



**NARRATIVES FROM KASHMIR: AN OVERVIEW OF  
*CURFEWED NIGHT, OUR MOON HAS BLOOD CLOTS,  
THE GARDEN OF SOLITUDE AND THE HALF  
MOTHER***

**Showkat Hussain Dar**

*PhD Scholar, Department of English, Mewar University, Rajasthan*

The contemporary writings from Kashmir in English (particularly expanded memoirs, fiction, etc.) derive their inspiration from Basharat Peer's 2009 memoir *Curfewed Nights*. In this book, Peer laments that people from almost every conflict zone have told their stories, such as, Palestinians, Israelis, Bosnians, and that he felt the absence of writing his own painful experience. The writer of *The Garden of Solitude*, Siddhartha Gigoo praises Basharat peer in the following words, Peer's "book shot to popularity after around 20 years of political turmoil. Twenty years is nothing as far as the evolution of art is concerned ... *Curfewed Nights* was important because it was read not only by Kashmiris and people in India, but people in the West also." Furthermore he says, "Previously there had been Urdu poetry and short stories—some of it self-published—but not novels and memoirs" says Gigoo. *Curfewed Nights* is considered a very powerful discourse about Kashmir by a Kashmiri, who himself has faced the pain of turmoil. Peer narrates very poignantly the ordeal that Kashmiris had to go through in the face of the turmoil. He takes a recourse to history in order to describe the Muslim community of Kashmir as a prolonged sufferers of violence and exploitation. He makes his readers to realize his memories of the conflict artistically. While unveiling the mask of innocence from Indian government in general and the atrocities of its army in particular, Peer bravely presents before his readers the stark reality of his state. He says that he himself had been once lured to join the army ranks, but he finally succumbed to his parents' emotions. Thus Peer dismissed the armed rebellion and joined the intellectual resistance.

*Curfewed Nights* presents a half picture of Kashmir as it does not deal with the Kashmiri Hindu or Pandit exodus, the other half is completed by Rahul Pandita in his memoir *Our Moon Has Blood Clots : A Memoir of a lost Home in Kashmir*—a powerful memoir in english. It narrates the Pandit exodus of 1990. Pandita takes a recourse to history and traces the origin of Kashmir and the Kashmiri Hindus. He takes hints from the generally accepted myths and also takes clues from his ancestors about the history of Kashmir and the relational ties that used to exist between heterogeneous communities in Kashmir. In this way Pandita seems to revive an identity informed by a Kashmiri ethos in the face of threat posed by a foreign land; its customs, culture, language, etc. Pandita's memoir is by and large crafted out of his sharp and precocious memory. The memoir is interestingly dedicated to writer's brother Ravi, who became an innocent victim of the turmoil. The narrative is powerful but has an inherent incoherence suggesting the incoherence of the Pandit identity. The memoir presents a kaleidoscopic view of the exodus. Pandita presents before his readers the trauma of knocking at one's own door



as an unwanted guest. The only emotion that the writer can gather in response to such a situation is tears in his eyes. Similarly, Siddhartha Gigoo's novel *The Garden of Solitude* reiterates the pain that the 1990 exodus brought to the Pandit community. The novel opens with the following lines:

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All I dream of now is a garden of solitude,  
Where I get morsel of rice in the  
Morning a morsel of rice in the evening.

The opening lines set the tone of the novel and become an epigraph of its kind to the novel. While dealing with various repercussions of the exodus, Gigoo also narrates the solitude that the exodus brought into the lives of the Pandits. The exodus seemed to erase all the bonds that used to exist between Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims. He presents before his readers an unpredictable and unexpected world—a world where the friends of yesterday become the enemies of today. Such an instance of severe animosity is put into the mouth of a Muslim woman when she says: “May God destroy the seed of Pandits.” In the midst of this saga of pain, narrator's journey to Ladakh gives a meaning to all the chaos and confusion. The wisdom in the Lama's words symbolically suggests the wisdom of the writer, who has crafted the story out of the pain that he has faced in the form of exile.

Finally, the debut novel of Shahnaz Bashir titled *The Half Mother* is about the ordeals and the cruelty that the people of Kashmir have been going through at the hands of the Indian army. *The Half Mother* narrates the doleful tale of a lady named Haleema. It revolves around the unbearable pain and identity crises that Haleema goes through when the only hope of her life, her son, is taken away by army. Slowly and gradually, Haleema loses everything which could keep her identity alive. Thus by losing her only innocent child she becomes a symbol of tragedy.

The armed rebellion of the 1990's in the Himalayan region of Kashmir has been reinstated by unarmed yet mighty non-violent/peaceful protests and more so by the pen, with an explosion of writers, researchers, columnists, bloggers, journalists committed to writing Kashmiri's history. Powerful fiction and non-fiction is emerging from the valley since the publication of Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night*. Mirza Waheed, Siddhartha Gigoo, Shahnaz Bashir and Rahul Pandita are the emerging writers from Kashmir who project the day-in-day-out incidents in their works. The large effect that comes out of their writings is that the narrative (about Kashmir) has been taken up by the people themselves. So every time a Kashmiri writer presenting his or her work on Kashmir, the expectations among Kashmiri's tend to go up. People start feeling that finally their narrative, of how they saw the things, what they went through, would be told to the world, bereft of the lenses of security paradigm through which Kashmir has been viewed – a strategic territory, with not – so – strategic, dispensable people.

## **WORKS CITED**

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