

UNFORGETTABLE TALE OF CONFLICT IN KASHMIR: A STUDY OF CURFEWED NIGHT BY BASHARAT PEER

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Abstract

Kashmir a paradise on the Earth is not only known for its beautiful land but also known for its socio-political reasons which are now-a-days become a global issue. Basharat Peer, a Kashmiri journalist who brought change by writing his debut book on Kashmir, *Curfewed Night: A Memoir*. His book presents a heart-stirring tale of socio-political ambience of Kashmir in 1990s when a brutal violence and exodus took place.

Curfewed Night is not only a tale of any narrator but it is an attempt to tell the human sufferings and emotional trauma at the time of insurgency. *Curfewed Night* brings alive the violence of people in Kashmir and their ever-lasting pain by the loss of the children and parents. The story of Kashmir has never been told before so artistically with emotional charge. Peer delineates how the people of Kashmir have not been living their normal lives. This book not tells the story of Kashmir as we get in the news but a story of Kashmiri and his traumatic journey from childhood to youth. The focus of my paper is the political conflict or communal riots in Kashmir as depicted in *Curfewed Night*. This paper will concentrate upon the emotions and stifled voices of suffered Kashmiri and their crucial situation. And the book *Curfewed Night* has such a powerful voice to explain an unforgettable tale of Kashmiri by which this book has connected many readers to its very soul. I will try to present in my paper about the complex crisis or serious problem of Kashmir in contemporary writing and its fictional treatment.

Keywords: Kashmir, insurgency, human suffering, tyrannical situation.

Undoubtedly Kashmir is a beautiful place, which was earlier known for its peace and tranquillity has now become a place of terror and restlessness. It is such a beautiful place where everyone wanted to go once in his life but now its beauty becomes a bone of contention and because of its terrific atmosphere even no one can imagine to visit the place to serve the purpose of enjoyment and peace. It is the tyranny of time that the people who live in this beautiful Valley

found themselves caught in a very crucial situation. Kashmir a paradise on the Earth is not only known for its beautiful land but also known for its socio-political situation which is now-a-days becomes a global issue.

Kashmir is very beautiful place but its beauty has become a dark spot on the forehead of India. A place which was full of peace and tranquillity is now full of terror and human sufferings. Kashmir has become the synonym of militants, gunfire, terror and insurgency. No one in the valley is remained unaffected by the numbing circumstances of Kashmir. There were many murders, disappearances, blasts, and migration took place in the valley. None writer can remain silent on such traumatic life of Kashmiri people. As Manto said, “a writer picks up his pen only when his sensibility is hurt”. On visiting Kashmir a person can see only the external beauty of Kashmir but inner beauty of Kashmir has been wounded since long time. To support my thought I would like to quote a line from the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali entitled “Farewell” which presents what Kashmir has become now if one would like to visit there: “I am being rowed through Paradise on a river of Hell”. (32-33)

When there was nobody to share his/her experience of tormented life. Basharat Peer felt like to write about his experience in the valley of Kashmir. Kashmir, a place, which was known for its beauty is now become a place of militancy, communal riots, insurgency, terror, curfews etc. Bashrat peer, one of the eminent writers who shared his experience about the tormented life of Kashmir. He has very intelligently delineated the crucial situation of Kashmiri life and was successful to get wide acclaimed fame. Reader felt connected their hearts with the writer and sympathised and many of them shed tears over the sufferings of human life.

Basharat Peer shared why he felt like to write a book, which is mentioned in his book *Curfewed Night*:

There was a sense of shame that overcome me every time I walked into a book store. People from almost every conflict zone had told their stories: Palestinians, Israelis, Boshians, kurds, Tibetans, Labnese, East Germans, Africans, East Timorese, and many more I felt the absence of our own telling, the unwritten books about the Kashmiri experience, from the bookshelves, as vividly as the absence of a beloved the empty chair staring at you across the table in a coffee shop.

Basharat Peer, a Kashmiri journalist who has shocked by notice that there was no book written over the plight of Kashmiri and then he decided to write about human sufferings Basharat Peer , a Kashmiri journalist who brought change in the literary world lately, by writing his debut book on Kashmir, a memoir, *Curfewed Night*. His book presents a heart-stirring tale of socio-political ambience of Kashmir in 1990s when a brutal violence and exodus took place.

The title of the book of Basharat Peer has been taken from the lines of the poem of Agha Shahid Ali entitled ‘A Country without a Post Office’ which is:

The city from where no news can come is now so visible in its curfewed night that the worst is precise.

Curfewed Night is not a book about Peer and his memory but it is a finest blend of his life as well other ordinary people of Kashmir who suffered a lot and survived their traumatic life by living in the Valley. In the review of this book Pankaj Mishra rightly said that:

Curfewed Night is a tale of a man’s love for his land, the pain of leaving home, and the joy of return as well as a fierce and moving piece of reportage from an intrepid young journalist. Describing the ruin of Kashmir, it does not only shock, but also challenges our most cherished beliefs in democracy, rule of law and the power of individual conscience. Everyone should read it.

The story of Kashmir has never been told before in such a manner. Being a Kashmiri muslim, Basharat Peer has not written in biased manner towards his community but he has been missing those Kashmiri pandit neighbours or friend who had left the Valley. He also sympathised with their situation. Being a Kashmiri he has suffered a lot in his adolescence when a separatist movement exploded in Kashmir in 1989. He writes in *Curfewed Night* “The war of my adolescent had started.” (14) *Curfewed Night* is not only an attempt to share his experience but also very closely associated with the human sufferings of ordinary people. *Curfewed Night* brings alive the violence of people in Kashmir and their everlasting pain by the loss of their children and parents. Steve Coll observes about *Curfewed Night* is that:

Curfewed Night is the finest book I have read on the contemporary Kashmir conflict literary, humane, clear-eyed and reliable. Peer has given a voice, unforgettable, to a generation of Kashmiri who have never been heard in the United States, but who should be.

Peer delineates how the people of Kashmir have not been living their normal lives. This book not tells the story of Kashmir as we get in the news but a story of Kashmiri and his traumatic journey from childhood to youth. It is the first book which has revealed the hidden truths and unforgettable sufferings of Kashmiri during the time of insurgency when brutal violence and exodus took place. This book unveiled how a boy caught between the heart stirring ambiences. *Curfewed Night* revolves around ordinary Kashmiri, such as Peer himself. The book contains several stories of betrayal, displacement and destruction. It is as much about the author’s life as about Kashmir and its people.

Being a journalist Basharat Peer has presented a very realistic picture of insurgency, militants, exodus in 1990. In his adolescent, Basharat Peer was not mature enough to understand or contemplate about that tyrannical situation. So that he revisited Kashmir Valley in his young age to explore the accidental events and shared the memories of ordinary people. His adolescent memories reminded him of deadly thoughts that made him restless and he decided to explore the truth behind that and was very keen to meet those Kashmiri who have been living their emotionless life in the valley. The tyrannical situation of Kashmir lost the grip of Basharat Peer over the beauty of Kashmir but he focused only on human sufferings that’s why Peer was succeed to hold the grip of his every reader. Every reader of this book feels connected with the people of Kashmir. This is what Basharat Peer has delineated in his book in the form of memoir. The book is divided into fifteen chapters. The book contains several stories of disappearance, torture, tragic survival. In his book Peer unveiled the torture chambers, Papa1 and Papa2, into which large numbers of suspected people have been captured and later their bodies would be found floating on rivers with cigarette burns, missing fingers and limbs. In the words of Basharat Peer: “Papa-2 was the most infamous torture centre run by the Indian forces in Kashmir.” (137) Chapter ten which describes Papa-2 is very painful and heart rendering episode in the lives of Kashmiri. In the words of one character in *Curfewed Night* who has been released after being tortured in Papa-2: “That place destroyed most people who were there. You do not live normal life after that torture. It scars you forever.” (143) That was very torturous camp and that was intolerable even more than death. In that camp electric shocks were given in their private parts of the body to those who were imprisoned and then they had become impotent, that was really inhuman act. After been there (Papa-2) they were failed to live their normal life as ordinary people live. They found their life like hell on the earth. In that cell (tormented place) where caught militants had no right to live their normal lives, they were brought very close to death but were forced to live.

Many books have been written about the socio-political condition of Kashmir but books about the ordinary people of Kashmir has been written passionately, evocatively and intelligently by journalist Basharat Peer. About his writing style Ahmad Rashid writes:

The story of Kashmir has never been told before so evocatively and profoundly. Peer writes with the skill of novelist, the insight of a journalist and the evocative power of a poet.

Mirza Waheed another Kashmiri writer has presented the same impulse of Kashmir in his famous work *The Collaborator*. As Arundhati Roy told in her conversation with P.G. Rasool that:

For writer, it's really a place which gives you an understanding of power, powerlessness, brutality, bravery and the dilemmas of the human condition.

Thus *Curfewed Night* has attracted many readers who have not been found the book about the people of Kashmir rather than its political theme. Really this book touches the soul of every reader. Basharat Peer very emotionally presented those tormented days of Kashmir when separatist movement exploded. Salman Rushdie in his review of this book written:

A passionate and important book a brave and brilliant report from a conflict the world has chosen to ignore.

Rightly said that *Curfewed Night* has represented the theme which was very difficult to write about and this writing may have been hurt the sentiments of author. By memorising and collecting those tormented facts the sentiments and hidden grudge against the situation is so visible in this book. *Curfewed Night* is a juncture of reality.

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