

## **Understanding the Plight of Kashmiri People: A Comparative Analysis of Rahul Pandita's "Our Moon Has Blood Clots" and Basharat Peer's "Curfewed Night"**

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### **Abstract**

The region of Kashmir has remained on the cover page of mainstream media and global platforms since the partition of India and Pakistan. Both countries are intact to govern the region. The Region has been witnessing bloodshed, violence and insurgency from the time of its formation as a state. As a result of this power struggle, the people of Kashmir have become the major victims of suffering. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, both have been victimized by the never ending bitter political fight. This research paper intends to examine the grief and plight of Kashmiri Muslims as well as Kashmiri Pandits. Rahul Pandita's "Our Moons Has Blood Clots" is his memoir which covers the cruelty on Kashmiri Pandits by extremists during 1990s. "Curfewed Night" is also a memoir by Basharat Peer that depicts his experiences in the wake of the insurgency in Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir in the 1990s.

**Keywords:** Plight, suffering, violence, narratives, Kashmiriyat

### **Introduction**

The state of Jammu and Kashmir or more commonly known as Kashmir is one of the constituent states of India. Historically, the region is widely referred as Kashmir Valley. Though modern era understanding of Kashmir deals majorly with the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, but Kashmir's real identity lies in its 5,000 years of history, and the competing claims on historical grievances. Over the course of time, Kashmir has been ruled by Kings from several authorities-Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Afghans, Sikhs, and Dogras. While the rulers kept changing, a large number of Kashmiri people in the past continued to feel they were un-represented, suppressed and oppressed. Kashmir's geographical location makes it strategically attractive, as it is situated between India, Pakistan, China and in close proximity to Russia. When India gained Independence from British Rule in 1947, it was subsequently partitioned into two countries; India and Pakistan. At the time of partition in 1947, the princely state of Kashmir was ruled by Hindu King, Hari Singh, despite its Muslim majority population. Hari Singh was left with the choice to either join India or Pakistan, or to remain independent.

Unlike the other princely states, which annexed themselves with either of the side, Maharaja Hari Singh wanted Kashmir to be an independent region. To avoid pressure to join either new country, the maharaja signed a standstill agreement with Pakistan that allowed citizens of Kashmir to continue trade and travel with the new country. As partition related violence irrupted throughout the region, the Pakistani government pressured Maharaja Hari Singh to join Pakistan. In September 1947, Pashtun Tribes man and other Pro-Pakistani militants

attacked on the Kashmir boarder. Maharaja Hari Singh asked for India's help, but India responded that, in order to gain military support, Kashmir would have to accede to India. Then in October 1947, after the signing the historical Instrument of Accession, the document that aligned Kashmir with the Dominion of India, but with the special status that Kashmir would have independence over everything but communication, defence and foreign affairs. This decision to align Kashmir with India resulted in decades of conflict in the Kashmir region, including two wars and a longstanding insurgency. Both countries have occupied their rule over the area and are governing the region as per their policies.

For a long time, Kashmir's historians have presented different views of the region's history-Sunni, Shia, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, rightist, leftist, liberal and conservative versions. But the most prominent conflict over the 'right' version of the history has been the Brahman-centric Kashmiri Pandits' version versus the Kashmiri Muslims' version. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits, both remain the major victims of the never-ending power tussle between India and Pakistan. Many of the Kasmiri people were disillusioned with the lack of consistent progress and developments through the democratic process. This sense of dissatisfaction resulted into uprisings of certain militant organizations in the late 1980s. With the external help of Pakistan, theses militant organizations continuously tried resist the control of Indian government. Militants started to target minority Kashmiri Pandits living in the valley. By the end of 1990s, this militancy had transformed into a full scale insurgency which forced many Kahmsiri Pandits to leave their homes. In response to insurgency, Indian government also initiated

military crackdown campaign against militants. Though militants have many sympathisers in the Kashmir, some of the times many innocent Kashmiri Muslims also came into the radar of investigation and criminal proceedings. Both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have suffered due to this political turmoil. Writers, activists and artists have represented their opinions and experiences of sufferings in their works. In order to comprehend the plight of Kashmiri People from both sides, this research paper intends to consider works of two different writers. One is Rahul Pandita who is a Kashmiri Pandit while the other writer is Basharat Peer, a Kashmiri Muslim.

Agha Shahid Ali, a renowned Kashmiri American poet, mirrors the catastrophic times and events of the 90s in one of his poems:

“...Empty? Because so many fled, ran away,  
and became refugees there, in the plains,  
where they must now will a final dewfall  
to turn the mountains to glass. They’ll see  
us through them-see us frantically bury  
houses to save them from fire that, like a wall,  
caves in. The soldiers light it, hone the flames,  
burn our world to sudden papier-mache...”

(A Country without a Post Office, 26)

● **Our Moon Has Blood Clots” by Rahul Pandita**

*Our Moon Has Blood Clots: The Exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits*, published in 2013, is a memoir about the lost home in Kashmir by Rahul Pandita. This self-narrative describes the author’s personal experience of having to leave his home in Kashmir in 1990, owing to a fear of persecution by the growing insurgency in the Kashmir Valley. Author says that he along with his family, were forced into exile, first from the valley to Jammu and then to Delhi. Like the other displaced Kashmiri Pandits, they became unsettled, unable to find out why they had been targeted, not only by "armed terrorists who took pride in killings" (Pandita, 115) but by "the common man on the street [who] participated in some of these heinous murders as well." (Pandita 115). Author was of the opinion that militant insurgency killed the essence of Kashmiriyat, the idea of religious harmony and co-existence.

**In his Interview, Rahul Pandita talks about his Book as**

“My book is called *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*. And it’s a memoir on growing up in Kashmir as a religious minority, essentially, Kashmiri Hindus, also known as Kashmiri Pandits—a small, miniscule community that lived in Kashmir for hundreds of years and were forced into permanent exile as refugees in their own country in 1989-90, when an Islamist movement broke out in Kashmir Valley.” (Forbes India).

Author shares horrible accounts of ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits and their subsequent exodus due to the armed militants’ uprising for the so called “Azadi” or freedom. The insurgency and counter-insurgency due to the non-resolution of Kashmir issue had heavy toll on the entire population of the region. Pandita writes, “But this word, Azadi, it frightens me. Images of those days return to haunt me. People out on the roads. People peering out of their windows. People on the rooftops of buses. In shikaras. And in mosques.”(Pandita, 9) The memoir is a moving description of lost home and subsequent difficulties faced by an entire community who were forced to live their life in exile in their own country. The whole story is told from the migrant’s

perspective which enables us to comprehend the complexities and hardships from which Kashmiri Pandits had to go. Pandita says,

“It was a pathetic existence. Many fell ill with diseases that were hitherto unknown to the community. In the first year alone, many elderly people died of sunstroke, and snake and scorpion bites. Children became infected with fungal disease, and scabies became rampant in the unhygienic camps. Doctors reported hundreds of cases of stress induced diabetes. Heart disease and hypertension made their way in our lives. Many fell into depression. There were severe privacy issues as well. Young couples were forced to live in small enclosures with parents. (Pandita, 130)” Rahul Pandita expresses his views on how Kashmiri Pandits felt marginalized on their own land. Both regional and religious authorities were failed to address their concerns and let them drown in the deep well of identity crisis. The story is divided into five parts. Part one deals with the history of Kashmir and its rulers. Author narrated that everything was in order before the insurgency. People of every religion and sect lived peacefully. Festivals like Eid and Shivratri were celebrated by both the communities with great fervour. In the second part of the book, author reveals the uprising of insurgency and reason of mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. The insurgent Kashmiri Muslims suspected Kashmiri Pandits as informers and collaborators of Indian Army. Insurgents started targeted killings of innocent Kashmiri Pandits. Kashmiri Pandits were ordered to leave the valley, “Advertisements had appeared in some Urdu newspapers. Released by various militant organisations, they asked the Pandits to leave the Valley immediately or face dire consequence” (Pandita 94). In part three of the book, author has described the hardships of immigrant Kashmiri Pandits staying at the refugee camps. They lacked basic necessities like clean drinking water, hygienic toilets and proper food. Kashmiri Pandits who left their home in Kashmir valley were not even treated with dignity in Jammu as well where they took shelter. Part four of the book tells the grief of Kashmiri Pandits in the past where they were raided by tribals from Pakistan. Many people were killed and looted by tribesman. Author describes an incident where Maqbool Sherwani, a member of National Conference misguided the tribesmen so they could never reach Srinagar and later he was brutally killed by the tribesman for his loyalty to India. Part five narrates the nostalgia for the past. Kashmir has become the memory for Kashmiri Pandits. Author finds that new generation has gradually alienated themselves from the love and attachment for their lost home. The book is not just the memoir about the author’s personal life but it is a tragic tale of a whole community. It presents the unheard story of the vulnerable people who left their homeland and suffered heavily with no fault of their own.

● **Curfewed Night” by Basharat Peer**

*Curfewed Night: A Frontline Memoir of Life, Love and War in Kashmir*, originally published in 2008, is a memoir on the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan, written by Indian American journalist Basharat Peer. The book represents the Peer’s personal accounts in the wake of the insurgency in Indian governed Jammu and Kashmir in the 1990s. Basharat Peer, born in Seer Hamdan in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir, is an Indian American journalist and writer. He lived his early years in Kashmir valley before shifting to Aligarh and then to Delhi for higher education. Later on he moved to New York City in the United

States where he is associated with The New York Times as an opinion editor.

In the wake of insurgency in and around 1990s, the major population of Kashmir have live under the psychological dilemma and sense of insecurity. Insurgency and anti-insurgency created havoc in lives of Kashmiri people. "Curfewed Night" covers the atrocities faced by Kashmiri people in the best vivid reportage that makes this book a significant narrative that hits hard at the heart of ongoing conflict. Peer describes how sufferings, humiliations and haunting memories of being judged as traitors have been affecting the mental conditions of the victims. Peer mentions an incident where his father and brother closely escape a militant attack which has huge psychological impacts on the lives of his family. As Author's father was a serving officer in Jammu and Kashmir Administration, militants considered him as an agent of the government and targeted him in a deadly attack. Bashrat peer honestly wrote down his own experiences which moulded his own mental psyche due to ongoing conflicts and propaganda spread by militants. Peer describes how children of Kashmir would be seen playing in the streets with fake wooden-guns slung around their shoulders and mimicking the soldiers patrolling the valley. We also find an incident where narrator's friend is mimicking a militant returning from Terrorist camp and raising war-cry slogans. Such incidents of young children psychologically affected with the cult of terrorism, violence and guns speaks a lot about the upbringing of Kashmiri children. Basharat Peer further narrates about the setting up of checkpoints and bunkers in the valley. Writer says that though these checkpoints were of the security purpose they were used to interrogate local civilians often asking their identities. Many persons walking through the checkpoints were made to stand by and exposed to the mental disturbance. Author describes in his words, "a soldier frisked them and checked their identity cards" (Peer, 20). Author further narrates though his father was a government servant, he would face certain checks and difficulties many times. He writes,

"Almost every time he came home, it took him around five hours. On a lucky day his bus would only be stopped every fifteen minutes at a military checkpost, he and other passengers made to stand in a queue, their raised hands holding an identity card and anything they carried—books and files in father's case. After a body search he would walk half a mile away from the checkpost and wait in another queue for the bus to arrive." (Peer, 18)

Such incident is shown in a bollywood film called "Haider" directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, where Basharat Peer himself made a cameo as a character standing in front of his own home for hours. The character seems to be mentally disturbed. But when another character named Roohdar which was played by Irrfan Khan, a fellow Kashmiri, comes and interrogate him asking his identity then only he enters his home. This shows how common people Kashmir have been mentally traumatized by continuous mental torture by authorities and militants alike. Peer further exposed the torture cells developed by the authorities, called Papa-1 and Papa-2, for interrogation of suspected militants and militants' sympathizers. Peer further explains that many suspects who were detained at the torture camps found floating dead in the rivers. Peer describes how hundreds of young Kashmiri boy were forcefully picked up and brutally tortured by the authorities on the suspicions of possible alliance with insurgents. "Hundreds who were taken to Papa-2 did not return. Those who returned were wrecks" (Peer, 137). These

victims of torture would live with the shattered memories of brutality for rest of their lives which further resulted in their alienation from mainstream democratic values. Peer also exposed the corruption prevailing in bureaucracy where officials use to demand bribes for sanctioning monetary reliefs. He exposes this nexus with his words,—"The files do not move by itself from one table to another. Out of the relief money of one lakh, the applicant has to spend 25 percent to thirty thousand rupees. Otherwise he will visit Years visiting offices. And once he pays that, we ensure that his name in the compensation Job list goes up and things move fast." (P. 164). Basharat Peer ends his narrative with positive hope with the resumption of bus services Srinagar and Muzaffarabad which reunites the divided families as sign of positive future. This memoir is an emotional account of author's immense love for his homeland, his pain suffered due to political turmoil and the joy of reuniting with his fellow Kashmiris. The major characteristic of this moving tale is author's unbiased representation of Kashmiri people's plight.

### Conclusion

Both authors have represented their anguish and trauma through their own experiences. We conclude and comprehend that both major victim communities, Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims, have suffered a huge amount of pain, grief and psychological disturbances due to non-resolution of Kashmir Issue. Every major armed effort to tackle the conflict has resulted into further clashes and failure. We seriously need to introspect our ways of looking down the conflict and ways to bring acceptable resolution for the same. We have to acknowledge the fact that War and Arms can win only soil but not the people. Plight of Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims can't be ignored or justified at any cost. Rahul Pandita explains though many people have returned to their homeland but just to find out that emotional gap between the two communities have been further stretched with no fault of their own. In order to bring back the lost harmony and real essence of Kashmiriyat, mutual dialogues and social interconnectedness is the only solutions.

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