



Hope and Mental Trauma of Haleema in Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother*

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ABSTRACT:

Literature is the mirror of life as it concerns with reality, inner feelings and the emotions of a person. Many Writers speak about the life of ordinary people, one such writer is Shahnaz Bashir. He was University Gold Medalist in Mass Communication and Journalism from the University of Kashmir. He was highly concerned about the reflection of ordinary people's life in his writings. He tells the heartbreaking story of one mother's battle for life and justice in the novel, *The Half Mother*. Shahnaz Bashir has attempted to address the issue of involuntary disappearances in Kashmir which he has closely witnessed. Here the main protagonist of this novel, Haleema portrays the mother's of Kashmir who have lost their family members in the conflict. This novel highly deals with war and its impact on the normal life of ordinary people. Haleema who had lost her father and son due to war had faced both the mental and physical trauma in this novel. This paper focuses on the hope that Haleema had on her son Imran and her longing for him.

Keywords: Hope, War, Longing, Mental Trauma.

INTRODUCTION:

The novel, *The Half Mother* portrays the actual plight and sufferings of Haleema who had lost all her dear ones, to the war which benefited none. This novel was set in the downtown area of Natipora, Srinagar, in the Valley of Kashmir. The novel started with Haleema whispered to herself, "The greatest suffering brings the greatest hopes, the greatest miseries greatest patience, and the greatest uncertainties lead to the greatest quest" (THM-3). With these words, she expressed her pain of losing her son and remembered the golden memories of his presence in past. The pain inside her pushed her to the extent where she wished to live no more.

When the story unfolds, the readers can understand that Haleema was the only daughter of Ab Jaan and Boba who was married to a medical assistant, but that twisted into an unsuccessful affair and finally was divorced within the period of three months. She lost her father Ab Jaan to the bullets of the army force and her son disappeared in front of her into the unknown territory. Thus the novel was constructed in the backdrop of Kashmir conflict and it narrates the story of loss and love, death and destruction, tragedy and trauma throughout the end. The aspects of experience of trauma is viewed through different violent scenes that Haleema witnessed. She had experienced that how Ab Jaan was killed brutally and she had also experienced the pain of loss through the disappearance of her only son Imran. She suffered from both physical tortures as well as mental problems too. The two horrifying events which shocked her inner self was the day when Ab Jaan was killed in front of her and when Imran was taken into custody by the security forces. In her mourning it's clear that Haleema longs to be reunited with her father. "She wanted the women to tell her Ab Jaan is still alive. Isn't he? Isn't he? He is alive. Why are you crying? She requested the women" (50).

Several women in Kashmir were living such a horrible life every single day with fear. Night and day, there was a continuous struggle to overcome the pain among Kashmiri mothers who lost their innocent children frequently. Many times Haleema dreamed of Imran's arrival to their home. Each time when she dreamed about him, she cried and gained hope in the morning to get back her son. Haleema's motherly care was seen when she wondered whether Imran is hungry or thirsty and that tore her apart every night and day. Haleema sacrificed both her health and property to achieve the goal that is finding her son. Her love for him forced her to leave everything for the sake of her missing son. The enforced disappearance of her son shattered her physically and mentally. Haleema still believed that Imran would return. After work, she would sit and stare at the gate expecting her son's return. She would sit there till the birds would return to their nests and the dogs start barking at the darkness spread everywhere under the sky. Haleema's search for her son everyday ended up in shaking her hopes and health.

Haleema never lost her hope. The search for her son became the sole purpose of her life. In order to seek information about Imran, she knocked the door of every possible way from radio to newspaper to broadcast the news of her son's enforced disappearance. Haleema frequently visited the court and met many other people fighting for their loved ones who were also the victims of enforced disappearances. She not only fights for her justice but for the entire community who fight for the disappeared people. "I am not struggling for my son now but for all those who were disappeared" (164).

Haleema' voice is considered to be the voice of a thousand mothers who live in Kashmir losing their dear ones because of the military oppression. During the conflict, some innocents were killed while others went missing. The mothers became half mothers and women were raped and suffered from psychological trauma. It also says about the human nature and mental agony that Haleema had gone through. In the end, Haleema was admitted in a hospital and died with the unfulfilled desire. The last two words Haleema uttered before dying was "Imran saeba? Aakha?" Imran. Have you come?" (78). The pain of her son's disappearance made Haleema mentally shattered and leads her to death. These last words of Haleema shows the ray of hope in her life to see her son Imran. It was the only hope of finding her son that kept her alive. She would constantly keep on looking towards the door with the ray of hope that her son would come and knock at the door one day. Thus the novel started with Haleema's hope for her son and went through the mental and physical trauma and ended with her hope for her son to be returned. Hope means hoping even when things seems hopeless.

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