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1. The Men and Women Relationships in against all Odds

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Abstract

Human relationship is a complex phenomenon that one cannot fathom the depth of human psychology. Many psychological theories are failed to analyze the complexity of human relationships in some extent. Literature is a source to examine and hypothesize the human relationships in a better way. Kishor Shantabai Kale's autobiography 'Against All Odds' unearths the complexity of human relationships of *Kolhati* men and women. The present paper throws light up on the plight and exploitation of *Kolhati* women's lives. The autobiography exposes the harsh reality of *Tamasa* dancers.

Key words:- Human relationship, Kolhati Men and Women, Dalit, Subaltern, Feminism, Autobiography

Introduction

Literature reflects the relationships of men and men, men and women, and women and women. The complex nature of human relationship is so enigmatic that one can baffle a bit. It is literature that helps us to understand the complex nature of human in between the lines. Many psychological theories are failed to analyze the complexity of human relationships in some extent.

The present paper tries to evaluate the same complexity of human relationships particularly the men and women in light of Dr Kishor Shantabai Kale's personal narrative *Kolhatyache Por* (Against All Odds). **Dr. Kishor Shantabai Kale** was a physician, and social activist. The life narrative exposes the unseen and unheard relationships of *Kolhati* women and men. The relationships of *Kolhati* women and men are beyond the cognizance of psychological theories. The autobiography reveals evil nature of men towards women. Kale's life narrative engrosses the reader to rethink and to redefine the relationships of human.

Kale's autobiography *Kolhatyache Por* is translated as 'Against All Odds' by Sandhya Pandey from Marathi into English. It is a life narrative of an illegitimate son of tamasha dancer of *Kolhati* community. As Sandhya Pandey says



In 1994, *Kolhatyache Por*, the autobiography of an unknown young man brought just such a person to light. It is the story of an illegitimate son of a tamasha dancer from the Kolhati community, set against the harsh and apparently hopeless life of its women.

(v)

Kishore Kale's life provides new insight to see the changing nature of human relationships in relation to *Kolhati* women. Generally, the woman in the family plays a role of mother, sister, daughter and wife. And she has been treated accordingly with love, protection, and sometime hatred. In the normal men and women relationship, the women are treated with dignity and respect. The chastity of a woman is prime important in any normal society. But in case of *Kolhati* woman, the same kind of norm has been violated by the family in spite of the woman is a source of the family. It is quite obvious to realize the nature of men and women relationship in *Kolhati* community. The women of the family mainly sisters and daughters are used as commodities. Despite the fact, the women of the family have been protected at any cost. It is ironic to comprehend the deeds of *Kolhati* men who sell the daughters and sisters for commercial purpose. The women's body is at the centre for the family as well as the upper-caste men. Here the attitudes of men towards the *Kolhati* women in and out of the society are remarkably inhuman.

The relationships of the *Kolhati* men to their women have to be accounted as wrecked, selfish, and callous mentality of the men. The women, from childhood to young age, have been designed to fit for the business of dancing and singing. They are converted to objects of sex for the upper-caste men. Hence the women are exploited at multiple levels by the head of the family and the upper-caste masters. The *Kolhati* women are the victims of rigid patriarchy. Another aspect of the men's conduct towards women especially the wives of the family is unintelligible that they are not allow to do the same business as it is forced to the sisters and daughters. It is confusing to know that why the *Kolhati* men treated wives differently. It makes clear that the relationship of *Kolhati* men towards the women is brutal. They are not considered the women as human but treated them as pet animals.

On the contrary, the relationship of women to men is more human, emotional and sensitive to the family for taking economic responsibility. The mentality of the *Kolhati* women has been designed to serve the family by all means. The women have been caught in a net as sex objects by their own family members. In the given state, the women have to go through emotional trauma, psychological and physical harassment by the family and the upper-caste masters of the society. The whole life of the *Kolhati* women has been premeditated as the child life is spent in learning dancing and singing instead of school education; whenever they reach



the puberty; they have been sold for the physical pleasure to upper-caste men. After the pregnancy, they have been thrown out by the owners. Again they have to turn towards tamasha. This circle does not stop till the woman's beauty faded away. Hence it is a complexity of human relationships that one cannot tress the degree of exploitation of the *Kolhati* women at numerous levels. Even feminists are not able to examine the relationship of men towards women. "Feminists are fighting uncompromisingly against the many kinds of oppression that women face in a patriarchal family setup, and because of male egoism outside it. They are fighting against the many atrocities against women: killing, dowry deaths, physical and psychological violence against women, and other problems, as also the burden of almost single-handedly shouldering responsibilities like housework, cooking and raising children. However, it appears that there is no awareness in these movements about caste and class." –commented by Challapalli Rani - (704-705)

So far as the relationship of upper-caste men towards *Kolhati* women is concerned, the upper-caste men consider the *Kolhati* women as objects to be used. The upper-caste men enjoy the physical beauty of the women in their own way. At the same time, the relationship of the women towards the masters is pure because they have to be loyal to the masters. It is the convention that the *Kolhati* women have to serve the masters as god and do everything as loyal wives in order to please the masters. It shows that the men and women relationship is male dominated where the women have little space to say. Besides, the *Kolhati* women are not permitted to get married by their family members. The writer comments- 'The daughters of the community lead a far harsher life. They are sold for their virginity at puberty, and are usually abandoned when they get pregnant. This is why most Kolhati children bear their mother's name, a fact that proclaims their illegitimacy and causes most of them to drop out of school rather than their classmates' derision' (ix). It draws attention to various issues in regards with men and women relationship. The *Kolhati* women seem to fight against poverty, identity, marginalization of patriarchy, viciousness within family and outside on account of gender. Spivak comments about the treatment of men towards women as-

It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (285).

Kale's autobiography represents the multifaceted relation of men and women. There are many lives that have been suffered on account of caste, class, and gender. The men of the community treat women as source of earnings. The very first encounter in the text is to



comprehend the relation of a man and a woman. Lakshmi, a married woman, runs from home with a daughter and son due to unbearable torture by the husband and mother-in-law. Taking advantage of the situation, Krushna Kolhati grabs the opportunity to allure Lakshmi to be the second wife. Here the woman is a source of income for the man whereas the woman feels the safety with the man. But Krushna Kolhati deceives Lakshmi in long run. Lakshmi wants her daughter to get married but Krushna does not permit it. Finally, the lives of the daughter Tarabai and the son Gagaram turn to the occupation singing and dancing. Consequently, Tarabai becomes a good dancer and starts performing in Tamasha. As Kale marks-

The Kolhati community forces its women to dance to attract male attention. Young, teenage virgins are given to men in a ceremony called 'chirautarna' with all the trappings of a wedding, but none of its sanctity. The man pays a prefixed price for her virginity. (4-5)

During the course of time, Tarabai travels from place to place to perform in Tamasa and becomes famous. Consequently, she has been asked as a keepwoman for a Patil. Krushna Kolhati sells her to Patil. It shows that the both the men treated the woman as a commodity. In case of other women like Shanta, Shalan, Susheela, Rambha, and Baby of the narrative have the same fate as Tarabai. Shanta, being a beautiful one, becomes the victim of her father's unlawful desire. Actually, Shanta's marriage is already fixed but the cunning father exchanges bride instead of Shanta, Shalan is married. Kondiba knows that Shalan is dark, plain one and would not attract men. On the contrary, Shanta would earn him more money. This is ruthless act of the father towards his daughter for the sake of earning; he throws the daughter in endless exploitation. It gives a think of the pitiful relation of the man to the woman. One has to think gravely about nature of human relationship. Shanta is thrown into physical and emotional torture. She has been denied a respective life. Kale comments-

But Shanta was not destined to enjoy the simple, respectable joys of matrimony. Kondiba pulled her out of school when she passed seventh class and sent her out off to learn dancing. Shanta objected; she begged, she wept. (9)

The head of the family designs the fate of Shanta to perform in tamasha. Basically, Shanta is a singer but according to the circumstance she is forced to perform dance as well. After performing dance at different places, she has to lure audience as much as she can so that the family can earn money. It is a laboured task to perform tamasha at various places, so Kondiba is in search of a rich party to contract his daughters for certain period of time for handsome amount. And the opportunity comes his way when Jagtap (MLA) asks him about Shanta as a keep. The author narrates:

'Name your price, Kondiba, and let your daughter live with me,' he said.

'I will not let her see anybody except you and she will not dance any more, but Shanta will live in my house. You can visit her whenever you wish,' replied Kondiba. (14-15)

But Kondiba is a very cunning fellow; he does not allow her daughter to live with the man forever. Both the men are concerned about their business but do not care about the woman. The men treat the woman as a dumb cow. The narrator exposes the relationship of men and women in the community that women as commodities. The *Kolhati* women have been sold again and again. It is a wretched lot of the *Kolhati* women. Shanta is abandoned by the master after the pregnancy. But she has to give birth to an illegitimate child. Again, she has to go back to business as a dancer. Yet again, she is tied up to another master. This vicious circle never stops in the lives of *Kolhati* women. The plight of Santa is excruciating that she is tried with different upper-caste men. She bears many children from them. The men, who come in her life, just care for her physical beauty and deny all lawful right to her and the children. The upper-caste men treat her as an object of sex. This is merciless act of the men towards the *Kolhati* woman. In case of Susheela, Rambha, and Baby, they have been sold and used by the family members and the upper-caste men. The *Kolhati* women toil their whole lives for their family in return they get nothing but physical and mental torture. They are also responsible for many illegitimate children. They are denied respect, dignity, identity, and married life.

Taking into consideration the relationship of *Kolhati* women towards men, the relation of the women is more pure, human, loyal and caretaking. They take the whole economic responsibility of the family in order to ruin their lives. For instance, Tarabai can live her life with the master happily but taking into consideration the poverty of the brother, she lives the place of the master. From young age to the old one, she serves the family. In many cases, they have the chance to get settle in their lives and live luxurious life but deny on account of family concern. The author depicts:

'Don't go on like this, Sahukar,' they said to him. 'We have our problems, too. Dancers like us are not here out of choice, but from necessity. We would much rather have husbands and our own homes to live in. But, this is only way our fathers and brothers and their families can survive. Men like you come to us and persuade us with your charming talk and money to give up dancing, but after a while you tire of us, and then we are left to get along as best as we can. Like a flower that has lost its fragrance, we are thrown out. We lost everything- our youth, our families and our dreams. Where are we supposed to go then? Society does not look kindly on poor, old dancers, Sahukar, and there is nowhere to go but the streets. (30-31)

Moreover, the relation of the *Kolhati* women towards the upper-caste masters is concerned, the women are always faithful, devoted and fully committed to serve the masters in all possible ways as legal wives. Taking case of Shanta in point, she has given up all her relations with the family and son for the sake of the master. Eventhough, she has been tortured by the master.

In a nutshell, the relationship of men and women in the *Kolhati* community has to examine in different parameters. First and foremost, the relation of *Kolhati* men towards their women is beyond cognizance. The *Kolhati* men use the women as property and upper caste men as the object of sex. In the men and women relationship, the women are always at receiving end. The women are the dupe of patriarchy. The women in general and *Kolhati* women in particular are oppressed, marginalized and subaltern. The *Kolhati* women are subjugated at many levels i.e. poverty, gender, Dalit, and subaltern among subaltern.

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4. Curfewed Night: A Lost Paradise

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Abstract

Kashmir is the land of beauty and natural resources, it is known as the heaven on the earth, but it has been converted into hell by the politicians, Pakistani and Indian armed forces as well as the militants. Now, it is the most dangerous place to live in for the common masses of Kashmir. In the period of 1990s, there were many evil changes and incidents occurred, the many Kashmiri Pandits were killed by the militants considering informers of Indian intelligence services as well as the many Kashmiri youth were converted into militants by Pakistani armed forces. Due to these circumstances, Indian armed forces were very harsh to Kashmiri Muslims killing many pro-Indian Muslims. Once Kashmir was a paradise but converted into hell by the politicians, armed forces, and militants activities. 'Curfewed Night' is a realistic account of the protagonist's life journey in general and the plight of common masses of Kashmir in particular.

Introduction

Basharat Peer's 'Curfewed Night' unfolds the plight, pathos, and suffering of Kashmiri people. Basharat Peer is a journalist turns into a writer as his wish to represent unnoticed, unknown life of Kashmir people as a voice of protest against conflict, violence, and armed insurgency of Pakistani and Indian Army as well as militants. 'Curfewed Night' is a realistic account of the narrator's life experiences that unearths many incidents, episodes and tragic events of exploitation of the Kashmiri common masses. The title of the novel 'Curfewed Night' is taken from one of the poems of Agha Shahid Ali. The poem, 'I see Kashmir from New Delhi at Night' implies agony, exploitation, suppression, torture, rapes, curfews, mass killing of Pandits and Muslims. The author feels that the poem reveals the horror and harsh reality of Kashmir which is unheard, untold, and forgotten by the world. The title is aptly reflected the life of Kashmir people that is monitored by armed forces and militants. Peer's narrative gives glimpses of brutalities, atrocities, grief, misery and uncertainty of the innocent masses of Kashmir. The narrative is an attempt to fetch the attention of the world towards the realistic problems of Kashmir people.

To look into the history of Kashmir Peer accounted the historical facts in order to understand the impact of history in the present-day situation of Kashmir. Kashmir had lost its independence in 1947 when Yaqub Chak Chak had accepted the Mughal sovereignty. Afterward Kashmir was ruled by Afghans, Sikhs, British, and the last Hindu king Maharaj Gulab Singh in 1947, after the partition, Gulab Singh took help from Indian Government for armed support to defend the Pakistani armed forces. Since then, the Jammu and Kashmir was a political zone resulting into conflict and war between India and Pakistan. The peace and political stability of the states were ripped from the history of Kashmir forever. The conflict among the armed forces, politicians, and militants has been going on since 1947 to the present-day. Consequences of the conflict are so harsh on the common people that they go through torture, killings, imprisonment, and unending curfews. Owing to the ubiquitous suffering and oppression, the most Kashmiri Muslims detached from India and felt alienated, in the process they were against Indian rule and developed a sense of independence to fight and revolt against India as Peer states:

We did not relate to the symbols of Indian nationalism- the flag, the national anthem, the cricket team. We followed every cricket match India and Pakistan played but we never cheered for the Indian team. If India played Pakistan, we supported Pakistan, if India played the West Indies, we supported the West Indies, if India played England, we supported England (11)

One can understand the situation and mentality of Kashmir people that they were fascinated to freedom movement. The impact of violence, atrocities, mass killings, and tumultuous situation of the valley was so callous that the young generation of Kashmir joined the freedom movement. Taking advantage of the situation, Pakistan forces showed sympathy to these youths to lure them to join militant organizations and spread terrorism in the valley. Pakistan Army succeeded to attract the attention of young minds to join militant organizations by giving them training and ammunition to fight against India in the name of freedom movement. The psyche of the young youths was affected by the separatist movement and joined the militant organization leaving their family in peril. As Peer states:

By the summer of 1990, thousands of young Kashmiri men crossed the Line of Control for arms training in the Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir. When they returned as militants, they were heroes. Like almost every teenager, I wanted to join them. Fighting and dying for freedom was much desired, like the first kiss on adolescent lips (24).

The separatist ideology had a great impact throughout the states during 1990s. Even the narrator wanted to join the militant organization but his family conspired and prevented him against his wish. During the same period, Indian government deployed military, paramilitary,

and police force in great number to maintain the law and order in the state. The militants attacked on army posts and police stations. In response these attacks, Indian forces were ruthless to subdue the revolt by arresting, killings, and torturing many people.

The narrator gives the account of the victims of militant organization. Tariq, the protagonist's cousin, had a graduate degree. His father wanted him to be a police officer but Tariq crossed the border for arms training in Muzaffarabad. During the course of time, his family was interrogated and tortured by the soldiers seeking information about his hideout. When he came back, he was killed in a raid. Such was the life of militants, they risked their lives as well as their families. Besides, the teenagers had come under the influence of pan-Islamic militant group to be suicide bombers. Afaq, a teenager, wished to be a doctor. He was made a suicide bomber. He blew himself up into the military compound. The youngsters like Afaq were indoctrinated by the pan-Islamic group in the name of Jihad and martyrdom.

The narrator exposes the plight of village life where the common masses suffered in the hands of militants and Indian armed forces. The conflict between the militants and Indian armed forces caused a grave effect on the lives of the common people that they were always under threat of their lives and torture. The words like killing, disappearance, cross firing, search operation, crackdown, and curfew are very familiar to them. The lives of common people were hideous to undergo continuous checkpoints, interrogation, and humiliation in their day today life. Identity cards were more important in their life than the any other thing. They suffered mentally, physically, and emotionally owing to atrocities by not only Indian armed forces but also militants. The militant made their life hellish. Every life in Kashmir was affected by the situation and everyone has a tragic tale of loss and violence. Crackdowns and disappearance were the harsh realities of Kashmir. During the process of crackdown, all the villagers were asked to assemble at certain place to identify the militants and their supporters. After the identification, the men were taken to interrogation by the army. The interrogation was so inhuman that the arrested men lost their normal life due to electric shock to their private parts. Many people disappeared from Kashmir; either they would have been taken away by the armed forces or killed in fake encounters. Almost every family of Kashmir had a tragic tale of missing members of their family. Peer states:

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 'half widows'. . . Many Kashmiris believe the "disappeared" men were killed in custody and cremated in mass graves.

Wives of many such men have given up hope and tried to move on. Others are obsessively fighting for justice, hoping their loved ones will return. (131).

The common people were caught in unending circle of misery and suffering at the hands of the militant and Indian armed forces. The militants used the local people to execute their planning and at the same time to ensure their safety. On the other hand, the Indian armed forces were very harsh to them for getting the information about hideout of the militants. In the given circumstance, the common people had to show their loyalty and faith to the militants as well as the armed forces. Their lives were caught in vicious circle between the militants and armed forces. The militants who asserted to free the common people from the exploitation and oppression of Indian security forces ironically they seemed to be responsible for the plight and misery of the common people. The narrator gives the account of the incident that the militant organization planned to attack on Indian army convoy at nearby village. The villagers pleaded to Mohiuddin, who was the son of that village, and tried to convince him the consequences of the attack. But Mohiuddin did not listen to them and attacked on the army convoy. The result of the attack as Peer describes:

Tonga and his cohorts were planning to attack a convoy of Indian troops supposed to pass by our village. The villagers were trying to persuade them against it. They were addressing Tonga by his real name. 'Mohiuddin sahib, you are our son, you are from our village. You have to stop this attack.' 'Mohiuddin sahib, you know what the soldiers do after an attack. Do you want your own village brunt? Have you forgotten we have young daughter? Do you want soldiers to barge into our home? Have the fear of God, this is your own village!' (42).

Peer as a writer accounted many pathetic lives that underwent physical, mental, and psychological trauma. A large number of people lived in war zone and endured terror and threat of life owing to constant conflict affected their psyche in such extent that they suffered from the psychological disorder. The protagonist's father fortunately escaped from the land mine blast, the incident created impact on his mind that he never went to the outskirts after that. The narrator's uncle suffered from a mental disorder after he escaped from militant shooting as Peer accounts "Four years had passed since the militants had come for him. After dinner he wanted water for the anti-depression drugs he took" (78). Peer narrates heart-rending sorties of missing young ones. Noora was a seventy-year-old woman whose son was taken away by the BSF when he went out to play cricket at a nearby ground. Since then he was missing. Noora visited every army camp, police station and politicians for searching her son but no use. It seems to the common problem in Kashmir that the young boys were missing in great numbers and no one cares for



especially Indian government, police, and politicians. In another incident, Perveen's son who was sixteen years of age was taken away from home during a raid and never came back. Perveen did what she could to find out her son by visiting many places, offices, and army camps. At last, she managed to register a complaint against the military after great efforts. As a result, she was offered one-lack rupees as compensation but she rejected and did not want to sell his son. Peer very graphically narrates the woe of a mother who observed that her sons were being used by the army as human bombers to kill the militants. Shameena's sons, Shafi and Bilal, were taken by army. She somehow reached the place where the encounter between militant and army was taken place. She saw her son was handed over an explosive mine and forced him to enter the building where the militant were hiding. She ran fast towards her son, held him tight, and not allowed the army men to send him into the building. But she could not save her another son Shafi who was forcibly sent into the building with an explosive mine and he blown himself up. It is terrific incident that a mother watched her sons being used as human bombers. Peer states:

In the courtyard of the building next to it, she saw the arrested boys. 'I saw Bilal from a distance but Shafi was missing,'... 'I ran towards Bilal, grabbed him by an arm and began walking away with him.' Bilal hugged her and said that the soldiers had sent Shafi inside the militants' house with a mine in his hands... 'I lunged ahead and threw myself on Bilal.' She took the mine from her son's hands and held him in her arms. Three soldiers and an officer circled them, asking her to leave her son... 'I held onto the mine and asked the officer to blow me up.' He remains silent...to let us go (169).

The same incident ruined the life of Bilal who suffered psychologically after the death of his brother. He was hunted by the memories of his brother as the narrator pens:

A wail rose from the other corner of the verandah. Her thirteen year old son was crying. She hugged and patted him and consoled him by saying I was here to help with Bilal's job. Then she lit the hookah and gave it to him, as if it was a feeder. He puffed violently and stared at me. Shameema told me he was psychologically disturbed. He had been in the same school as Shafi and would run from his classroom to cry outside the house where Shafi was killed. His condition had worsened and he refused to go to school... But every time Shafi is mentioned, he is agitated. Which mother would pass a hookah to her son? But I have to, it calms him down. (170)

Peer throws light upon the woman lives of Kashmir as victims of atrocities by security forces and the militants. The women were most vulnerable victims of violence. They were raped, tortured, killed by the militants and Indian forces. Raping the women was an easiest instrument used by the militants and army to suppress the most of the population of Kashmir. Rape was



brotherhood between Kashmir Pandits and Muslims. The narrator felt the agony of Kashmir Pandits that were disappeared from their homeland owing to the constant conflict between militants and the army. The narrative throws light upon the consequences of terrorist attack on India, the most of Muslims particularly students all over Indian were faced humiliation and hatred because of Kashmiri Muslims. The most of the Kashmiri students had to go out from the state for their security concerned and further study. The narrative discloses the internal conflict of the common people and the policies of both the nations India and Pakistan towards the common masses of Kashmir. It gives voice to the voiceless section of Kashmir society that was suppressed a decade ago. It is also the wakening call of Kashmir people especially the young generations to understand the existing political and social realities of the state so that they can shape their better future. One has to understand the existing reality of Kashmir where the common people have to face unending miseries, torture, and curfews. Taking into account the reality, one can say that the government should launch many projects such as modern education with free of cost, medical and health facility, as well as the security to their lives. The young generation of Kashmir should understand the existing political situation of the state and educate themselves for developing rational mindset to secure their future, family, state, and at last their nation.

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8. The Half Mother: The Plight of a Mother

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The greatest sufferings
bring the greatest hopes,
the greatest miseries
greatest patience,
and greatest uncertainties
lead to the greatest quests...(3).

Abstract

Lives of Kashmir people presented in literature are an enigma to the world. Literature of Kashmir gives insight to the hollowing world of Kashmiri masses. A decade of 1990s was hellish in the history of Kashmir. Most of the literary works like novels, poetry, and short stories present the impact of brutality of war, conflict, torture, insurgency, unending curfews, crackdowns, search operations, and disappearances of young ones. The common people of Kashmir are the victims of ceaseless war and conflict among Indian army, Pakistan army, and militants. Once Kashmir was known as a paradise but it is converted into hell by the politicians, armies, and militant organizations. Consequences of armed insurgency and counter-insurgency were more severe on the common people of Kashmir that they were deprived of peaceful lives. The conflict of 1990s left many mothers, wives and daughters in peril. Shahnaz Bashir, in his novel *The Half Mother*, unearths the plight of a mother from Natipora village, three kilometres away from Srinagar.

Key words: plight, conflict, forces, militant, mother, crackdown, etc

Introduction

Shahnaz Bashir is a teacher of creative journalism, and literary reportage. He is honoured with the Kashmir Times Award (2007). He is known for his essay 'A Crackdown in Natipora'. *The Half Mother* is his first novel that is important in many ways to give voice to the plight of the common people of Kashmir in general and tragic story of a mother in particular. Her life

story seems to be the representation of many mothers, wives, and daughters of Kashmir. The writer belongs to the same area and looks very closely at the disappearances of young ones and their sufferings during and after the conflict of early 1980s and late 1990s. The present novel is a reflection of the experiences endured by many mothers, wives, and daughters of Kashmir. The writer quite skilfully and poetically depicts the plight of a mother who has lost her son being a victim of the conflict between the army and militants. The title of the novel is quite emblematic one for using 'half' as a determiner to the word 'Mother' whose son was picked up by army. It is clarified that the term is taken by the author from 'half widow'. The word 'Half' is used to denote the status of women whose husbands were taken away by the army during the conflict of 90s. All these men were either killed or disappeared in the conflict.

The novel opens with the poetic description of a devastated mother who is in peril for losing her sole son. One can sense the tragic condition of a mother as well as her mental and psychological trauma. The novel depicts the three-generation lives of a family with Ghulam Rasool Joo, the protagonist's father, Haleema, a central character of the novel, and her sole son Imran. Joo tries his level best to maintain his family by working hard. The family has only daughter Haleema, who has been cared by the father and mother. Haleema's plight starts at very young age when her mother died of tuberculosis. She is forced to leave school by the circumstance. She is bereft on account of early death of her mother and loaded with household responsibility at very young age. She is deprived of happy childhood and takes on her shoulders all responsibilities of the family at the age of eight. After she could come out from the hurdles of day-to-day life, she marries a medical assistant. Her marriage could not live long because of infidelity of her husband who is having extra marital relationship with a nurse. So their marriage ended in divorce within three months. Her life seems to be full of miseries, distress, and disappointments.

After few days, she discovers that she is pregnant and looking for prosperous life with her baby. After giving birth to a baby boy, she lost in her own world to nurse the baby with due care. She looks her own reflection in her baby even though the baby having facial features of his father. She finds comfort in loving and caring her son after tragic incidents in her life. Her son is the whole world for her. Ab Jan is very affectionate towards the baby boy named him Imran. The author describes the beauty of Kashmir along with the childhood experience of Imran. The snowfall month of winter in Kashmir is very joyful for children. Imran enjoys his childhood by



making ice-cream from icicles, and eating roasted potatoes, eggs, and hot *kahwa*. The family spends happy time with Imran. Imran takes the central place in the family by helping his mother in household work as well as assisting his grandfather. But at the same time, there are many political, social upheavals going on during the winter of 1990s.

The family is also felt the heat of the situation that the military troops try to build a bunker near to their house. Ab Jaan opposes it very strongly owing to the safety of the family. He is beaten with the butt of rifle by the trooper. Imran is angry and gallops towards the trooper saying, "How dare you touch my Ab Jaan? How dare....I'll kill you" (27). The incident left the family in mourning knowing the consequences of the act. The conflict between army and militants takes ugly turn to shatter and disturb the lives of common masses. The insurgency starts in the valley; the people quite openly oppose the government. The impact of insurgency is so deep among the people that the school children are also affected to draw picture of masked militant, bullet, and gun on their notebooks. People come out from their houses on the street in great number for procession with the slogan 'Azadi' as a result of atrocities meted out on the common masses by the military. In response to the insurgency, the government deploys the forces to maintain law and order in the state. The peaceful atmosphere of the valley is changed into death, killings, curfews, crackdowns, raids, and encounters. As Bashir states:

(...)Their migration from one region to another came to be witnessed and more than 200 of them were killed by militants. . . . Since the armed resistance started, around 70,000 people have been killed; thousands have been injured; 10,000 have been involuntarily made to disappear; and orphans, widows and several others languish in jails. Thousands of unmarked mass graves have been found (17-18).

During the same period, the youths of Kashmir cross the border to Pakistan for arms training. From Notipora, two talented boys Shaheen and Imran Bhat crossed the border. Shaheen Ahmad was killed because he refused to throw a Pakistani flag. Taking into account the situation, Pakistani army supports to form militant organization by giving training and providing ammunition to Kashmiri youths for their own benefits spreading terror in the state. The Pakistani army lures the young generation of Kashmir to join the militant organization in the name of independent movement. Owing to the circumstance, the common people are tortured, and beaten by the army. Kashmir women are also the victims of rape, torture, mutilation and sexual



exploitation of the wealth of villages, as well as the villagers. It further states that the common people of Kashmir are harassed and humiliated by the army. The author is of the opinion that the parents that are faced with rape by the soldiers in case of Kashmir. The author states that the common people are the victims of the atrocities by the army. The author is of the opinion that the common people are the victims of the atrocities by the army. The author is of the opinion that the common people are the victims of the atrocities by the army. The author is of the opinion that the common people are the victims of the atrocities by the army.

It is not the case with Kashmiri Muslims but Kashmiri Pandits are also harassed, killed by the militants. Both the communities are under threat by the Indian army and the militant organization respectively. Under protest the real picture of suffering the innocent people of Kashmir in the conflict of the army and militants. From Kashmiri Pandits are spared (at least the exploitation of the army). In case of a Kashmiri Pandit Mr. Tandon, who wants to take away his belongings under the supervision of the army, but he is beaten by the soldiers after arrest by the insurgents. The angry transports set fire to his belongings. During the raid, the people are beaten, tortured and even their houses, shops are set on fire by the army. The next day, Major Arora (of Kashmir) starts the search operation in the village returning, abusing, and humiliating the civilians to find out hidden militants. He asks the man whereabouts the militants but the man reasons that the army is for their protection not for torture and humiliation of the innocent people. Kashmiri gets angry, orders his men to grab him, and force three bullets on him. The author states the remark of Kashmiri as "No, let everybody see this! See what happens when you rebel against us" (50). The incident reveals the inhuman and unbecoming conduct of the military towards the innocent people of Kashmir. It seems that the like encounters and killings are justified in the name of law and order. Kashmiri kills the man out of hatred because the man prevented to build a market in front of his house. But the death of the man shatters the life of Haseem because his family is totally dependent on the man.

After Haseem could recover from the loss of his father, but life takes a new turn towards dreadful incident. His wife is killed by the army. The author states that the author is of the opinion that the common people are the victims of the atrocities by the army. The author is of the opinion that the common people are the victims of the atrocities by the army. The author is of the opinion that the common people are the victims of the atrocities by the army. The author is of the opinion that the common people are the victims of the atrocities by the army.



uprooted after losing her son, and the new journey starts in her life to search out her disappeared son. Now she is quite strong and bold because she does not have anything to lose. With the help of Imam, she launches the search whereabouts her son. She visits nearby police station where she is advised to find out in the military camps and interrogation centres. The author is successful to reveal the ground realities of the state as well as the agony of the families who were lost their sons in void of the conflict. Bashir realistically depicts the condition of the victims who lost their young ones. It is also shows that all the defence authorities and forces even deny the arrest of captives. In such circumstance, they have to approach to media but the media too are restricted to give exposure to disappeared ones. Haleema tries to take help from everyone such as news papers, TV centres, and journalists as well as meets the politicians, commanders, and searches every place like police station, army camps, prisons, interrogation centres. But she finds everything is futile that the police could not lodge a complaint against the army because their job is restricted only to identify the dead bodies and deliver to the concerned families. The write exposes the harsh reality of the state where the innocent people are exploited in the name of law and order.

Haleema does not lose her hope that she sells her all property in the pursuit of any hint or information of her son. Despite the restrictions on media, the BBC journalist promises her to narrate his tragic tale. The local newspaper *Watan Ki Aawaz* also published her story. She also meets the local politicians to take help from them but they could not help her stating that they are sealing in the same boat. In another incident, the corrupt mentality of a politician can be seen. Rafi Bhat, an MLA, advises her "You are wasting your beauty and time in vain...Don't you think if we two meet, we can find him in a day?.." (83). Here the author explores the bad political system of the state where the common people have not been given due importance to their plight and sufferings. Despite many unsuccessful attempts, Halemma fights against all atrocities and odds of life to find out her missing son. With the help of an advocate, she manages to register complaint against the army. The Army offers her compensation but she rejects it for justice. During course of trial, she is informed that Major Kushwaha was killed in an attack at the border. She loses her all hopes for her son but one mid night Imran visits her as the author narrates "As the figure walked closer, she was shocked to find the boy was Imran" (157). Later on, she decides to fight for justice to all those victims who were lost their young ones.



Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* unveils the predicament of the common people of Kashmir where the innocent people are exploited, tortured, victimized by the defence authorities as well as the bad political system. Many people are killed in the name of fake encounter. The protagonist of the novel seems to be the representative of many mothers who lost their sons during the conflict. It also throws light up on the limitation and restriction on media both electronic and press that they could not represent the reality of the state. Besides, many Kashmir youths are lured by the militant organizations to fight against the Indian government in the name of freedom movement. The problems of Kashmir people presented in literature have no easy solutions but one can state that the quality education can change the situation of Kashmir. In addition to this, the forced authorities should be liberal towards the common people of Kashmir as well as the young generation of the state has to understand the political situation and be fully educated to know their common benefits for building the nation as a whole on humanity ground.

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