

## **The Curfewed Nights by Basharat Peer and The Half Mother by Shahnaz Bashir depict The Women as a part of Resistance Movement of Kashmir.**

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**Abstract:** The paper presents the current condition and role of women in resistance movement of Kashmir. It is the study of Basharat Peer's novel *The Curfewed Nights* and Shahnaz Bashir's novel *The Half Mother*. The present study depicts the Kashmir's longstanding demand for self-determination and sexual violence used as a tool by armed forces to suppress the legitimate resistance movement of Kashmir. The title of the paper is "The Curfewed Nights by Basharat Peer and The Half Mother by Shahnaz Bashir depict The Women as a part of Resistance Movement of Kashmir". The study explains the role of women in the freedom struggle of Kashmir. How a mother coup up from the trauma of losing her son and fought for his whereabouts since last thirty years. The active participation of women in armed struggle as well as in non-violent movement of Kashmir struggle. How the courageous women of Kashmir stood side by side with men in every phase of the struggle. Whether it is armed or political. Women of Kashmir have formed its own organizations and have created its own leadership.

**Key Words:** freedom, disappearance, resistance, struggle, victim, rape, killing, violence, half-widow etc.

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Date of Submission: 17-01-2019

Date of Acceptance: 03-02-2019

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"We are thankful to Indian security forces for their atrocities they commit. The more excesses they commit, the more number of women will be willing to join the cause of freedom" - Asiya Andrabi.

Kashmir the highest militarized zone in world where more than 700,000 Indian armed forces personnel are present to crush the desire for freedom and as it says, to crush the armed rebellion which currently stands at a rough 150 armed fighters. In this duration of time, India has been responsible for countless war crimes in Kashmir which include extra-judicial custodial killings, enforced disappearances, mass graves, and sexual violence of the worst kind. Women have been at the receiving end of this occupation as direct and indirect victims of violence by the State. Women have lost their loved ones; husbands, brothers and sons, some of whom were killed and some never returned. This gave rise to a new sub-category among women, called 'half-widows', women living in the hope of knowing whether their husbands are alive or dead.

*"Between four and eight thousand men have disappeared after being arrested by the military, paramilitary and police. Newspapers routinely referred to the missing men as "disappeared persons" and their waiting wives as the "half-widows". (Basharat 128)*

Human Rights violation against women directly or indirectly is the most important factor which forced women to join the rebellion. Women repeatedly raised their voice against human rights violations in Kashmir. In the case of militant being killed or in anti-India rallies, women participated in a significant manner.

The rape has been used as a weapon of war by Indian armed forces against Kashmiri women. The number of rape incidents in Kashmir is alarming. Even though a lot of cases have been registered by international investigating agencies like Human Rights Watch, but the majority of cases are kept hidden. A lot of cases have not been even reported because of the fear of Indian military forces and also because of the fact not even single member of the Indian armed forces has been prosecuted or executed till date in any case of human rights violation. In such a scenario where there is no accountability of an occupying state and worse, it has legal, moral and political impunity to protect its armed forces, the discourse about sexual violence, against both women and men is obviously bound to be lost. In Kashmir, sexual violence has been used as a tool, against both women and men to break resilience at the community and individual levels.

Since 1947, the role of the Kashmiri women towards its resistance movement is an inalienable element. The courageous women of Kashmir stood side by side with men in every phase of the struggle. Whether it is

armed or political. Now a day the resistance movement of Kashmiri has become a full-fledged and well organized social movement. Women of Kashmir have formed its own organizations and have created its own leadership.

From the beginning Kashmiri women have provided safe refuge to their men and to armed fighters, often acting as couriers, supplying food and ammunition and providing shelter, saving them from Indian armed forces. They have hidden weapons, whispered important messages and come between death and their loved ones far too often. Women have sung songs, glorified martyrs, and thus preserved memories and people forever to be remembered. Motivated by the role of freedom and freedom fighters, women provided psychological support to Kashmir's men, folk of mothers, sisters and wives. The militants were glamorized and projected as heroes of the movement. Being a mother, sister, aunt of militant is a matter of high pride for Kashmiri women. Traditional Kashmiri folklore (wonnuwum) is atypical and accurate example of the prevalent scenario. Instances of women giving shelter and food to militants and protecting them from security forces are common in case.

The Kashmiri women had paid a cost, a cost that is often too common in a conflict zones; the bodies of the women have been ruined up by the Indian military forces to break the community as a whole, by attacking the 'honour' that a society attaches to its women. The women of KunanPoshpora, where soldiers of the 4th Rajputana Rifles mass raped between 30-100 women, for, as the Indian armed forces put it, 'sympathizing and hiding militants and weapons', are a proof of what the very patriarchal institution that is the military can and will do in a patriarchal society to silence voices rising against it.

*"KunanPoshpora, the village in the northern Kupwaradistrict where the Indian army raped more than 20 women in 1990. KunanPoshpora had become a symbol, a metaphor, a memory like Srebrenica."* (Basharat150).

Women have witnessed socio-economic, and health consequences of the conflict either by losing breadwinners to a bullet, or to the oblivion of a disappearance, to continuously evolve as the strongest pillars of resistance, while simultaneously changing and fitting into gender roles within their societies, moving from dependents to bread earners, from followers to leaders within families. The physical presence of women in pro-freedom marches is not new or unheard of - this happened back in 1990's when the armed movement was at its peak in Kashmir - but over the years women have been seen more frequently on the roads, expressing themselves, and often with stones in their hands. 2016 was no different and a collective resistance from women was seen on the streets; these gatherings were either spontaneous or in some cases organized and mobilized by pro-freedom women's groups such as the Dukhtarane Milat (Daughters of the Nation).

Basharat Peer in his debut novel described as

*"She had begun her activism soon after college in 1987 by painting out the actresses in Bollywood film posters that were put up every week in Srinagar and elsewhere in the valley."* (172)

The late eighties and early nineties made a turning point in the freedom struggle of Kashmir. The streets and homes of Kashmir were resonating with a shrill, resounding, popular call for freedom from India. This manifested itself into massive popular protests, declaring popular support for the armed struggle against Indian rule, which had been launched in the late 1980s.

*"In the year 1990. As the insurgency in the valley intensified, the government resigned, paving the way for governor's rule. Tears, blood, death and war followed, as did curfews, crackdowns, raids, encounters, killings, bunkers, and an exodus of people, burning markets, schools and buildings."* (Shahnaz 32)

As Kashmiri masses were riding high on the wave for "*azadi*" [freedom - from India] women did not remain impervious to the charged political landscape. They were pushed by circumstance or sentiment of nationalism to engage either as victim-activists, protesters or as separatist politicians. However, a Kashmiri woman's identity and place in historical accounts describing her position in the ongoing struggle - more often than not - is seen to rest at being a "victim".

In the early stages of the armed struggle, broad-based support for the independence movement was apparent, and resulted in the creation of both dissident men and women. However, men and women formed their opposition to Indian rule largely in different ways. Men took to combat, women to facilitating the men's fight, or by registering their support for *azadi* through popular protest.

Women also became facilitators of combat by acting as couriers for arms, informers for militants, provided them shelter and food, and at times helped them escape capture during the sudden and dreaded Indian military raids or "crackdowns", which continue to happen in civilian areas. Their motivation came from the general feeling for independence running deep in the masses.

The ranks of major guerilla outfits such as Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, which turned from armed to non-violent resistance in the early 1990s are primarily comprised men. Nevertheless, they also had women's wings - *Binatul Islam* and *Muslim KhawateenMarkaz* respectively. Yet, the engagement of these outfits remained primarily political and non-military.

The All Party Hurriyat Conference - the umbrella organisation spearheading the movement for independence - also has women's organizations, such as the *Muslim KhawateenMarkaz* (MKM), and the *Dukhtaran-e-Millat* (DM) as constituent members. Both the MKM and DM have a political mandate professing separation from India while, in addition, carrying out social and human rights activism.

*"Dukhtaran-e-Millat (daughter of the Muslim community), headed by AsiyaAndrabi, who is not known for much else. I had not heard about her for over a decade. Then one summer day in 2004 she surfaced in the public sphere."* (Basharat172)

Yasmeen Raja and ZamrudaHabib head the two factions of the MKM, and AsiyaAndrabi chairs *Dukhtaran-e-Millat*. However, DM's representative character can be seriously challenged, considering its radical Islamist approach is hardly endorsed by anyone, save a handful of AsiyaAndrabi's sidekicks. Also, Fareeda Dar (FareedaBehenji) heads the Jammu and Kashmir Mass Movement, which also is a member organization of the Hurriyat.

All of these women have served multiple years in jail for overt or covert support for the independence movement and are constantly harassed by the Indian security apparatus because of their political involvement. They come from middle class backgrounds and chose to give up a possible life of comfort for risk and tribulations.

ParveenaAhanger the "victim-activist" woman, Her son, Javed, then 14 years old, was picked up by the Indian Armed forces, never to be returned to his family. He became one of the many who were subjected to enforced disappearance.

The illiterate Parveena, instead of embracing the passive space of victimhood, chose to engage actively. She founded the *Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons* and brought together people who had similarly suffered. She continues to seek justice for the wrong meted out to her and to others of her ilk, through protest and advocacy.

*"Parveena is a chubby housewife in her forties who, along with a lawyer, ParvezImroz, formed the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons to campaign and fight cases in the courts."* (Basharat128).

Shahnaz Bashir portrait the role of ParveenaAhanger in Allegorical way. He portrays Parveena as Haleema in his book "The Half Mother"

*"They wanted to call it the "Association of Relatives of Disappeared Persons" is that ok? Haleema read,fumbling with the English words she had repeatedly revised to enunciate them properly."* (Shahnaz 141)

Also, ZamrudaHabib, after her release from Tihar Jail, where she was lodged for the continuation of her separatist political participation, and, owing to her torturous experiences as a Kashmiri political prisoner in an Indian jail, founded the *Association of Families of Kashmiri Prisoners* (AFKP). The AFKP provides psycho-social support to the families of Kashmiri prisoners held in Indian jails, as well as tracking and documenting their cases.

Social ties were therefore responsible for inhibiting, as well as prompting, women's engagement as positive actors in the conflict. In the 1990s, their participation was primarily motivated by a general feeling of nationalism and the sentiment for *azadi* born from it. As time passed, the Indian state's sustained "iron fist policy" and the general denial of justice gave impetus to the already existing popular call for independence, arising out of a sense of personal and general suffering and the memory it gave rise to.

Another strain of actively engaging women, which keeps coming to prominence intermittently, yet consistently, is that of the women protesters. They were seen wearing shrouds and chanting pro-freedom slogans in marches against Indian rule in the early years of the conflict. Many were killed or injured in shoot-outs by Indian Armed Forces while on these demonstrations.

In the mass protests of 2008 and 2010, an increasing number of women participated alongside men; at times even leading all-women protest marches. The former were triggered by the illegal transfer of Kashmiri land by the local government, and the latter, by arbitrary teenage killings by Indian paramilitaries.

These summer protests of 2008 and 2010 were punctuated by protesters pelting stones at Indian troops, which became their defining feature, often triggering comparisons with the Palestinian intifada. Interestingly, women also engaged in stone-throwing, together with chanting anti-India and pro-freedom slogans such as: "We want freedom" and "Blood for blood".

One of the most gripping images that came out in the local press around that time was of a Kashmiri woman in her late sixties, dressed in traditional attire, hurling a large stone towards a soldier. Some women were quoted saying: "We have lost patience. They have killed our sons and brothers. How do you expect us to be mute spectators?" Some said they had joined protests in solidarity with those who had lost their loved ones. Others thought that they, as women, also have a participatory role in the struggle against injustice and the demand for freedom. In addition to this, in keeping with their assigned gender roles, they also cooked for - and distributed drinking water to - their fellow protesters.

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Mohammad YaseenPandith. "Women as a Part of Resistance Movement of Kashmir ByBasharat Peer's Curfewed Night and Shahnaz Bashir's The Half Mother." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 24 no. 1, 2019, pp. 08-11.