valley, country and life.

Once she saw a boy Rehbar released from a very brutal interrogation center called Papa2. She asked him about his son and showed him his photograph, Rehbar recognized and said I have seen him at the BadamiBagh cantonment and advised Haleema to visit a barbar, Abdussalam from Pampore, who is only allowed to visit inside the camp in order to shave the detainees. Haleema visited the person where she learned that Abdus Salam is not now allowed to visit the place because army did not want to leak the internal situation of the place and she

also learnt that his own son-in-law was killed by Indian troops,

The army killed her husband Showket a year ago ...'Abdus Salam said and paused for a long while. Salam's daughter reclined her back against the pillar and looked away silently, her face now enveloped in gloom. The baby giggled. 'Showket did not even see his son,' Abdus Salam ruffled the boys hair. 'Waseem was born three months after' (Bashir, 97).

Haleema went to nearby Police station to file an FIR against the army Major Mr. Kushwaha who has kidnapped her son Imran. Police did not lodge any FIR against army by giving the only excuse that we are not in the position to lodge FIR against army. We are supposed to be here only for identifying, carrying and delivering dead bodies to their families.

...It has been a long time since we filed an FIR. A long, long time. Actually 'we cannot lodge an FIR against the army.' The constable spoke in a countryside dialect. Our job is to identifying, carrying and delivering dead bodies to their families. That is the job of Police now, 'he said slowly, with a tired smile behind his weighed words. 'Sister, in your case' the only way is to approach the army itself. They take everyone they pick up to their local camps (Bashir, 63).

Haleema approached Army but all in vain. At last with help of different people Haleema managed to meet the chief minister Dr. Aiyesh Mir of J & K State, who did not help Haleema but was very rude towards Haleema and argued that the missing people have crossed the Border will never come back but Haleema said that our beloved ones have been picked up from our own places we, our neighbors are the eye witnesses. Dr. Aiyesh next argument was that we are sailing on the same boat,

I have gone through the same madness myself' he said my wife is in America, my son is in America. My daughters are here and there. My family is scattered. I am here. I keep no trace of my family. I am like you. Actually we are all the same. We can't do anything. I can just pray for you (Bashir,151).

On the top of the day Haleema was dying on her death bed with the same hope that Imran will come. She was dreaming of Imran's presence, his narration of the story how much he was beaten by Indian troops, his struggle and miserable condition and come back. It was her soliloquy and her hope and dies peacefully. The last two words Haleema uttered before dying; "*Imran saeba? Aakha?* Imran. Have you come" (Bashir,178)

In the novel *The Curfewed Night*, Basharat Peer has brought some real incidents of Kashmir to our insight. In 1990 Jagmohan, an Indian bureaucrat was appointed as governor of Jammu and Kashmir. His policy was very unkind and harsh, ordered military and paramilitary forces to oppress the inhabitants of Kashmir so that people will forget the struggle of independence. In 19th of January 1990 people were dragged out of their houses, beaten and hundreds of youth were arrested. But it took

negative consequence the next morning people came out of their houses, protesting, shouting slogans for independence. "Hum kyachahte? 'Azadi' (we want? freedom)" (Peer, 16). A group of protestors also came into the street from Maisuma, who were stopped by the paramilitary forces, "the Indian paramilitary, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), opened fire. More than fifty people were killed. It was the first massacre in the Kashmir Valley. As the news sank in, we all wept..." (Peer, 14). The author has well portrayed the incidents with the use of literary devices. It is in the form of street of consciousness when he recalls his childhood days. He and other villagers were once talking about the mortar guns, its use by Indian forces. A driver Rashid described the situation of a border town Handwara. The whole town was burnt by troops, "they throw gunpowder over the houses and the fire mortars and the entire village was burnt in an hour" (Peer, 20). The author have successfully portrayed the mass destruction and killing. He has not failed to display the disappearance of thousands of youth, who were never seen again, not known whether they are alive or dead.

Between 4000 and 8000 men have disappeared after being arrested by the military, paramilitary, and the police. Newspapers routinely refer to the missing men as 'disappeared persons', and their waiting wives are the 'half widows'. The government has refused to set up a commission... men were killed in custody and cremated in mass graves. (Peer, 131)

Shafi was a detainee, who was escaped from Papa2 interrogation center, "how can I forget it? Not even straw cows would eat the food they threw at us there?" (Peer, 143). In papa2 the detainees were beaten ruthlessly that even innocents will accept that they are outlaws, militants or helpers of militants. They were asked to reveal the fact about militants and their hideouts,

...they beat us with guns, staffs, hand. But that was nothing... were asked to remove all your clothes, even your underwear. They tied to a long wooden ladder and placed it near a ditch filled with kerosene oil and red chilli powder. They raised the ladder like a seesaw and pushed your head into the ditch. It would go on for an hour... they burnt your arms and legs with cigarette butts or kerosene stoves used for welding. They burn your skin till you speak... but the worst was when they inserted wire into my penis and gave electric shocks. They did it with most boys... (Peer, 143)

These monstrous troops didn't even spare the women. They are also being oppressed, snatched their children, husbands and loving ones, even sexually harassed and killed. During the crackdown males were asked to collect in one place only, females were asked stay at their places. They were sexually harassed and raped by those monsters at their houses and the authorities and politicians didn't care about. Kunanposhpora is a village of district Kupwara. The males were asked to come out of their houses and collected at a

single place and the females were raped. It was a mass rape " ... Indian army raped more than twenty women..." (Peer, 156).

In May 1990, Ab. Rashid Sheikh of Chawalgam village got married to Mubeena and after two or three hours of their marriage, they were coming back from Mubeena's place to Chawalgam. On the way they were stopped by the paramilitary forces that were recently attacked by the militants. They were frisked and asked whereabouts and purpose of their travelling. The forces start harassing them, the bride "had been raped by a group of Indian Paramilitary forces" (Peer, 150). Mubeena and others were protesting and begging mercy from those murderous and cruel people. But they didn't listen a single word, did their inhuman job honestly. Her newly wedded husband wanted to escape her but could not help and after she was ruined, her husband wanted to encourage her but could not because the murderous BSF men circled the bus, "poured bullets into the bus. Rashid threw off his turban and ducked under his seat like all the others". (Peer, 153)

In conclusion both the novels are relevant to Kashmir's current state of affairs, its struggle for freedom and self determination. Both the novelists have highlighted the plightful condition of people of Kashmir, the monstrous military oppression, mass killing, torture, sexual harassment, struggle, political and bureaucratic corruption etc. It is the depiction twenty five years history of Kashmir, struggle for freedom from the military captivity. Both India and Pakistan are playing with the sentiments of people. Pakistan is sympathetic towards Kashmir for its personal gain and India is playing a dirty politics in order to keep the land of Kashmir not Kashmiri people. If India would have any sympathy for Kashmiri people, they would have never killed them or harassed them so mercilessly. India is using every key to keep Kashmir as a part of India; they are giving some fake sympathetic speeches and press conferences. They are also using tyrannical approach toward common masses in order to suppress them.

Jiska law hai uska order. Made on order law and order. India Pakistan ne milkar khaila humse border border. Ab na hume chode Hindustan, ab na hume chode Pakistan. Are koi humse be tou pocho, hum kya chahte? Azadi. (Haider movie).

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