Kashmiri WomenArticulating Stories of Resistance in Freny Manecksha's *Behold I Shine*

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ABSTRACT: Colonization in the Global South was ultimately brought down by home-grown nationalism. But many former colonies inherited ideological and geographical anomalies. In this regard, in Indian continent after the partition of 1947 Kashmir, the once-fabled place, turned out to be the most contentious territory having witnessed a bloodbath of violence sprawling well over decades of militant struggle by the local population for *Azadi* (freedom) from India. In August, 2020 the BJP-led right wing Indian Government through an arbitrary parliamentary amendment deprived Kashmir of its special status giving way to a resurgent wave of Kashmiri nationalism in collusion with Hindu colonialism. Other than anything else Kashmir is now a settler colony of India. Kashmiri literature has responded to this situation aggressively and has shown concerns that not only freedom is a matter of holding a tract of land but of securing their identity and tradition being consistently erased. In more recent times front line journalism both by Indians and Kashmiri diaspora have taken the burden of dispensing stories of Kashmiri people, the victims of violence and displacement however women the worst victims of violence are not given a space to articulate their predicaments and traumas. Freny Manecksha's *Behold, I Shine* (2017) is a groundbreaking book harboring and navigating stories of women and children, the victims of sexual abuse. This paper argues that set in the genre of creative non-fiction Manecksha's stories blur the boundary between fact and fiction acquiring a counteractive edge suggesting women despite being ostracized and shunned by a patriarchal culture are no more scared of telling their stories of sexual abuse. Stories of half-widows, teenage girls, and mothers reveal real life sufferings. Consequently, a story by victim-survivor is the most legitimate voice of personal and political resistance.

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If there is a paradise on earth,
It is this, it is this, it is this
Amir Khusro

Kashmir sinks into my mailbox
….. This is home.
Agha Shahid Ali

Storytelling is as old as human history. The very idea behind narrating a story is of sharing one's perspective. From an anthropological perspective, storytelling is a gregarious activity. Our oldest ancestors had stories to tell. The earliest of our stories were oral until they started appearing in written form. Everyone carries a story however everyone does not take the initiative of narrating a story. Therefore, many stories either remain unheard or buried under the debris of time and history. Arguably, in a story, the author on behalf of his personae projects his vision of an event. Therefore, a story the can be called mere fiction, and yet, it is also rooted in reality. So, great stories have sprung from great historical epochs, from particular events, and cultural contexts. When a story is a confession of one's intimate life it is an autobiography and when it recalls one's life it is called a memoir. Stories, autobiographies, and memoirs, are all rooted in a particular emotion, ethos, and spatiality. The common element between these apparently different and yet overlapping genres in terms of their occasional structural semblance is the author's preoccupation with selfhood suggesting how important it is to empathize with humanity at large.

In *"Anthills of the Savannah"* Chinua Achebe, the most trusted story-teller from Africa, countering imperial versions of stories on Africa states that "Storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit -- in the state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever." Therefore, the oppressed always hold a story against the oppressor. Solorzano & Yosso (2002) state that counter-storytelling is a 'method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" including people of color, women, gays, and the poor (p. 26). Counter-stories or narratives stand in opposition to narratives of dominance called majoritarian stories'.

Western colonization in its drive for geographical domination of the Global South suppressed the voices of the oppressed therefore their stories concentrated on peripheries have either fossilized or have lingered through temporal occlusions. No doubt, it is through colonization the western modernity remaps the geographical and cultural life of the rest of the world laying the foundation of their power dialectics. Resultantly, the twentieth century witnessed global violence and economic disparities mounting to menacing heights. Therefore, natural and manmade disasters like the Great Depression of 1929, the Holocaust, Spanish Flu, and the Bengal Feminine of 1770 exposed the utopian delights of capitalism. Furthermore, the era of the cold war, Vietnam War, and East Europe becoming a communist block escalated ideological divides in the world. The Post-industrial myth of progress was also exposed as English poet W. H. Auden in his poem 'September 1939' lamented the sad demise of humanity at the hands of imperialism and capitalism pricing its claws into the body of humanity:: 'Those to whom evil is done/ Do Evil in return'. Therefore, colonization often glorified as a project of reformation of the non-western world perpetuated oppression, injustice, and violence institutionalizing ideological encampments. Even today, the world after colonization continues to divide bitterly over economic and ideological differences. Even so, witnessing the neo-imperial hegemonic supremacy manifested in the US' invasions on Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of world decolonization seems a ritualistic departure from one position of power to another. Consequently, globalization just doused the painful memory of colonization. The newly independent but economically unstable former colonies are beset by internal fissures. Therefore, the postcolonial also have a story holding up long against the colonials.

After colonial departure, the Indian continent catapulted into an unprecedented state of political mayhem. In 1947 the United India was divided witnessing the partition, a bloodbath of communal strife. The demarcation of the border between the two independent states of India and Pakistan was the most challenging task for the receding British Empire. Indian Punjab was divided. However, Jammu and Kashmir whose population was predominately Muslim decided to cede with India. But ever since 1947 the valley of Kashmir has witnessed a violent conflict as there is a popular insurgency or separatist movement demanding freedom in the light of the United Nations' Security Council Resolution on holding plebiscite of which India Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru is a signatory. After the partition, Kashmir submerged

into political turmoil. The British as they ruled India secured the support of fiefdoms and small states they controlled in league with the local elite and landed peerage. The local elite was culturally decadent and politically fatuous. Therefore, completely overlooking the will of the majoritarian Muslim population Kashmir was annexed to India by its Dogra ruler. Ever since the United Nations' resolution Kashmir is a disputed territory. Z.G Muhammad in "Kashmir: Hegemonic Discourse And Azadi" critiques the political duplicity, a continuation of colonial legacy, the state of India adopted over the issue of Kashmir. "Historically, it was neither, Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro who defeated USA super-power nor Ahmed Ben Bella who made France quit his soil lock, stock, and barrel, but it was the triumph of the narratives of their nations that made most powerful countries to quit."(para.10) Therefore, the rise of nationalism in colonies brought down many colonial powers to their knees. In Kashmir, the movement for freedom from the state of India is also a form of Kashmiri nationalism. Resultantly, the battle for freedom as it spreads over decades exposes the culture of divisiveness the colonial system perpetuated.

After the violence witnessed at the time of partition Kashmir is the next most violent theater of war in South Asia. Approximately eight million troops are deployed in the valley whereas the Indian Government alleges Pakistan for interfering and sending militates to Kashmir. However, the international community is largely silent over atrocities committed in Kashmir; the fact remains bitter and alone that the people of Kashmir want freedom from India.

The history of conflict in Kashmir is documented both in literary and non-literary discourse. The ubiquitous urgency of narrating the story of Kashmir can be gauged from the fact that after 1989, an estimated 70,000 people have been killed and around 8000 have disappeared. The upward surge of this unending conflict induces writers to re-cast, re-invent, and re-envision Kashmir's story of murder, rape, abduction, and genocidal extermination from perspectives shaped by emerging trajectories of ideological contentions. Whereas violence is rampant in Kashmir it is the women and children who are the worst victim of physical abuse and torture. Therefore, in the valley of Kashmir women's and children's stories of resilience and fortitude shown against a brutal military machine are often occluded. Lisa R. Merriweather Hunn et al write in "Who Can Speak for Whom? Using Counter-Storytelling to Challenge Racial Hegemony" that 'here are three genres of counter-stories documented by

CRT scholars: personal stories, other people's stories or narratives, and composite stories (245). Of course, the personal stories are told by actual victim-survivors whereas the other people's stories are indirect narrations and have some holes in the narration whereas the composite stories are retellings and offer 'synthesis of numerous individual stories'. These stories hold alternative plot-possibilities. The method is to state, restate, disrupt, arrange, and retell a story from as many possible perspectives as possible. *Behold, I Shine* by Freny Manecksha brings into light the stories of women traumatized by sexual crimes but what makes this non-fictional account unique an aspect which this paper attempts to accomplish is its narrative challenging readers to distinguish between the fact and the fiction. Manecksha states that "In 2012–13, I set out to record cases of sexual violence linked to the conflict in Kashmir. The women courageously agreed to share their stories with me, even though I was a complete stranger" (59). Manecksha as a journalist shows her commitment to exposing the dark sanctums of modern societies living under the menace of ethnic conflicts where women being the marginalized gender are the worst victims. *Behold. I Shine* attempts to break the silence of Kashmiri women confronting the social and psychological aftermaths of sexual violence. However, what sets apart *Behold, I Shine* is its commitment to reality, reportage, and reverence for human passion accumulating in the genre of creative nonfiction.

InThe Art of Creative Nonfiction: Writing and Selling the Literature (1997) Lee Gikund extrapolates the nuances that set apart the creative non-fiction from fiction. In his view writers turn to the creative nonfiction genre because they feel passionate about a person, place, subject, or issue and have no interest in or intention of maintaining a balanced or objective tone or viewpoint. (12) Therefore, objectivity is not an overwhelming concern in creative non-fiction however one wonders how a story holds onto facts swayed by the passion of the reporter. At another place, Gikund says that 'the goal is to make nonfiction stories read like fiction so that your readers are as enthralled by fact as they are by fantasy'. *Behold, I Shine* fulfills the theoretical paradigm of creative nonfiction as the writer/ journalist shows her subjective interest in the lives of women of Kashmir subjected to sexual violence. The place Kashmir, its history, landscape, and political turmoil are issues the writer takes into account narrating the stories of women and children.

Therefore, creative nonfiction is by a twofold persona of a 'reporter and a writer, too' (9). The reporter sticks to the facts whereas the writer takes

liberty with the facts bespattering them with his imagination. Having said that the world view of creative nonfiction is diverse and eclectic. Isabelle Thye, a writer of creative nonfiction, says that "Writing transforms the energy of hurt, lost, panic, hopelessness and helplessness into the energy of life" (Thye). The creative nonfiction is driven by a large-scale empathy for humanity and especially in journalistic discourse covers areas as wide as war, conflict, geographical dislocation, woes of minorities, and gender discrimination. After the Second World War Global South is the site of ideological and political conflicts so there is a surge of journalistic creative nonfiction covering ethnic, tribal, and racial disputes. Muneeza Shamsie, in her book *Hybrid Tapestries* states that "nonfiction has remained the bedrock and springboard of all South Asian English writing" (543). In other words, storytelling is indispensable and where there is a story there is an eye of a reporter monitoring the antecedents of the story. *Behold, I Shine* complies with the South Asian norms of storytelling however the stories told by victim-survivors are wedged by an equitable space granted to fantasy and reality.

Moreover, the recent genealogy of young writers and artists from Kashmir both at home and in exile is of an interesting array exploring ways to address the plight of the people of Kashmir. Rap singers M.C. Kash and ShayanNabi vocalize the concept of resistance in their cutting-edge indigenous hip-hop lyrics. Agha Shahid Ali the poet in exile was perhaps the most nostalgic voice echoed across the Atlantic wrote ghazals on Kashmir's beauty and the violence trashing its beauty. His collection *The Country Without a Post Office* is replete with images of violence becoming a routine and the people fleeing from one part of the valley to another whereas many have relocated to western metropolis hoping to return to Kashmir. The frontline journalists such as Mirza Waheed and Basharat Peer choose the genre of creative non-fiction telling stories of Indian occupation and the ensuing residence. Mirza Waheed's*The Collaborator* exposes the hideous nexus of media and state proliferating bi-partisan reporting on Kashmir. Basharat Peer's internationally acclaimed frontline memoir Curfewed *Nights* is the most searing dissection of conflict in Kashmir seen through his childhood and family circumstances. The emerging novelist Shahnaz Bashir's novel The *Half Mother (2014)* is about the woeful situation the son and mother were destined to share during the occupation. Similarly, Nitasha Kaul's*The Future Tense* deals with the upcoming youth of Kashmir joining armed resistance. The artist Malik Sajad sketches the graphic stories of disappearances in his book, *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*. The

canon of modern Kashmiri literature is highly receptive towards the historicization of changing patterns of politics of resistance in Kashmir. Moreover, writers, artists, journalists despite censorship and surveillance brave the bureaucratic hurdles by the state machinery.

In *What is Literature* (1947) "When I am committed," says Jean-Paul Sartre, "I reveal the situation by the very intention of changing it. I strike at its very heart, I transfix it, and I display it in full view. With every word that I utter, I involve myself a little more in the world." In journalistic reportage, commitment is the central ethic. In other words, commitment is an engagement with politics. Manecksha's account of the women of Kashmir is an intervention in the Indian government's official position on the situation in Kashmir. The world outside Kashmir does not know about the actual predicament of its people especially women and children. The valley is under siege and curfew spanning over decades of conflict has remained cut off from the outside world. The author using the mode of stories voiced by actual victims resurrects Kashmir for international readers. *Behold, I Shine* despite being non-fiction indulges in the luxuries of conceptual, fictional, and poetic rendition of social injustice meted out to women, the victim-survivors. The degree to which the book engages with the actual dilemmas of women living under the menace of sexual abuse is no longer muffled and extensively investigates the details of empirical as well as historical records of the brutalization of women in Kashmir. Therefore, as second-wave feminism commits to the ideal of 'Personal is Political' Manecksha shows her commitment to political reality shaping the ways how we can read these stories of women from Kashmir both as aesthetic mediations and political overtures. Therefore, within the formal bounds of non-fiction, the writer approaches to literary activism redeeming women and children of Kashmir from historical amnesia.

The very idea behind these stories of women and children from Kashmir is to develop a spirit of camaraderie among the victim-survivors. Additionally, the very notion of sharing their stories to the world at large is to show their resistance against a body of coercive militarism. In *Behold, I Shine* storytelling is imbued with trappings of resistance, both individual and collective. Therefore, story-telling in essence is a dialectic between the inarticulacy and articulacy and the oppressed and the oppressor:

> Storytelling in critical pedagogy aims to give voice to normally silenced people and subjugated knowledge, to provide 'a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice' (Ladson-Billings & Tate 2006, p21). Storytelling is valued as a means for expressing and documenting experiential knowledge (Delgado 1989) about the particular experiences of those at the margins of society (Lynn 2006).

Therefore, for Manecksha women's storytelling is an articulation of their lives silenced by conflict. Moreover, storytelling by a victim-survivor unravels elements of ideological oppression. Typically, in congruence with the modernist zeitgeist investigative journalism attends to stories of people who disappeared, removed, detained, and exiled. Ever since the rise of nation-state and conglomerate capitalism the state has become increasingly coercive using power against citizens and renege elements. Foucault in his lectures at College de France somewhere between 1977 and 1984 proposed the concept of *governmentality* which primarily focuses on the certain control techniques the state uses against its subjects or citizens. In simpler terms, it is the art of government. The most popular lecture in this regard is "Security, territory and population" (1978). Foucault's concepts of power and *governmentality* illuminate the power apparatus employed by modern states. The crux of Foucault's discourse is that a state legitimizes the use of violence and force against the so-called non-state actors who in their terms mobilize counter-ideological movements. In Foucault's view, the operatives of government not only hold a check on the political consciousness of its subjects but also interfere in their subjectivities.

This word [government] must be allowed the very broad meaning it had in the sixteenth century. 'Government' did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated how the *conduct* of individuals or groups might be directed – the government of children, of souls, of communities, of the sick … *To govern, in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others. (*Foucault, 326, 341, authors' emphasis).

How far-reaching is Foucault's analysis of the power structures and governments establish to control and direct the lives of the masses or citizens. Even the conduct comes under state surveillance. The

individuals' conduct is stripped off unwanted elements and only selective conduct is legitimized or endorsed by state institutions. The government controls fields as varied as healthcare, education, borders, asylum, and migration. Therefore, territories where there is insurgency, insurrection, and ethnic strife are dealt with coercive strategies often triggering reprisals from minorities and peripheral groups. In Foucault's parlance, this is termed as 'counter-conduct'. The state controls the conduct or behavior of an individual or a citizen who in turn demonstrates his resistance or protest. The norm of protest is enshrined in structures of modern democracy which ironically tend to be coercive and exacting like totalitarian regimes. Therefore, counter-conduct is the essence of resistance taken up by individuals or groups or even by one or the other gender. Foucault describes counter-conduct as 'the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price' (Foucault, 2007b, 75). Therefore, counter-conduct can also be radical and inflexible; and desists absolute forms of ideological orientation. Foucault also pays attention to the language of controlling conduct used by authoritarian regimes. Therefore, *thusly* suggests a state's control over-use of the language making sure that it is purged of anti-state verbiage. Carl Death is of the view that the 'idea of counter-conducts can be used to develop an *analytics of protest* (writer's italics) for the study of contentious politics'. In Death's view, contentious politics is not only 'actor-centric' but also involves 'specific practices and rationalities of protest'. Secondly, dissent revolves around subjectivities of protest. Therefore, 'an analytics of protest is specifically designed to show how protest and government are mutually constitutive'. *Behold, I Shine* as Foucault's intertwined notions of discourse and power elaborate uses the medium of storytelling and by explication and methodology of narration and plot structure unearths the analytics of protest women of Kashmir demonstrates through counter-conduct. Arguably, women by telling their stories destabilize the conventional binaries of power and resistance thereby reinstating resistance. Therefore, in *Behold, I Shine*in line with Foucault's concept of power women's stories reveal the discursiveness of social protest:

> For Foucault, the production and circulation of discourses are simultaneously mechanisms of social power. Corollary to this, he asserts that those who wish to exercise social power must use discourse in order to do so. The regulation of discourse deals with who is allowed to speak on a given topic, as well as which

> forms of knowledge are subjugated in the production of truth. As Foucault (2003) notes, "The delicate mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed, organized, and put into circulation, and those apparatuses are not ideological trimmings or edifices" (33-34).

The process of regulation involves authorities who control the discourse. The truth which a story of a victim-survivor reveals and the truth which the on-ground journalism deciphers may not be similar. Therefore, language remains a decisive factor determining the ideological bent in a story whether the narrator is neutral or inclined to show counter-conduct. Even the production of truth is not without suppression of knowledge therefore, language plays a vital role in the circulation of a particular version of the truth. In the case of Kashmir, the general population is in collusion with the Indian state and military and alternatively, their counter-conduct makes them militants, separatists, and freedom-fighters. ,The language is inflected by ideological affiliations. Since stories in *Behold, I Shine* are meant to empower the marginalized therefore the narrative is power-centric and the language is of counter-conduct. In essence, Manecksha's stories of victim-survivors hold up to the Foucaldian concept of counter-conduct.

Maneckshais an independent journalist based in Mumbai, India. *Behold, I Shine: Narratives of Kashmir's Women and Children* is her debut book and as a professional journalist she has covered Kashmir for over ten years. Therefore, despite being a detached observer and an outsider the amount of time she spent inside Kashmir makes her an insider one who can empathize with the sufferings of women and children beleaguered by violence. The book is divided into eleven chapters comprising stories of Kashmiri women spanned over a history of the last seventy years. The first five chapters specifically focus on the resistance waged by women bred and brought up in the valley who from their childhood have been the unfortunate recipients of violence. The next six chapters pose questions about the future of women and children and voice concerns if women's resistance is directed or distracted. There are stories of half-windows a term given to Kashmiri women whose husbands have disappeared and were missing and along with these widows, a growing contingent of rape survivors traumatized and socially dysfunctional. Manecksha ploys herself as a mediator in these stories of women and

does not cast assumptions or judgments on their plight. Despite cultivating detachment, a technical hallmark of non-fiction Mancheka's first-hand accounts of women frequently eludes earth-bound realism in favor of creative imagination. In an interview with Wande Magazine's Irfan Mehraj, Manecksha says:

> "We were returning from Shopian one evening in November 2011 and I was struck by the sight of women walking away into the fields whilst some armed forces personnel looked on. It was such an incongruous sight. I remarked on it. How did women feel under the male gaze of such hostile scrutiny even as they went about their daily chores and routine?" (2).

The eye witnessing account of a woman being encountered physically by the military speaks for the ontological anguish the observer/author contains inside her feeling the ethical compulsion of retelling the story to those who are physically away from the valley and cannot see the actual misery its women go through daily. How deplorable is the situation as men intervene in the 'routine' life of women eking out their existence suggesting that their lives in Kashmir are almost unviable. Indeed, this is an example of enmeshing of on-ground reportage with the visceral. By that very fact, the choice of emotional language such as 'male gaze', 'hostile scrutiny' and 'incongruous sight' demonstrates the author of non-fiction trying to keep a gap between authorial intention and his *self* while reporting the incident and yet on this occasion the language stretches for aesthetic proximity to a situation nakedly real. Therefore, the line between fact and fiction tends to blur in *Behold, I Shine* and this softening of the divide between fact and fiction reveals deep layers of psychological scars worn by victim-survivors. The women reclaim their identities by sharing details of sexual abuse nonetheless is a traumatic practice otherwise also a defiance of patriarchal traditions. However, it seems that narrating stories help women in freeing their long besieged memories. As the conflict in Kashmir passes from generation to generation, telling stories is a paradoxical process of releasing oneself from the burden of memories held up from childhood to adolescence. Freny recasts the stories of victim-survivors through the reconstruction of memory and the memory's unreliability because by definition a traumatic memory has no resolution. Therefore, women's stories as they reach readers are not pruned, diluted, and censored. The stories are original as much as the women who narrate them are real victim-

survivors. In an interview, Freny states that “The horrors of curfews and crackdowns were, not just disrupting the routine lives of Kashmiri women, but also violating their norms of sensitivity and dignity especially in a traditional milieu where it was taboo to speak of bodies and feelings, menstruation and sex” (29). Therefore, to overcome social, cultural, and cognitive barriers impeding women from voicing their subjective histories of sexual abuse the author mingles fact with fiction, a narrative ploy, concurring human memory’s dual streams of aggravation and healing. Unless the memory of sexual abuse the victim suffered is not stimulated through storytelling the memory is not either redressed.

> Blurring fact and fiction, such storytelling allows contemporary women writers the opportunity to call attention to (and in some ways mimic in the forms of their stories) the fundamental structures of memory construction and to use this awareness of memory’s mutability to voice their histories and their memories in ways that validate their realities and speak back to hegemonic, patriarchal discourses that have excluded them. (12)

Therefore, the retelling of individual stories of rape and violence by women is an alternative methodology of archiving the histories of the oppressed. No matter how much a state is hegemonic the analytics of protest can’t be held back from converting individual opportunities of expressing resistance into a collective counteractive discourse which in the case of *Behold, I Shine* are indigenous feminist assertions of Kashmiri women. The stories voice by women whereas on one hand lay bare the pent up anguish of a victim of sexual abuse on the other hand enable them to return to life. In "Storied Memories: Memory as Resistance in Contemporary Women's Literature" Sarah Katherine Foust Vinson is of the view that writings by women pivoted on traumatic trajectories of past “can construct new identities—identities that embrace possibilities previously denied and that resist a history of oppression—while also creating new ways of conceiving of the world and women’s pasts and possible futures within it” (12). Therefore, the personal story of a victim-survivor beholds a political gesture. So, what stuns a common observer is that women in Kashmir encroached upon by the military continue to live and go through daily chores of life. Many of these women are half-widows and mothers whose husbands and sons are either in custody or have disappeared. These women face a bleak future of

financial hardships yet what distinguishes them from women living in circumstances of peace is their resilience against a violent aggressor. Untethered women in *Behold, I Shine* are real sufferers who also take their suffering lightly adapting to the changing situation in the valley. But that does not take away the fact that women in Kashmir despite being aware of religious sensitivities and a patriarchal overlay of society are afraid of taking their abused *self* to the public domain. On the other hand brutal incidents such as KunanPoshspora an alleged mass-rape that occurred on February 23, 1991 when the unit(s) of the Indian security forces cordoned off villages in search of militants trigger narratives like *Behold, I Shine*. The twin rape incident of Shopian in 2010 is another harrowing incident whose sexual perpetrators are scot-free. The Indian government dismissed the charges levied by victims of rape however severely criticized in print media no to speak of the social impact of the incident as the victims of rape were ostracized within the village. The mass-rape incident is one of the many examples in which women are caught up in fire ending up as haunting relics of sexual violence.

The more recent journalistic discourse on victims of rape has produced some spectral commentaries. These pieces contextualize Kashmir's demographic history as a starting point of conflict and measures up the more recent political attitudes of the Indian government trying to dissuade the attention of media from highlighting the Indian army's sexual crimes against Muslim Kashmiri women. The anthropologist and Pakistani-Canadian journalist Omer Aijazi is of the view that "as Kashmiris are confronted with a new era of settler colonialism, we must take a stand against the violence'. Essar Batool a social worker from Indian-administered Kashmir states that 'in Kashmir, sexual violence has been used as a tool, against both women and men to break resilience at the community and individual levels." Batool also opines that for Kashmiri women resistance, despite them being victim-survivor, was the only option, it is another thing that due to socio-economic fall-out their resistance turns from active to passive modes. Sanjay Kak in his piece "The last option: A Stone in her hand", envisages the scene of a stone-pelting woman, an apt manifestation of Foucaldian counter-conduct. Kak sees the transformation of the average Kashmiri woman from a walling victim into a vigilant and vociferous protester holding a stone in her hand as a symbol of newfound resistance. The eponymous photograph of a stone-carrying woman dressed in a *traditional shalwarqameez* head covered with *duppata* defies the conventional image of a Kashmiri woman. Out on the streets pelting stones showing aggression, this is a

new crop of Kashmiri women who cannot hold back themselves against an army culpable of sexual crimes protected by totalitarian laws. 'This is not an ordinary anger' warns the journalistic mind of Sanjay Kak watching women yelling and screaming facing barbed wire fences and soldiers flaunting guns. From mere bystanders, ordinary Kashmiri women have turned into active participants. Conclusively, journalistic discourse captures the emergence of a new Kashmiri woman smarting from the traumatic history of sexual assault.

The first half of *Behold, I Shine* deals with the historical realities of Kashmir turning into a place of perpetual conflict. The author tells that how the decades leading to deployment of army in the valley gave way to Jihadi movements, largely militant, which used religion to influence people and to recruit them for physical combat. Whereas the Indian government lays blame on Pakistan for supporting these dispersed militant groups so to say the veracity of this allegation cannot be entirely dismissed the fact remains the local people even the women are part of these religious outfits. The new breed of Kashmir youth and women, being born and brought up under the shadow of war, a situation similar to Palestine, are not reluctant in taking guns. In more recent times Arundhati Roy the acclaimed novelist and political activist who is one of the most vocal critics of Indian atrocities in Kashmir states that one of the worst mistake committed by the Indian government in its long drive of diverting the international community's attention from the state-sponsored violence is a simulation of a false atmosphere of ' believing that domination was a victory, that the "normalcy" it had enforced through the barrel of a gun was indeed normal, and that the people's sullen silence was acquiescence" (17). The myth of normalcy in Kashmir perpetrated by the Indian government cannot hold ground as women who were the silent half of the family are even no more silent. How fragile and short-lived is this state of normalcy can be measured from the chapter " "A Soldier Under a Chinar" in which Manecksha writes that "What do women feel about the presence of strangers holding guns and grenades, in their fields and orchards? And, that these strangers have the right to use their weapons with impunity? What is it like to work and function under this hostile male scrutiny every single day, all the time?" (1). The tone is accusative as well as factual outlining the situation in which the women appear as vulnerable victims in their own backyards. The author implicates the aggressors taking advantage of the unarmed people. However, this hubristic display of the military might cannot suppress the spirit of the people. The hegemonic military presence is a

tactic employed hoping to crush the will of the people therefore in the words of Gautam Nakhlava for Indian government's occupation means in real terms: constant control over people's public and private lives (6). Similarly, Foucault says that the government through extreme measures even controls the subjectivities of its subjects.

The worst fall-out of occupation is the split caused in the perception of the tourists and the locals. Even before the partition, Kashmir was the most sought-out tourist destination owing to its bewitching natural beauty. The tourists represent a popular national sentiment therefore they see the presence of military and police safeguarding the industry of tourism in the valley which was once the biggest source of economic activity. Security forces protect tourists coming from other parts of India is a political smoke screening of the on ground situation in Kashmir. Kashmir is unsafe for its people. The locals view the military presence as tarnishing the natural beauty of the place. Therefore, the author insinuates the popular view of the tourists aligned with the Indian Government's explanation for military presence in the valley. 'For most Indians the presence of the military and the police within the Valley is normal, even reassuring—a way of preserving national unity and security, and a means of countering the 'destabilizing' forces behind Kashmir's freedom struggle" (Manecksha, 2). The locals have lost their traditional recreational spots. Due to curfew women's outer movement is restricted. Women who used to do laundry in the traditional *yaarbals* (washing Ghats) cannot go outside and in this way, they have lost opportunities of social interaction too now caged inside their homes. The loss of open spaces is perhaps the worst loss for women. Manecksha connects the current predicament of Kashmiri women losing the open spaces with the glorious halcyon days of the past when poets wrote unhinged lyrics of its natural beauty. The author using intertextuility dwells upon the mystic persona of the 16th century Kashmiri women poet HabbaKhautn, the Nightingale of Valley:

> If HabbaKhatun is loved, it is also because her poems are a reminder of a life once familiar in Kashmir—her verses are replete with allusions to wandering in open spaces, gathering wild basil or jasmine flowers, or drawing water from the wells. One poem reads: 'Gather violets, O Narcissus/Winter's ashes from our doors I fling!/The water bird the lake embraces/How can frost upon your petals cling?' (3)

The interjection of poetic metaphors in the narrative and of the segments of the cultural and literary heritage of Kashmir is evidence of the mingling of fact with fiction, a unique aspect of *Behold, I Shine*. The tourists' concerns are material as compared to the poetic concerns shown in the poetry of Habba whose voice rings through the author's memory. Habba's poetry celebrates the free roaming spirit of a mystic feeding on the flora and fauna, an activity which can only be vicariously experienced in contemporary Kashmir, now a deeply militarized zone. The comparison is disturbing as the landscape of the present day Kashmir is riddled with trappings of the military:

> Kashmir's menacing material environment of sandbags, barricades, checkpoints and fencing has had a profound impact on its people. It has dramatically altered mental mappings. A woman whom I had met in my early days in the Valley, told me with regret, 'These symbols of occupation are now so entrenched in our psyche that we unconsciously use them as markers for directions. If I have to guide a stranger, I no longer refer to tree-lined avenues or ancient houses as signposts. I say, turn left at the CRPF camp, go towards the checkpost, and turn right near the bunker' (5).

The landscape drawn from the perspective of a sixteenth century women poet and the one outlined by a common Kashmiri woman of the present day Kashmir tells the sad difference as the valley is submerged in violence. But the language of counter-conduct explains the deep-rooted dissent the women of Kashmir hold against the state of India. The impact of actual occupation and symbolic occupation is perhaps the same however the prevalence of symbols of occupation over the landscape is a source of deep anguish. The poetic symbols of flowers of basil and jasmine are replaced by the crude images of sandbags and checkpoints. Noticeably, the transformation of landscape traumatizes women. In this landscape of barb wires and patrolling vehicles, women are the unfortunate escorts to strangers. Therefore, what Roy terms as normalcy in Kashmir projected in the official discourse of the Indian state is a new norm and the "new normal" the women of Kashmir both understand and defy. But what is perhaps the worst outcome of the occupation is one's feeling of alienation from one's landscape, an image viscerally depicted by the author:

> The average Kashmiri's disconnect with the landscape is heightened by the way buildings, heritage structures and landmarks have been appropriated and used for counter-insurgency purposes. In downtown Srinagar, former cinema houses, a few hotels and heritage buildings now serve as makeshift security camps and lie swaddled in nets and wire (Manecksha, 5).

What Edward Said once termed cultural imperialism can be seen in the birth of the Indian version of cultural imperialism befitting its character of settler colonialism. The spaces which were once the vestiges of heritage are now converted into make-shift counter-insurgency camps. The cultural space has visibly shrunken. Therefore, judged by the ominous code of normalcy Kashmiri people are expected to surrender their cultural troves. What really adds to the poignancy of this reportage on cultural vandalism is women's perspective as they have lost their husbands, sons, and families but they have also lost their hold and pride on cultural spaces. It is the beholder who beholds the pain of this painful process of cultural erasure. The women bear assaults not only on their bodies but also on their imagination. Resultantly, their subjectivity is tortured and mutilated, a cerebral trope of rape incapacitating women's minds and imagination. Therefore the spatial images of roads entwined by barbed wires and heritage buildings turning into rubble denote the torture women bear on their bodies and minds. The spatial analogy between the assaulted body of a woman and that of a damaged physical structure occurs implicitly throughout these stories. The distortion of the landscape and of the female body is conceived ecofeministically. The natural beauty as well as female beauty are subjected to violent measures. Seeing the landscape of the valley turning into living hell the author's tone becomes antagonistic:

> In the eyes of its residents, Kashmir, once eulogized by poets for its unparalleled loveliness—has morphed into a bleak land of desolation. Military hoof-marks not only connote a loss of space but also liberties. 'I feel caged,' is one of the commonest refrains. Given the frequency of curfews, crackdowns, hootouts, shutdowns, encounters, mass arrests, street protests and firing, plans or commitments remain conditional. It is dependent on the 'haalat' ('the situation'). In Kashmir, 'haalatdekhkar'

> (after assessing the scene) is all-too-common an expression (Manecksha, 6).

The place has deformed, the inhabitants compelled to continue their lives, and there seems to be no reprieve. What is compelling in this description is the symbolic outcome of the militarization of the landscape as the military has marked the landscape giving it a new spatial marker codified with national aspirations something akin to an intentional process of making women and children outsiders forcing them to think leaving the place or to face the consequences. The recurrence of metaphors of cage and incarceration signifies the mental state of the average Kashmiri. Besieged in their homes bearing the brunt of a callous military the narrator of the *Behold, I Shine* shows the landscape occupied by the Indian army now turning into a site of women's counter-aggression. Therefore, stories of women are a form of narration accomplishing resistance.

But perhaps children are the most unfortunate victims of war inside Kashmir. In most cases, the father is already absent. It is the women as mothers of children who bear the burden of loss of family. The children have no life, as schools in the valley are closed, their yards are littered with bombshells, bullets, and grenades, and their premises are used for make-shift military activities. Besides, another painful spectacle is of children who have lost limbs. These are children of war as Manecksha presents a gruesome picture of children exposed to the brutality of war in Kashmir. From their childhood, Kashmiri children's vocabulary is impressed with words connotative of war stripping them of their innocence prematurely. The story of a girl Uzma is told with a grim reminder that the future of children is bleak:

> "Like so many of Kashmir's children who grew familiar with words like 'curfew', 'crackdown' and 'tehreek', the conflict colouredUzma's life—so much so that almost every childhood event came to be bookmarked by the larger struggle for azadi. 'People would say, "I remember you were so-many-years-old when a 'particular person' in the resistance was picked up" (42).

The young Uzma tells the story of the bomb blast close to her school, an incident that changed her life ever since she is haunted by the images of debris scattered over the place. She narrates how she escaped the place

desperately searching for her brother through the woods until she came across her teacher befuddled by the impact of the bomb the spectacle permanently etched on her mind: 'I heard a visually-challenged teacher ask repeatedly, 'What's happening?' I had no answers (Manecksha, 45). ShaziaYousaf, a child of *theerk* tells that she revisited her childhood home where she knew the neighborhood and found that from each home a boy had disappeared. Having witnessed the violence since early childhood the language these victim-survivors use in their stories reeks of tearing traumas. She recalls an incident from her childhood when she was hit by a scooter and on being rescued by a boy became so hysterical started yelling and cursing: "May you be killed! May you die! May soldiers take you away!" Imagine that. A five-year-old picking up such language and insults!' (47). The worst comes when young boys have to live with the stories of their mothers and sisters being raped. They grow along with a bruised emotional life, helpless but vengeful, even blaming their mothers and sisters. The stigma of being an offspring of a raped mother is unacceptable and long life of psychological disorder waits on them. ShaziaYousaf tells how her brother Muneer carried a long life of guilt and though he empathized with her mother's predicament it was so hard on him to live a normal life. Muneer could not forget the spectacle of her mother's body being carried to hospital with her hair loose, her hands and clothes smeared with blood. Too little to know what had happened, he imagined that his mother had killed his father and brothers' (48-49). The psychic dissertation caused by such incidents leads children into inhospitable zones of mental delirium. The absence of psychic care turned Muneer into a cynic harboring anger against everyone. Similarly, Shaukya, Zareena's unmarried daughter tells her story of being attacked by soldiers running for her life with the help of her nephew who was so scared of the scuffle that he lost his speech permanently. Young boys are a special target of the security forces because they belong to the new generation ready to take arms. The author documents the story of Mushtaq passed to her by another journalist. The boy was picked and imprisoned but her sister Sakina started protesting and in no time she became famous as ' ring leader and strategist' holding rallies wearing ' a pair of jeans and a faux leather jacket, and sporting short hair' (51) her presence heralded a new crop of young resistance taking to the streets of Kashmir. Women in Kashmir undaunted by military presence now brave the path of militant resistance. Manecksha writes that women participate in "funerals, chanting and composing special songs of praise (wahnuwan) and recalling the sacrifices of their 'shahids', while scattering almonds and rose petals on the body" (24). The war has

changed the inner structure of an individual's life family life as well as collective social life. After the father or elder brother is gone the elder girl takes the responsibility not only of protecting the remaining family but of letting the aggressors know that the legacy of resistance cannot be suppressed. But on the other hand, these children ' have been witness to a mother's grief and a father's sudden disappearance, have been compelled to lead isolated lives and, often feel stigmatized, especially on occasions like 'Parents' Day' at school (Manecksha, 52). With no schools, no modern facilities of life, and no parents Kashmir endures a surging population of children facing an uncertain future. By and large, children are the real collateral damage of the war in the valley of Kashmir. They have no future and for them, there is no exit either from this situation.

However, it is the women as mothers who imbibe the pain of their children. "UzmaQureishi, a social worker, told me, 'At such times, you feel as if your throat is on fire" (Manecksha, 10). The children and women feel harassed by the constant echoes of slogan-shouting. The war keeps children inside homes. . However, there were times when children wandered in the idyllic valley fearlessly. "In HabbaKhatun's verses, there lives a time when groups of girls could pick chinar leaves and twist them into ornaments, or walk into forests to collect firewood, or celebrate the coming of spring in badamwaris" (3). Now, children are orphans and women half-widows. The recreational compounds and school playground are deserted and littered with shrapnel.

The narrative juxtaposes Habba's poetic landscape with the war-torn landscape of present day Kashmir. This approach is appropriate to non-fiction blurring boundaries between the temporal and transcendental, between the past and the present, and between the historical and the ahistorical. This is evident in many stories of rape victims and half-widows. Manecksha states that 'not surprisingly, many half-widows carried severe psychological wounds (32). Therefore, the story of a rape victim tends to oscillate between the real and the surreal. Notwithstanding, these accounts of victim-survivors vent factual consequences of women becoming widows-in-waiting. Inside the four walls, the half-widow is a bitter picture of individual tragedy, a woman who can neither remarry nor ever live a life of normalcy. And perhaps the Indian state expects these women to accept the status of half-widow as a new norm of normalcy. One of the most tormenting stories is of Mehbooba, a victim-survivor of rape, who was feeding her sick husband

when she heard the gunfire rattling windows and the next moment she found someone trying to 'disrobe her' and when the attack subsided she saw her family 'lying in a pool of blood'(35-36) When she returned to consciousness she thought guiltily whether 'her husband comforted when she conveyed to him that she had not been raped?" (36). Even if on Mahbooba the sexual assault was aborted her mind was ravaged by the post-rape trauma. Mahbooba personifies the fate of the average Kashmir woman being sexually assaulted at one or another point of her life. Similarly, Zeenat, another woman, tells her side of the story that soldiers smashed her household things and holding guns abused her. Consequently, "Whenever we could, we'd run away and hide in the fields." (40) Zareena's story is even more heart wrenching who lost her two sons. Afterward, there is no 'social support' for her, her ruined house spells economic doom, even the villagers were sacred of helping her forcing her to become a laborer : 'we remain faceless, identity-less,' "said an anguished Zareena" (41). A whole life lost to the repercussions of war and conflict'. The security forces breaking into homes of women and their bodies stripping them is part of the agenda of new normalcy. Guatum Nukhala is of view that this 'type of warfare' is a 'dirty war' the people of Kashmir have been facing over decades, and this strategy is willfully implemented to break the 'will of people'(3).

In this regard, the fate of half-widow is perhaps extraordinary. Not only do half-widows have to live with the stigma of widowhood but also have to search for their husbands. What could be more painful than a young bride waiting for her husband? Neither FIRS are registered nor is any formal social and financial support available; many young married girls rot inside their homes facing the menace of social ostracization. The half-widow Tahira's story is unbelievably harrowing since having no money she was compelled to put her three sons in three different orphanages. When her 'children returned to stay with her, they were bitter and angry, unable to make sense of why their mother had abandoned them. One of her sons brusquely asked, 'Was I an orphan? If my father has died, why do you still search for him?' (54).

Over the years by the Indian army women's bodies, raped and molested, are used as a subterfuge against Kashmiri men, compromising their armed struggle. Since the Indian subcontinent is historically a tribal society, therefore, the onus of the rape is always on a woman. Instead of being provided with social and legal justice often the victim of a rape, is at the mercy of patriarchal norms. Therefore, for a victim of rape there

are endless consequences. Moreover, the body of a raped woman is seen as if defiled and polluted. Often facing narrow religious interpretations on the status of raped women the victim-survivors' social life become crippled. On the other, the raped woman also inspires honor killing. Given such an extraordinary trail of cultural history rejecting the body of a raped women turn them into sexual fetishes therefore it is not surprising that the Indian army uses rape as a ploy to subjugate the will of men taking arms against the state of India: "While she did sense that rape was being used as a weapon of war, she was still to arrive at the realization that there was no justification for the crime—that the violation of her autonomy and integrity was not acceptable and is an internationally recognized crime" (Manecksha, 58). Lori Handrahan in *Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (2004), states that 'Women are expected to serve their communities/countries not by fighting as a soldier, but by 'preserving' their sexual purity for the 'honor' of their male relatives'. The women in Kashmir on one hand - carry the stigma of rape and on the other hand the responsibility of proving their sexual purity. Caught between the demands of ethnicpatriarchalism and religious codes women in Kashmir cannot remain protected from sexual violence. Similarly, the UNICEF report, Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War echoes the sexual predicament of women in Kashmir. The report states that 'harm inflicted in such cases on a woman by a rapist is an attack on her family and culture' (70). Therefore, rape ensues complex cultural and social ramifications for the individual victim-survivor and her family and even for the succeeding generation of young girls. Consequently, the stories and situations depicted in *Behold, I Shine* show that even women as 'non-combatants' undergo frightfully huge violence.

Indian troops in Kashmir operate under the precept of disciplinarian violence with utter impunity. In Kashmir and other parts of India were separatist movements are in progress 'security personnel cannot be prosecuted—not even for a crime as heinous as rape—without the sanction of the Central government" (Manecksha, 61). Owing to religious and tribal sensibilities rape is an uncomfortable topic to be discussed in public by Kashmiris. Therefore, statistics on rape are contradictory and often beguiling. Manecksha quotes from A Médecins Sans Frontières report stating an alarming surge in rape after 1989. However, there is strict censorship on print and electronic media and often these independent reports are blocked. The Foucauldian notion of controlling the conduct of individuals and institutions, a state's agenda

on priority, is fully in practice in Kashmir. "This surveillance and control by the military are not restricted to just merely the visual [but] manifested in the way the military controls the economy, means of livelihood and social spaces" (117). Therefore, the state has earned the wrath and hatred from insurgents and renege elements. The military operates under a 'blanket of immunity' and this has deepened the demand for *Azadi* (freedom). Hearing and documenting stories of women disillusioned and embittered the author asks a question on their behalf: 'Has justice ever been delivered in this state when the crime has been perpetrated by military personnel? (74).

In *Kashmir*: *The Case for Freedom* Arundhati Roy implicates the Indian Government for denying the people of Kashmir their right of self-determination making them hostages in their native land something which recalls the 'the old colonial argument about how the natives were not ready for freedom justified the colonial project. Therefore, Hindu colonialism shows its muscle blatantly transgressing the constitutional rights of the citizens of Kashmir. On August 5, 2020, the BJP-led right-wing government revoked Kashmir's special status imposing an unlimited curfew. There is total lockdown and the valley is cut off from the rest of the world whereas the local political leadership is under house arrest. There is no stopping of atrocities for the people of the valley and an uncertain future waits for women and children to be the most forsaken of all. However, by intermingling fact with fantasy the characteristic mode of creative nonfiction *Behold, I Shine* retrieves the women's and children's stories of resilience against the might of the Indian army trampling over the dream of Azadi (freedom).

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