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THE SUFFERINGS AND STRUGGLE OF A MOTHER (HALEEMA) FOR HER DISAPPEARED
SON (IMRAN)- IN SHAHNAZ BASHIR'S *HALF MOTHER*

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the current situation of the people of Kashmir. It is the study of Shahnaz Bashir's- *The Half Mother*. 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 Sufferings and Struggle of a Mother (Haleema) for her Disappeared Son (Imran) - In Shahnaz Bashir's- Half Mother*. 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 and suffering especially of mothers whose sons have been picked up by Indian forces and never released. 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 the writer.

Keywords: Oppression, Exploitation, Crackdown, Frisking, Corruption, Murder, Killing, Rape, Disappearance, Military, Paramilitary.

It is an irony of history that by a combination of fortuitous circumstances a tiny nation of Kashmir has been placed in a position of great importance, where it can be instrumental in making and marring the future of so many. - Prem Nath Bazaz.

In 1947 Jammu and Kashmir was among the largest of 562 so called princely states in the Indian subcontinent. The ruling family of Jammu and Kashmir was ethnic Dogras, upper-caste Hindus from Jammu region. The first political party of Jammu and Kashmir was All- Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, founded in Oct. 1932. Its principal leaders were Sheikh Abdullah from the valley and Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas from the Jammu region. At the party's annual convention in 1939, its name has been changed to All - Jammu and Kashmir Notional Conference. Two independent domains "India and Pakistan" were born on 14-15 Aug. 1947. The princely states were the peculiar issue in the decolonization process. The choice was straightforward for all princely states- except Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir was territorially contiguous to both India and Pakistan. In early Sep. army groups from Pakistan began infiltrating J&K from west Punjab, looting and attacking Hindu and Sikh minorities. After taking the town of Muzaffarabad, the raiders headed straight for the heart of the valley. Meeting almost no resistance from the Maharaja's crumbling forces as they advanced into the

northern part of the valley, they rapidly captured the town of Baramulla, just 20 miles northwest of Srinagar. On 24 Oct. the Maharaja administration sent an urgent request to New Delhi for military assistance. Accordingly the Maharaja signed the formal "Instrument of Accession" to India. The following day 27th Oct. Mountbatten replied to the Maharaja accepting the accession, but noted that once the law and order has been restored and the "invaders" expelled the accession should be ratified by "a reference to the people".

On 2 Nov. 1947 Nehru declared his government's "pledge," given "not only to the people of Kashmir but to the world," to "hold a referendum under international auspices such as the United Nations" to determine whether the people of J&K ultimately preferred India or Pakistan. Nehru reiterated this commitment numerous times over the next few years at press conferences, public meetings and international forums. In Aug. 1952, he told India's parliament that he wanted "no forced unions" and that if the people of J&K decided "to part company with us, they can go their way and we shall go our way".

Now India claims Kashmir an Integral part of it, "the crown of India."

Shahnaz Bashir's book *The Half Mother* is a heart breaking narrative, centering on Haleema. *The Half Mother* is 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 book details, how in the 1990s conflict and war in Kashmir, providential and innocent families crumpled, how their life became a hell, how young boys were arrested and disappeared, how mothers and wives were not allowed to meet their sons and husbands in jail, and how they were molested, raped and tormented. How families went from pillar to post in search of their relatives but walked back with 'big No', how every politician consoled them, how others even don't listen to them and how mothers, like Haleema, went to look for their sons till their last breath.

Shahnaz Bashir, in *The Half Mother*, debates a mother's suffering, struggle and distressed state after her only son Imran is picked up by the troops. Haleema, the half mother like other myriad mothers who don't know whether their sons are dead or alive, is tormented by not knowing whether Imran is dead or alive. She is torn apart by her own lonely existence and develops a habit of talking to herself, and suffers in insomnia, sleeplessness or wakefulness.

'Dear collard greens, apologies, for you shall be cooked without salt once again'.... 'Where have you disappeared? Where do I look for you now?' She now called out to the often misplaced wooden ladle.

'Here you are! Where have you been? I have been looking for you everywhere' she said. (*The Half Mother*, 04)

Shahnaz Bashir, so evocatively and profoundly, tells the tale of one woman's battle for life, dignity and justice that tears roll down the eyes and one does not help but reads the story irrespective of other considerations and engagements till the last page. As an insider, the author mirrors the story of unfortunate Haleema. Brought up with great love and affection, she is married off to a medical assistant but is soon divorced, when she found that her husband has an affair with nurse. She then begins a new life at her father's house. Some months later, she came to know that she is pregnant and after nine months gives birth to a son, Imran. AbJaan, whose real name is Ghulam Rasool Joo, and she take a good care of Imran. He grows up as a ray of hope for them, particularly for Haleema.

One evening, AbJaan returns home with a newspaper, "Valley Times" that reports about a gun battle in Srinagar. *'The war has begun, AbJaan said with tired eyes, quietly, almost to himself' (The Half Mother, 23)*. He doesn't know that the war has started to ruin them: their life, peace, and everything.

One fresh snowy morning, sometime later, AbJaan leaves to sweep the snow away from the walkway. After clearing half the snow from the path, Imran comes to help him. Picking up shovel full of snow to open the gate, Imran and AbJaan happen to see a couple of troops. *'Give us your shovel' AbJaan is told (The Half Mother, 26)*. Outside, on the road, there are a dozen of army men busy making a bunker. AbJaan doesn't like this and thunders at them: *'the bunkers will be a nuisance – you will always be intruding into our homes... please take the bunker a little away from here' (The Half Mother, 27)*. The soldier turns and pushes him back with the butt of his rifle. AbJaan falls down. Imran runs to help him stand up.

From here the life of the Joo family starts to fall apart and the life in Kashmir is shown nothing better than hell. Curfews are imposed, Natipora, symbolizing all Kashmir, suffers, Shafiq's son Shaheen Bhat crosses

over to Pakistan for arms training, symbolizing the youth who went to Pakistan for arms training against Indian occupation, her family is beaten, AbJaan, symbolizing the old aged people, is thrashed and killed, Haleem's son Imran, symbolizing the youth who have been picked up by forces but never came back, arrested and Haleema's journey for her son who is never released, begins.

Haleema protagonist of the novel half mother sells her everything- cattle, jewellery utensils of her kitchen and at last her garden only for one reason that is Imran.

"Haleema sold her cattle to Shafiq for ten thousand rupees as well as her jewellery and more expensive copper utensils. The joo house wore an empty look now." (Half Mother -69)

The Half Mother, spread over 17 chapter and Random Notes and set in the author's home town- Natipora, depicts the 1990s upheaval and anger against the outsiders (Indian army). As Shahnaz writes, people –*"men, women, children and young – took to streets and roads in an endless stream of procession. Wearing green headbands, held banners, waved flags, they shouted slogans of freedom over and over: 'Azaadi'" (The Half Mother, 32).* And it continues for months together. The author goes on to say about curfew days, peoples' hell like life during these days, canings, beatings and terror in the minds of the people.

In chapter 6 - the first attack- of the novel, the tempest in real sense blows and takes away the life of Joo family's head member and sole bread earner:

'Two troops held Haleema and Imran back. Haleema screamed for help. 'kunikahnchhuna' 'Anybody? Help! Please don't kill him! Please!' ... Three bullets were pumped into AbJaan. one in the neck, one in the heart, one in the stomach...' (The Half Mother, 49)

And the death of AbJaan breaks the back of Haleema. People in the vicinity tried to come for help but army Major fired some warning shots in the air and threatened them all there to stay back:

'No one will come here. Whoever does shall meet the same fate' (The Half Mother, 49).

How everyone in the neighborhood aspired to come forward for help and with what enthusiasm the funeral procession was led by the people- young, old, children and women- is heart piercing. Haleema doesn't believe her eyes that her father is dead and wails:

'I don't believe this, my father isn't dead! Isn't this a lie, my father? Your death has battered me, my father!' (The Half Mother, 52)

The Raid, chapter 7 of the novel, begins like the World War Second in the life of Haleema and annihilates all her hopes and expectations. Soldiers besiege Haleema's house and demand Imran, her son. They break in the house, catch him and take him along. Haleema pleads for his release:

'You killed my father! Leave me someone to live with! How could you be so cruel?' ... What is his crime? ...He is a small child! Don't you see? ... I beg you, he is innocent! Anybody, please help, for God's sake! (The Half Mother, 56-7)

As the trooper bundles Imran into the Gypsy, Haleema runs and kneels in front of the vehicle, cries and begs for Imran's release but she is dragged aside and the army Gypsy leaves. Haleema chases the Gypsy until it disappears. In no while, all the neighborhood people assemble, they try to calm and console her but she yells: *'I am a perforated soul, my son' (The Half Mother, 57).*

Haleema now alone visits a local imam and pleads him for help. With Imam and Shafiq, 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 now confined 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 pickup to their local camps (The Half Mother, 63)".

From this part of the novel, Haleema battles for answers and– narrating her brief and full version– visits every police station, every military cum torture camp, politicians for help, Radio Kashmir to give her news, news agencies, Abdul Salaam- the barber's home, morgues, and jails for any sign of Imran. Every times, she returns

home disappointed except one possible hope Izhar, the BBC journalist. Izhar helps her escort press enclave to publish the news regarding her missing son in the Urdu newspaper *WaadikiAwaaz*. Though it gives her a little bit hope and relief, yet the truth about Imran remains lost in the shadow of war. 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” (*The Half Mother*, 151).

Now disappointed and hopeless, she approaches the court and in the summer of 1999, Justice Aadil Khan concludes the long inquiry and summons the army in the court of law. Haleema is thrilled; for it is the day she thinks she will finally know what happened to Imran after he was picked up. But to her dismay, she hears:

‘The least I can tell you is this: Major AmanLalKushwaha was killed long ago in an attack on the border’. (*The Half Mother*, 154)

This saddens her as Kushwaha was her only hope for Imran’s whereabouts. Though the news stuns her, yet she goes on to believe Imran is living:

‘I have to keep hoping... I cannot be defeated like this. I cannot lose him like this... I have to go home and keep waiting. Yes. That is the only this I have to do.’ (*The Half Mother*, 154)

Turning psycho in memory of her son, she waits and waits and waits:

‘In my long solitary walks,
Sometimes
I have imagined you as
someone,
distant to me,
somewhere,
walking in the middle of a lonely road,
then turning around
only to become
someone else.
Your face blurs,
tiring my eyes.
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... (*The Half Mother*, 155,6)

This reflects the picture of every mother who lost her son in the on-going frenzy of war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Now, Haleema dreams her son walking back home and asks him where he had been. His reply she imagines is:

‘Don’t ask where I have been’ (*The Half Mother*, 157)

Frustrated and tired after a long waiting, Haleema dies uttering:

‘Imran saeba?Aakha?’

‘Imran, Have you come?’ (*The Half Mother*, 178)

Reading Shahnaz Bashir improves your knowledge about the sufferings people endured in Kashmir. Going through the pages of the novel makes you wonder about the tyrannies inflicted on old, young, women and children alike and at the same time, makes you aware about the defunct, corrupt and handicapped political, and defense set up there.

In conclusion the novel presents Kashmir's current state of affairs, its struggle for freedom and self-determination. the novelist have highlighted the pitiful condition of the people of Kashmir, the monstrous military oppression, mass killing, torture, disappearance, arrests, sexual harassment, struggle, political and bureaucratic corruption etc. It is the depiction of twenty five years of the 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. The present study depicts the worst condition of those hundreds and thousands of women whose relatives have been disappeared during the turmoil. But the irony of fate is that no organization from the world came forward for their help. It is not only the story of Haleema whose son, the only ray of hope, have been picked up by Indian forces but the story of hundreds and thousands of such mothers, the story of wives who lost their husbands, the story sister who lost their brothers, the story of fathers who lost their son and the story of those orphans who lost their fathers. Haleema represents the whole society of Kashmir.

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