

## Half Motherhood and Beyond: Trauma, Schizophrenia and Resistance in Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother*

Syeda Saba Zahra<sup>1\*</sup>

### Abstract

This research paper explores the re-conceptualization and revision of the idea of motherhood in *The Half Mother* by Shahnaz Bashir (2014). The protagonist, Haleema, is the embodiment of numerous Kashmiri mothers of the 1990s torn between political violence, personal loss, and social desertion. Her cheating husband abandons her when she is pregnant; she finds shelter with her father, Ghulam Rasool Joo, and there she gives birth to her only son, Imran. Her future history is marked by traumatic events, first of all the cruel killing of her father by Indian soldiers, and then the kidnapping of her adolescent son by the same forces. The title of the novel is an indication of her fragmented identity as a 'half mother' who is in a constant state of limbo concerning the fate of her son. The mental consequences of the long-term trauma and solitude are shown when she slowly falls apart emotionally and eventually develops schizophrenia. Her psychosis is an expression of the highly personal price of an unresolved loss and the wider phenomenon of the collective silencing of women in conflict zones. This research study applies the psychoanalytic theory of schizophrenia formulated by Fromm-Reichmann (1959) to analyze the factors that lead to the decline in the mental state of Haleema. Furthermore, it adds to the debate about women in conflict literature by showing how the novel by Bashir reinvents maternal identity as both vulnerable and protesting. Therefore, by placing the experience of Haleema into this theoretical context, this study investigates the overlaps of motherhood, trauma, and mental illness whilst pre-empting the resistance of Kashmiri women to systemic violence.

**Keywords:** Schizophrenia, Mental Illness, Motherhood, Loneliness, Trauma.

<sup>1</sup> PhD Scholar, Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, Germany

\*Corresponding author's E-mail: [zahra\\_syeda@live.com](mailto:zahra_syeda@live.com)

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## Introduction

In a harrowing account of the pursuit of motherhood, Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* (2014) follows Haleema, whose husband cheats on her and then abandons her only three months after their marriage. Haleema seeks refuge in her father's home and gives birth to her only son, Imran. For a short time, the three of them live in peace, until their lives are irrevocably changed by the intervention of the Indian Army. Her father, Ab Jaan, is mercilessly shot by three bullets by the army officers, and later, Haleema's son Imran is abducted as a teenager, while Haleema is left to suffer loneliness and despair on her own. Freida Fromm-Reichmann (1959) states in her model of psychoanalysis that chronic loneliness not only results in emotional pain but also can be deadly, speeding up conditions like Alzheimer's, high blood pressure, heart disease, and schizophrenia. Shulevitz (2013) also supports this argument with the fact that vulnerability to contracting such illnesses is heightened when loneliness is abundantly present. Within this structure, Haleema's relentless search for her son traces Haleema's slow descent from sanity into insanity, where words of comfort or consolation no longer hold a purpose. Her refusal to celebrate Eid, which was coupled with the statement "her Eid would be the return of her son" (p. 179), encapsulates both her shattered motherhood and the intensity of her relentless grief.

The powerful narrative of the novel helps the reader envision all her struggles, living through her experience; the reader stands equally with her in all her efforts, in her pain, and in her destructive isolation, which leads to her death, ending the only bit of hope in the reader's mind. Tragedy upon tragedy befalls Haleema; her tragedies are countless, but she is alone, she has to face the cruel circumstances all by herself because her fate is redecided and rewritten by the Army, depriving her of all her protectors in a war-stricken world. Haleema begins to believe that the things around her respond to her when she talks to them,

She began talking to herself or to the 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. (p. 69)

This research paper looks at the tapestry of a woman's life as she transitions from mother to mothering to something more than mothering. The quality 'beyond' in her character represents how she, as a mother,

transcends her basic instinct of self-preservation and instead suffers for the love of her only son. Unable to save him from the so-called protectors of the state, she falls to the ground on the dirt road and cries, "I am a perforated soul, my son" (p. 57). This study gives voice to the silent strength of thousands of Kashmiri mothers of the 1990s whose sustenance was possible only through their children. It also conveys the sense of how, for women such as Haleema, the present and the uncertainty of the future become unbearable, and all they have left are memories of the past from which they can only draw a fragile comfort.

The application of Fromm-Reichmann psychoanalytic theory is achieved through a number of analytical steps in an effort to enhance the methodological appropriateness of this study. The initial one focuses on locating narrative points where Haleema displays behavior that is consistent with clinical signs described by Fromm-Reichmann, such as fragmentation of identity, disorganized perception, and withdrawal from external reality. The symptoms are identified by analyzing Haleema's shifting self-perception, her inability to maintain coherent boundaries between past and present, and psychological spaces whenever she confronts traumatic memories. By mapping the symptoms onto the narrative structure in this way, the analysis is no longer limited to the surface-level interpretation, but it creates a methodological gap between the clinical theory and the literary representation.

The second step is to trace these symptoms throughout the text by paying close attention to the speech patterns of Haleema, frequent dream imagery, and dissociative reaction towards violence and displacement. These literary signs are not considered metaphorical embellishments but structural mechanisms that can be used to understand the psychic outcomes of continuous political trauma. By viewing Haleema as incoherent, her sudden silences and hallucinatory memories as symptoms of schizophrenic withdrawal, the research shows that Bashir has coded the trauma into the very fiber of her characterization. The systematic approach to it is necessary to base the psychoanalytic framework on the concrete reality in the novel and to interpret the image created of Haleema as a multifaceted process of psycho-sufferings versus a violent sociopolitical environment that determines her inner reality.

## **Literature Review**

The 1990s are seen as one of the darkest times in the history of Kashmir when curfews, bloodshed, disappearances, and systematic violations of human rights were the order of the day. Women were a disproportionate

target of this violence, as they were subjected not only to humiliation and social vulnerability but also to extreme psychological trauma due to the loss of the person they loved. Human Rights Watch (1993) records how enforced disappearance in Kashmir spawned a state of perennial uncertainty, as women were suspended between hope and despair, incapable of reaching closure. Seema Kazi (2007) goes further to suggest that militarization in Kashmir not only caused physical but also profound mental violence on women; grief, waiting, and uncertainty became part of the daily suffering.

Although Haleema is not harmed physically, because of the loss of her son to forced disappearance, she is affected mentally and emotionally. The fact that she has found herself waiting endlessly, lonely, and psychologically degenerated into schizophrenia speaks of how militarized violence in Kashmir is not only body-attacking, but also mind and identity-attacking, and leaves women like her permanently fractured. "For all such uncertain cases for women whose husbands have disappeared, we will prefix their status with 'Half', Advocate Farooq Ahmad explained" (p. 142). Unable to resolve the conflict of whether her son was still alive or dead, Haleema becomes a half mother, "So am I a half mother?" (p. 143).

Shahnaz Bashir has attempted to expose the pain, agony, mental instability, misery, and helplessness of thousands of mothers of 1990's Kashmir through the character of Haleema. The tyrannical holders of power always try to silence these stories of helplessness according to their own desires or as it may benefit them. The novel is filled with grim and realistic details of brutalization and mourning in 1990's pre-war Kashmir. Not sure whether to mourn over her son's death, Haleema dies every single moment in his torturous absence. As the novel proceeds, the search for her son begins; the reader expects at every turn that some detail or a word of hope might bring some relief to her broken heart. The author of the novel successfully brings to light the state of fear, desperation, and the threat that the people of Kashmir face even today. The condition of Jammu and Kashmir is still pretty much the same. As *The Kashmir Today* writes, thousands of Kashmiri women are still waiting to see their sons who have been taken as enforced disappearances (2014), and this truth is strongly expressed in *The Half Mother* by Bashir. Haleema lives in this shared pain in the novel; the days of her life are defined by the rise of a desire unknown to rest, an ache in endless suspension. Unraveling, schizophrenic and lonely, her mind is inextricably linked to the collective trauma of hundreds of women, whose

lives have been framed not by what exists, but what hurts desperately unnoticed.

Loneliness has long been recognized as an important psychosocial stressor that can make people vulnerable to serious mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia. Fromm-Reichmann (1959) puts forward the argument that it is not only the lack of social interaction that is considered a real loneliness, but the lack of intimacy, which can be as painful as a physical ailment. Similarly, Cacioppo and Cacioppo (2018) highlight that chronic loneliness has impacts on neurobiological systems that generate stress responses that increase vulnerability to psychiatric disorders. Taken together, these views emphasize the importance of considering the prolonged experience of loneliness not only as an emotional experience but also as a key factor in the development of psychotic symptoms.

In order to place the psychoanalytic reading into a more modern and intersectional context, this work takes into consideration the findings of trauma and feminist theory. The concept of trauma as something that cannot be fully understood at the moment but rather returns in fragmented and deferring ways can be used as a very interesting prism through which to interpret all of the flashbacks that Haleema constantly experiences, her intrusive thoughts, and shattered memories. Indications of feminist trauma research, especially captivity, powerlessness, and dissolved basic trust, also help understand how the mental health issues of Haleema are conditioned by the repressive system of military-controlled power that constantly interferes with her feelings of security and independence. Also, the concept of postmemory is used to suggest how the violence and discontinuities of the Kashmir political arena are transgenerational and can determine the identity of women based on fear, grief, and unprocessed collective trauma inherited. Combined, these theoretical frameworks enrich the psychoanalytic reading by situating the struggles of Haleema, in terms of her psychology, in the wider conceptualizations of the meaning of trauma, gender experience, and historical memory.

Based on this theoretical background, the paper further compares the story of Haleema to the available literature on the Kashmiri women who have been subjected to a longstanding conflict. Analogues of gendered violence, limited mobility, militarized surveillance, and imposed silence point to the conditions that are almost similar to the social and psychological life of Haleema. Reading this literature, it is now obvious that Haleema is not unique with her trauma but that her experiences are prevalent among other women in militarized Kashmir. Placing the novel

in the context of these larger discourses, the analysis highlights both how the figure of Haleema is informed by and contributes to current debates about women suffering, their strength, and the many manifestations of resistance that occur in societies engulfed in civil wars.

In addition, empirical studies have provided evidence for the relationship between loneliness and schizophrenia, and studies have shown that people with a lower social network are at an increased risk for psychotic experiences. Michalska da Rocha et al. (2018) demonstrated that loneliness is significantly correlated with paranoia and hallucinations in schizophrenia spectrum disorders and that social isolation increases symptom severity in these disorders. Further, Lim et al. (2016) note that loneliness amplifies the symptoms (both positive and negative) in schizophrenia while at the same time compromising the quality of life. These results shed light on the vicious circle in which loneliness contributes both to the development of schizophrenia and to its clinical course.

Loneliness, recent research also shows that it not only increases the symptoms of schizophrenia, but it also undermines recovery by inhibiting hope and resilience. Randolph et al. (2025) argue that there are consistently high prevalence rates of loneliness and, in turn, loneliness was associated with worse mental health outcomes and lower life satisfaction among people living with schizophrenia. Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010) also report that loneliness activates biological and psychological processes that make coping abilities worse, which makes it much harder to recover from mental illnesses. These lessons lay a critical structure for understanding Haleema's descent in *The Half Mother*, where isolation and a sense of unresolved grief give way to schizophrenia, reflecting both the individual and the collective wounds of Kashmiri women.

The unconscious world of the imagination, which is commonly the first and only place where a person can find the strength and bravery to do that, is a place where most people find shelter from the harsh realities of life. For Haleema, this imaginary escape takes flight with her lived experience as she becomes the symbolic voice of Kashmir herself. Her words and actions in the novel resonate not just with her but with the collective pain of thousands of her fellow Kashmiris who have been subjected to oppressive regimes for many years. One personal tragedy after another, coupled with the enormous burden of loneliness, gradually destroys her mental balance and thrusts her into schizophrenia. Haleema's psychological disintegration therefore mirrors not just her personal battle,

but also the pain and the ineradicable trauma of an entire community, silenced by conflict.

Chopan (2015) highlights in “Psychic Trauma of a Bereaved Mother” that the loss of her only son is responsible for taking Haleema from sanity to schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is largely a result of extreme loneliness and is a psychological condition in which the emotional pain of losing a child can lead to a wide variety of psychological and physiological problems, such as depression, anxiety, and cognitive and physical disturbances. Haleema begins to talk to the wall, nails, and other things belonging to Imran, “Haleema says she has been talking to walls since ages- perhaps with the cracks and nails too” (p. 173). People suffering from schizophrenia prefer to be left alone, and they are also fascinated by the idea of suicide.

The mysteriously disappeared Imran creates a deeply poignant narrative that traces the relentless search of a mother to reclaim the only reason of her existence. She has not yet recovered from the tragedy of her father’s death when her son is also taken away from her. She remains a half mother for the rest of her life, struggling to find her son to become a complete mother again, “The greatest of suffering brings the greatest of hopes, the greatest of miseries the greatest patience, and the greatest uncertainties lead to the greatest quests” (p. 03).

## Research Methodology

The research design used in this study is a qualitative research design because it explores the narrative, psychological, and thematic aspects of *The Half Mother* (2014) by Shahnaz Bashir. The qualitative method is especially suitable in this work since it focuses more on close reading, interpretive depth, and contextual analysis, which is the key to studying the construction of trauma, motherhood, and mental illness in conflict literature. This approach to the novel, which includes paying close attention to its language and narrative holes, figurative imagery, and behavior of characters, makes it possible to have a finer sense of why Haleema is depicted in this or that psychological position and how her fragmentation is a mirror of bigger sociopolitical influences. Qualitative inquiry, unlike the quantifiable results, aims at gathering meanings that are not solely objective but closely linked with the process of meaning-making; this allows the researcher to look at the depth of emotional, cultural, and psychological meaning contained within the text.

The paper is based on primary and secondary data. The key source, *The Half Mother* (2014), offers the main story on the basis of which scenes of psychological disruption, lamenting motherhood, and emotional seclusion are chosen to be discussed closely. This reading is backed by secondary texts such as academic criticism, theoretical discussions, psychoanalytic theories, and scientific research on trauma and loneliness available in academic databases. Particular attention is paid to the concept of loneliness as one of the predisposing factors of psychological deterioration, which is proven by psychobiological studies that reveal that long-term isolation interferes with emotional control and leads to increased susceptibility to such disorders as depression and schizophrenia. The combination of the literary analysis and the results of the research on trauma, feminist theory, and psychological science provides the methodology with a multidisciplinary theoretical base for interpreting the schizophrenia in Haleema's character as a literary element and a mirror of the facts that women in conflict areas live in.

## Research Problem

The role of the mother in *The Half Mother* (2014) comes out as a complicated representation of power, pain, and a shattered psyche. The story of a woman whose son is forcefully taken away and whose father is horrendously killed reveals the numerous and quite conflicting roles women must play in militarized communities. Being left by her husband and having to bear the burden of motherhood on her own, Haleema turns into a half-mother who cannot be sure of everything and tries to find the child who is never coming back. The contradiction of how Kashmiri women are at once placed as rebellious spectators of state violence, as agents of family memory, as people deprived of patriarchal agency, and as women unable to stop the repetitive patterns of loss can be seen through her experiences. On this note, the story of Haleema is not a pure identity; it is a negotiation point of roles that the literature rarely keeps together in the same female form. A gradual slip by the mother into schizophrenia, which is characterized by instances such as the mother talking to the dead walls in her lonely house, is an allegorical expression of trauma that has not been resolved, psychic fracture, and extreme isolation.

Loneliness, which is aggravated by political violence and being left by her family, not only serves as a catalyst to her mental breakdown, but also serves as a metaphor of the invisibility of the suffering of Kashmiri women as a whole. Although current research in the conflict zones frequently focuses on trauma, resistance, or gendered violence, they

rarely consider the intersection of these identities in the inner world of one woman. This paper thus aims at filling this gap by examining how Kashmiri mothers are portrayed in literature as composite beings whose identities are protesting, caring, dependent, and suffering at the same time. It also explores the pernicious overlap of solitude and schizophrenia in the novel, by claiming that the psychological breakdown of Haleema is not only a personal tragedy but also a larger statement about the muffled emotionality of women who are subjects of militarized occupation.

## Research Questions

1. How does Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* imagine the maternal subject as both warrior, nurturer, dependent, and sufferer in the socio-political conditions of occupied Kashmir?
2. To what extent does unresolved trauma, compounded by loneliness and loss, precipitate Haleema's psychological deterioration and schizophrenia?
3. How does the story of the 'half mother' complicate traditional gender roles by putting women's resistance and agency at the center of the narrative in the face of militarized violence and patriarchal abandonment?

## Analysis

In the quest for her son, Haleema ignores her health, and her health starts to deteriorate, and she develops schizophrenia. At one point, when she has completely lost control of herself in the SSP's office, she grabs a rifle from a guard and holds it to her chest, demanding that he pull the trigger to kill her. As Reichmann (1959) notes, loneliness is so horrifying and uncanny in its quality that those who go through it try to disassociate themselves not only from the memory of it but even from the fear it induces. Haleema's descent into schizophrenia is characterized by her slow distancing from reality; she starts to talk to inanimate objects and expresses a desire for death, a sign of the lack of moral and emotional support essential to survival. Yet amidst her shattering condition, there is hope left inside; every time a knock on the door sounds, her heart shivers with anticipation, believing, "It is him, perhaps, it is him" (p. 112).

There is nothing more isolating than not having anyone to talk to, which is why Haleema relies on her walls, nails, and the things her son owns as stand-ins for human company. Her schizophrenia, exacerbated by the

loneliness and the insomnia, is a manifestation of the many interacting factors that make the symptoms of her disorder much worse, where the overwhelming life experiences are the triggers for the symptoms of her disorder. The only fix for her deteriorating mental health would have been Imran's return, a return that never happens. As a result, she deteriorates and experiences an endless cycle of grief, hope, and psychological disintegration.

Haleema, the half mother, is the representative of countless women of 1990's Kashmir who lost their children, husbands, relatives, and dear ones at the hands of merciless Indian army officers. Haleema's father is brutally killed in front of her eyes, "Three bullets were pumped into Ab Jaan. One in the neck. One in the heart. One in the stomach. The rapid staccato startled the birds in the plum trees" (p. 49). She witnesses the whole scene, slapping her face and her chest; she pulls her hair and begins to mourn over the loss of her father. According to Reichmann (1959), loneliness appears in its real form only when there is a lack of real intimacy.

Haleema's mother passed away when she was only eight years old. Being the only child of her parents, the responsibility of all the domestic chores was put on her shoulders after her mother's death. "Slowly, the chores became a habit; the habit seeped into her and then became a part of her" (p. 10). When she got divorced by her husband, she did not know that she was pregnant. Only a few months after the marriage was over, the news of her pregnancy was no less than a shock for her. Haleema gave birth to a baby boy and tasted the essence of motherhood for the first and the last time in her life. She loved to play with his tiny fists and fingers, "And sometimes for reasons unknown to her as well, paint his tiny fingernails red" (p. 14). Here, the reader might think that she wanted to have a daughter rather than a son. Had it been a daughter, it would have been easier for Haleema to overcome her mother's absence. Though he looks lesser like Haleema and more like his father, all her life she remains resolute in claiming Imran as hers only, "Ignoring the stark similarities between him and his father, Haleema passionately and desperately lied to herself" (p. 16), this shows her sense of possession and her feeling of security as he will grow up to be the man who would always protect her.

Human suffering is often only incomprehensible to others until they themselves experience a similar thing, and sharing in that pain creates empathy in ways that do not happen otherwise. Haleema goes through such an unbearable ordeal when she sees the brutal abduction of her son by the Indian army officers. In a moment of desperation, Imran screams,

“Ammi! Save me” (p. 55), in which Haleema cries for mercy, calling out, “You killed my father! Give me a companion for I cannot die alone!” (p. 56). This crucial moment becomes the starting point of both the ceaseless search of Haleema and the main plot of the novel, making the text into a story of search in which Haleema and the readers join hands in the hopeless search for Imran across Kashmir. This torture robs Haleema of rest, and in the morning her neighbors notice the effects of her suffering, “Her face was pale and dry like a corpse's” (p. 61).

Once while she is cooking in the kitchen for herself, she is reminded of her time with Ab Jaan and Imran, both of them are gone. Gone with them is the fragrance of her happiness, “The vegetable reminded her of meals with Ab Jaan and Imran. Of happier times. Times full of conversation and laughter” (p. 04). She is reminded of them again and again because their memories never leave her rather those bitter-sweet memories always haunt her. The things around her bring back the memories buried in her mind, she is tired of everything around her; tired of being brave, perhaps.

Haleema begins to think that her life has become useless, the idea of suicide keeps hovering over her mind again and again, but she always gives up on this idea because she knows that how much her life is precious for both herself and her son; both of them do not have any one else but each other. Even after Imran is gone, she begins to imagine him screaming for help, calling her name aloud, calling for water, as he did on the day he was captured. “Water! I couldn't even give him a tumbler of water! But how could I?” (p. 58). Her imagination keeps her guilt alive, she feels restless because of her helplessness and severe loneliness, whereas this loneliness proves to be lethal for her, her health is ruined, and hence, she dies in the end of the novel.

Haleema does not give up as long as she is alive, she goes to see politicians, local reporters, and she also seeks help from the BBC correspondent's office. The news of Imran's disappearance is published in a local newspaper, the headline says, “*Haleema ka Dugna Sadma-Haleema's Double Tragedy*” (p. 78). She reads the newspaper many times, it gives her some kind of relief and she hopefully begins to think that her son would be brought back to her now. Unfortunately, this ray of hope also diminishes as days go by. Her loneliness is not simply a desire for company, any company; she desires the companionship of who she considered hers, Imran.

Women whose husbands disappeared could not be declared widows because no one was sure if their husbands were dead or still alive. “For

all such uncertain cases for women whose husbands have disappeared, we will prefix their status with "Half," Advocate Farooq Ahmad explained" (p. 142). Unable to resolve the conflict if her son was still alive or dead Haleema becomes a half mother, she remains a half mother for the rest of her life, struggling to find her son to become a complete mother again. Unfortunately, she dies as a half mother.

Haleema goes into the SSP's office and is told that her son might be in the army hospital. This army hospital is situated behind Badami Bagh Cantonment; she visits the hospital and sees many captive young boys and men, fingerless, limbless, hairless, toothless, eyeless, and earless, because of the torture they receive from the army officers during interrogation. Haleema feels moved after seeing this horrible scene and begins to think about Imran, "*Has Imran gone through the same treatment?*" (p. 80). For a moment, she thinks about it and then gives up on this disturbing idea and prays to God for Imran's welfare. She asks everyone in the hospital about Imran, but does not get any clue from anyone. "Time had stopped for her, and now she waited for it to unfreeze itself" (p. 80). Then comes May, the beginning of summer, which is the most difficult time of the year for Haleema's poor lungs. Though the air is fresh, it is filled with pollen and dust particles, making it hard for people with poorly functioning lungs.

Haleema turns to a politician for help in finding her son, a man who is far more complicated than she realizes: "He knew such cases well and treated them mechanically. It was common to listen to the grievances, express great sympathy, and to treat each seeker for help as a potential voter" (p. 81). Haleema shares her tragic story with him, and his assurance that he would "look into the matter" is her only hope. Hence, she starts visiting his house often, and all her expectations are linked with him. However, in a matter of days, the politician displays his exploitative ambitions by stating she must "think about herself too," that she is "wasting her beauty and her time", and that if she really wants Imran to back her, she would need to "spend a little bit of personal time with him". He goes even further to trap her by playing on her desperation, he says that he has already sent a message across to search for Imran and is sure that her son would be with her on the Independence Day, "the tone of his assurance was so convincing that Haleema carelessly rejected the idea of slapping him for his suggestive proposal" (p. 83). Haleema then, without a word, to save her son, sacrifices her self-respect, and walks away only to find that her submission brings her nothing; this increases the depth of her pain.

In search for her lost son, Haleema also loses herself bit by bit with the passage of time. She marks a cross on each day in a calendar that she has to spend without Imran. She sits and keeps counting the cross-marked days until her back becomes sore and her body numb. There is no possible way in which she could enjoy a peaceful slumber. “She had grown habitually insomniac now. Dark brown patches had developed under her eyes. Incipient wrinkles criss-crossed her face, while her cheeks had begun to sag” (p. 84). Haleema’s cruel fate makes her look older than her age. Constant struggle and mourning over the loss of her dear ones do not spare her enough time to look after herself. She does not give up even when the SHO suggests that she should give up, rather on the Eid day she goes to visit the place ‘Papa 2’ where captives are kept, she hopes to find her son there, but she does not get anything from there, but she keeps waiting and waiting, and this waiting does not seem to end anywhere. “Hours passed; she waited and wriggled. Her mouth had dried up. She was feeling thirsty, hungry, and suicidal. Yet each time she thought of death, she felt strictly accountable to life. It was the hope of seeing Imran that made her feel so” (p. 87). In such a worse time, the animal instinct asks her to leave for home, take some rest, eat, drink, and sleep, but the ‘beyond’ makes her transcend her human limits, where she forgets about her health and herself. She waits a bit longer, but her physical capacity is over-exhausted, and she has no choice but to leave.

On her way back, she meets a woman who is holding her released son on her back, his name is Rehbar, and he is unable to walk on his own because of the constant torture he had to face as a captive in the cell. Rehbar tells her that he knew her son, but then he was shifted to Papa 2 and he never heard about Imran anymore. This news brings hope into her life again: “*Really? What was he saying? How is he? Where is he now?*” (p. 89). Haleema asks him more about Imran, Rehbar tells her, “... he said his mother was alone and whom he was sulking with because she had not come to take him home” (p. 90). These words shatter Haleema’s heart, but she does not let it bring her hope down, and she asks him if there is a way she can get there to see her son. Rehbar tells her that there is no way to see Imran, but he also tells her about the barber whose name is Abdus Salam, who had shaved her son’s head once. She has to narrate the whole story of her pain to the barber when she sees him. Every time she has to narrate her story to someone who does not know about her, her trauma is aggravated.

In a way, it was now a strange, a different kind of psychological torture to be compelled to tell her story to anyone from the beginning in proper order, without missing a single detail, till the end. With time she had begun to

forget details. She would remember them later, after finishing the narration, and would remind the listener of the details she had missed. (p. 94).

The barber tells her that he once saw Imran, then he was shifted to some other place with the other prisoners, and he has no idea where that place could be. He further tells her that Imran was fine when he last saw him.

That night, Haleema dreams of seeing Imran sitting in Abdus Salaam's shop. She approaches him and requests him to come home with her, but his reply breaks her, "You didn't look for me in the places where I was" (p. 98). Haleema tells him that she looked for him everywhere like a 'mad woman', but Imran goes away and disappears into thin air while she keeps shouting his name, asking him to come back. She does not give up and calls his name even louder but, "In an instance, a high barbwire-topped wall comes between Haleema and Imran. She tries to climb the wall, but she slips and tumbles down, hitting the ground", she wakes up all drenched in sweat and she is continuously muttering the following words, "I looked for you! I looked for you everywhere..." (p. 99). Later in the novel, Haleema decides to pay Rehbar a visit again because he is the only one with whom she can talk about Imran, but on her way to his house, she learns from another passenger on the bus that Rehbar has been killed by the Indian army officers. She further tells her that his body was thrown into the forest, and a local shepherd found it. This news shatters all her hopes. Haleema finds not even a single moment's peace after hearing about Rehbar's brutal murder; she is not able to free her mind of the dark thoughts.

Haleema's fate spins in a surprising direction when she meets her estranged husband in a clinic, the man who had cheated on her and had left her at a time of great vulnerability. By this point, she has no feelings for him at all, not even sympathy, because her problems have given her something more to worry about than the collapse of her marriage. Yet beneath the surface, his sudden reappearance unsettles her, reminding her that human beings can never fully remove themselves from their past, regardless of how hard they try to do so. Her feelings of loss as a mother are further intensified when she sees a woman on the street smiling lovingly up at her child, a sight which reminds her of both her bitterness, and her sorrow for the loss of her own child, "It is better to live in a sewage pipe with your son than to live alone in this world" (p. 123).

Sympathy and empathy are crucial elements of human life, but they are not necessarily healing. Sometimes, after repeating the expressions of

sympathy, nothing brings any real solace, and if anything, it just increases the pain. In such situations, one is forced to endure a fixed stare of sympathy without the expectation of healing; this too can be a form of psychological abuse, “empty sympathy felt like alms given in charity, which she despised” (p. 140).

When Haleema realizes that she is not the only one suffering from the loss of her dear ones, there are many others, she decides to form a unified organization to raise her voice and demand justice from the holders of power. The organization is named “Association of Relatives of the Disappeared Persons,” and Haleema was made the head of this organization by other people. Haleema and a few others visit a local politician and present their case before him, and he says that the state cannot help them because nobody knows if their missing relatives have already crossed the border; this is something where the state can do nothing for them. Haleema responds,

We've become beggars, as you can see. Had they been killed by the army in front of us, we would have stayed put and silent throughout our lives, and with no expectations, no hopes, and no despair. But this longing is a pain. An eternal torture. It has not abated for a second. It kills us every day and resurrects us every morning to kill us again. Please feel for us. (p. 151)

As the novel proceeds, a colonel of justice offers her enough financial resources to lead the rest of her life peacefully, but she turns his offer down as it would bring her no solace. She is told by the same colonel that the Major who abducted her son had died, to help her feel a little relieved. Contrarily, this news saddens her even more, as that Major was the only person who could tell her about her son's whereabouts, but he is gone, and gone with him is her last hope of finding her son. Somehow, she musters up the courage and hope again, “*I have to keep hoping, I cannot be defeated like this. I cannot lose him like this. I have to go home and keep waiting. Yes. That is the only thing I have to do.*” (p. 154). Izhar, the BBC reporter in the novel, plays the role of a pivotal supporter for Haleema in her lonesome journey; in his notes at the end of the novel, he writes that he is worried about Haleema's health, “But I know medicines aren't enough. What she needs is company” (p. 163)

Haleema's continuous hope, ironically enough, is what turns out to be her source of suffering and the basis of her perseverance. Consequently, her existence represents the contradiction of endurance created by

desperation, in which the experience of waiting is an act of survival. In this respect, Haleema is a psychological portrayal of millions of Kashmiri women whose power does not lie in their ability to come to terms but in their ability to endure unfulfilled desire. She remains steadfast in her cause to stand up for the people who have lost their loved ones until the end of her life, "Haleema stands, and, supporting her back with her hands, speaks fiercely to the gathering" (p. 164). She tells Izhar that this struggle has become her life, and it has given her a new sense of purpose.

## Conclusion

*The Half Mother* (2014) is a brave declaration of the intolerable loneliness, trauma, and survival of Kashmiri women living under the cycles of political violence, as embodied in Haleema's story. Haleema, rejected by her community but supported by her personal declining strength, is the reflection of some kind of maternal sorrow that is so deep that it not only breaks her psyche but also gives her the strength to live. Not only does her schizophrenia become a clinical effect of the loss, but it also becomes an embodiment of a grief that does not want to be contained. Under the incessant pressure of endless tragedy, her hopes are up and down, but she never gives up her quest for her lost son. In this undying struggle, Haleema changes into a subject of resistance, an average woman whose shattered body and collapsing mind cannot yet acknowledge the end of defeat. In this regard, Haleema is broken by the loss, yet she never becomes broken spiritually; her disillusioned life gets recorded in the history of resilience that is etched in the memory of oppressed people.

Simultaneously, the novel demonstrates the essentiality of literature in voicing narratives that are sought to be suppressed by political systems. In a society where official discourses have rendered suffering invisible and reduced individual experiences to a one-dimensional plane, literature seems to play a significant role in counter-narrative or, to put it differently, one that brings the lives of those who have been elevated into the one-dimensional system into view again. *The Half Mother* reinvents motherhood not as a singular condition but as a complex one, which is shaped by struggle, which makes women fighters, nurturers, survivors, and reluctant reporters of a communal agony. The novel goes beyond recording suffering, because through its account of grief, isolation, and cultural trauma, it challenges readers to face facts that are normally hidden or downplayed in mainstream accounts. In turning individual suffering into collective memory, the text performs an act of protest to make sure that the plight of the women on the fringes is not forgotten or

disapproved. Finally, the novel concludes with a statement of literature as a witness, to maintain, confront, and challenge history by maintaining a place where such voices are oppressed by history.

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