

Psychic Trauma of a Bereaved Mother: A study of Shahnaz

Bashir's The Half Mother

DR. Usha Jain

Asst. Professor, S.A.B.V. Govt. Arts and Commerce College

Indore, M.P

Faroze Ahmad Chopan

Lecturer, S G S I T S.

Indore, M.P

Abstract

History witnesses that the ambivalence have always affected an individual, both physically and mentally. Kashmir's suffered, strived and struggled but there doesn't seem to be any end to their miseries. The ongoing conflict had made their living even worse than hell. As physical injuries are visible to everyone mental psyche often go unacknowledged. Shahnaz Bashir has made a good attempt to address the psychological condition of the people of valley, based on his own experience and memories. Bashir has depicted a heartrending story of bereaved mother, Haleema. Haleema lost her only son in the ongoing conflict and despite the trauma and agony of being a mother; she made every effort to search out her lost son, till her last breath. The article will put insight in to the sensitive human nature of novel and the mental agony through which the protagonist went through.

Key Words: Schizophrenia, Conflict, Kashmir, Disappearance

The relentless conflict of Kashmir has now stepped into its third decade and had affected the lives of entire valley. As Kashmir has always been an interest of writers and the unending conflict has evoked the writers to expound the reality in the form of literature. Contemporary literary scenario of Kashmir brings the tragedy and angst of the people living

there. Previously writers from outside the valley, like MulkrajAnand and Salman Rushdie used to depict the discourse of the valley. But now there is an advent of many indigenous voices like Basharat Peer, MirzaWaheed, Rahul Pandita and Shahnaz Bashir. As experienced by themselves these writers are successful in portraying the dynamic shades of the ongoing conflict. They have spotlighted the intricate subjects like individuality, exertion, travails, endeavour and persecution which were normally missing from the narrative thought of Kashmir. In earlier times literature of Kashmir was mostly written in Urdu and Kashmiri, but writing in English had put the Kashmiri literature on the global track.

The Half Mother is one of the untold stories of Kashmir, elucidated by Shahnaz Bashir. Shahnaz Bashir who is born and brought up in Kashmir has witnessed the transition of valley from tranquillity to cataclysm. He himself has experienced the ambience and is clearly reflected in his works. Presently he is working as an assistant professor of media study at the central university of Kashmir. *The Half Mother* is author's debut novel, before this he has also written an essay named "*A Crack Down in Natipora*" (2013). Shahnaz Bashir Says about the novel: "In Strife-Torn Kashmir, I have always been tormented by the feelings of indefinite and eternal uncertainty. The Half Mother is an outcome of those feelings." (Greater Kashmir)

The backdrop is author's homeland Kashmir, which has been an incongruent Zone since author's birth and the settings and characters of the novel expound the same. Shahnaz Bashir is depicting a heart breaking story of one of the thousands grieving mothers, who had lost their children in the ongoing conflict, whose children disappeared and are not located till date. These mothers are in a dilemma that, are their children still alive or dead, are they still mothers or not, so those mothers are termed as Half Mothers by Shahnaz Bashir.

Bashir has portrayed a character of Haleema as a mother and transforms her into a tragic figure, which is torn apart between the roles of being a nurturing mother to a suffering wanderer. From the beginning of the novel she has been portrayed as a woman of great resilience. The character of Haleema has echoes of Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte. She is one of the earliest representations of an individualistic, like Jane Eyre; Haleema also experienced the psychic trauma and always relies on herself to get back on her feet.

The story of the novel revolves round a female character, Haleema, who has been suffering in all respects of life. Haleema, who was the apple of her parent's eyes, lost her mother at the age of eight, which forced her to left the schooling and to take care of household chores. Haleema was married to a medical assistant, after the marriage Haleema discovered that her husband has an extra marital affair. It was excruciating for her and she became reticent, and unchained her husband from the sacred knot. Haleema ended her marriage which lasted only for three months by divorcing her husband. After a period of time Haleema, who was very much disappointed, gave birth to a baby boy who brought her smile back after the tragedy of divorce. Abjaan, the father of Haleema and she were very much attached to the baby boy who was named as Imran.

But the tragedy does not end up here, rest is more panic. Chapter five of the book has been named as Tempest, which is quite ironical. It expounds the situation of 1990, when the conflict was at its peak. The year was in real sense a tempest for the valley and for Haleema too. Haleema's innocent father, Abjaan was slaughtered by troopers one night leaving Haleema broken in jolt. Now Imran, her son was only bread winner and lone support for her, who also was taken by troopers, and he never returned back home, leaving Haleema shattered, who lived her rest of life as a half mother. She murmured:

The colour of everything is sorrow,

the colour of the moon is sorrow,

the colour of the streets is sorrow, and

the colour of memories is sorrow.

The colour of my heart, in its own heart, is sorrow.

The colour of my breath is sorrow,

the colour of sorrow is sorrow. (The Half Mother, p.5)

As the days were passing there was no sign of Imran. Haleema was very much attached to his son Imran and his loss affected both her physical and mental health. As observed loss of the child is generally the most awful angst, and is considered the foremost root of a prolonged misery. As it has been noticed that when parents lose their child, a part of

them dies. Imran was a symbol of future for Haleema and by losing him she lost both her dreams and hope. It was the one of the worst traumatising experience by Haleema, despite the misery she has to look for her son all alone whom she was never able to locate: "The emotional blow associated with child loss can lead to wide range of psychological and physiological problems including depression, anxiety, cognitive and physical symptoms. . . ." (When a Parent Loses a Child, p.1)

Haleema is now an inevitable victim of circumstances and she ultimately becomes schizophrenic. Schizophrenia is frequently linked with major psychological disability and seclusion. The symptoms of psychosis were now clear in Haleema. She was shocked and often confused, and there were many changes in her behaviour too. She was now absolutely devastated and often having misconceptions. As: "Psychosis simply means that a person has sensory experiences, thoughts or beliefs that are not shared by the majority of people. Such experiences may include delusions, hallucinations and disordered thoughts" (Sane, p.1)

Environmental influences like socio economic status, family atmosphere and substance abuse are actually the potential contributors to the disorder. The ambience around Haleema and her isolation were the main causes of schizophrenia. Losing her husband, father than her only son were the main events that sparked off the disease: "schizophrenia is caused by a combination of factors; . . . but stressful life-events or experiences could trigger the onset of symptoms" (Sane, p.2)

The night, when Abjaan was slaughtered by troopers, everybody around was crying and weeping. But Haleema was in total shock, not believing that Abjaan is dead, no tears in her eyes. Her hair was loose, laughing like a mad and beating herself: "she was conscious now and in shock. She wanted the women to tell her Abjaan was still alive. Isn't he? Isn't he? He is alive. Why are you all crying?" (The Half Mother, p.50). The author is successful in portraying an Archetypal Mother consciousness in depicting Haleema, who at some places has been represented as Fairy Mother, which directs and guides her child.

After Imran was taken, she was bare footed, bare headed, wailing like anything else. She was now having delusions, imagining troops beating her son, and he crying for help. That was the most devastating night in the life of Haleema; she cried throughout the night and was not able to sleep for a fraction of second. She was now completely lost. She was looking

weary, not covering hair; face was looking pale like a non-living and clothes she had worn were inside out. Her health condition was now going from bad to worse and she was now taking help of inhaler. She was frustrated by life and bursting in tears and crying intensely.

Haleema was now having auditory hallucinations, and believing that things around her are talking to her, when she felt alone:

she began talking to herself or to walls. Sometimes, she would talk to the things that belonged to Imran, crying and wailing alternatively. She would open the dented heirloom trunk and take out his notebooks. She would slowly run her fingers over his scribbles and feel the letters. . . (The Half Mother, p.69).

She also used to converse with Imran's clothes, kissing and sniffing them. Her behaviour was now of a bizarre kind and was having false and irrational beliefs. Schizophrenia was now affecting her ability to think straight. Her thoughts were coming and going rapidly. Haleema was now not able to concentrate on her normal life. She was distracted and it was very hard for her to focus on one deliberation. She was now trailing her persistence. She once lost her equanimity, when she was kept waiting to meet SSP; “. . . snatched a guard's rifle in frustration. She pointed the barrel at her chest and threw its butt into the guard's hand. 'Kill me!' shrieked in utter frustration.” (The Half Mother, p.79)

Haleema was not able to sort out the things relevant to the circumstances. Her thoughts were illogical, fragmented and disorganized. People suffering from Schizophrenia frequently display flat or blunted affect. Haleema was now showing severe reduction in her emotional expressiveness, and her facial expressions seemed to subside now. Haleema was entirely isolated from the happenings of day to day life. She has lost the tally of the days that were turning by. Time seemed to be stopped up for her: “She had grown habitually Insomniac now.” (The Half Mother, p.84). Shahnaz Bashir has juxtaposed two facets of women's character, her inner psychology, where she has become schizophrenic and another where she struggles to locate her lost son. Sometimes it is felt that the author has depicted a weak character of a woman, who was not able to cope up with the situation because all the parents in the world who lost their children doesn't become schizophrenic but they are able to make out and manage their regular life. On the other side Haleema doesn't leave any stone unturned in

order to search for her missing son. She is having a type of rebellious nature of achieving her goal.

She was often having psychotic beliefs and dissimulations of having Imran around her. Once she passed through market, she was desperately looking around her:

. . . Surveying here and there, hoping by chance she would find him walking down a footpath. *What if I spot his face in the crowd?* A boy with as thin a haircut as Imran, with the same height and stance, walked across her. *Let me turn around and see...Oh!* It was not him; just a mere pedestrian at Dalgate. (The Half Mother, p.85)

People with Schizophrenia are often withdrawn and wish to be left alone. Suicide is a sombre threat in the lives of people who have Schizophrenia. People having the disease have higher suicide rate than other population. Haleema too had the problem: “She was feeling thirsty, hungry and suicidal. Yet each time she thought of death, she felt strictly accountable to life.” (The Half Mother, p.87). Haleema has been depicted as a formidable mother, possessing many worthy virtues. Despite suffering from few faults and weaknesses, she has been able to put mingled impression on the reader.

The remedy of the disease of Schizophrenia for Haleema could have been the return of Imran, who never returned. Haleema was now petrified and crestfallen; it was affecting her health, because untreated Schizophrenia can lead to severe emotional behaviour and major health problems. It creates anxieties and phobia, Inability to work, depression and social isolation. In the memory of his son, Haleema had actually forgotten herself and her age; “She discovered creases on her face and neck in the fragment of a mirror. She kept near her pillow. I am an old woman now, she thought, touching her sagging cheeks.” (The Half Mother, p.102). The optimum trait of Haleema’s character is his self-sacrificing nature. Her love for Imran is boundless for which she sacrificed every means of her own survival.

Haleema was now often baffled, vacillating and perturbing. Her mind was now occupied by noises and gloomy thoughts. She was now having illusions and day dreams:

Some wet patches on the dry cement surface of the bathroom had morphed into ghostly Shapes, creating an optical illusion. She studied them with awe. A

ghostly figure with a wide-open mouth seemingly shouted back at her. She poured a mug of water and spoiled them all.(The Half Mother, p.106)

The novel has immersed in the tenacious exertion of Haleema, a lonely woman for her right to dignity and survival and has also given voice to many mothers to endure, crusade and don't chuck up the sponge. At the end, she was a complete tragic figure because of her misfortunes and heroic endurances. She died uttering the words: "‘Imransaeba? Aakha?’ Imran. Have you come?" (The Half Mother, p.178) Women usually used to be a silent sufferers but Haleema deserves our admiration because of her rebellious attitude and manner of endurance. The author has made a good attempt to plow the involuntary disappearances subject in Kashmir. Shahnaz Bashir has illuminated the invisible scars of conflict which are not visible like physical wounds. The psychological wounds like that often go unacknowledged and unrecognised. The people are still poor in understanding and addressing such traumatic brain injuries. Parents have to accept the loss and should adapt the fresh life. Sometimes grief may be stiff and nerve-wrecking, but we must not forget that human resilience is more powerful. Ernest Hemingway defines human power as: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."(The Old Man and the Sea, p.107)

Works Cited

Bashir, Shahnaz. *The Half Mother*. Noida: Hachette, 2014.Print

Hemingway,Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*. Kolkatta: Papilio Classics,
2014. Print

Muzaffar, Imran. "Half Mother Released". Greater Kashmir. 22 June 2014.

Schizophrenia.Sane.<www.sane.org.uk>

Vitelli, Romeo. *When a Parent Loses a Child*. Media Spotlight: Sequim,4feb.

2014.Web<www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mediaspotlight/201302/w hen-a-parent-loses-child>