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## CURFEWED NIGHT AS A LITERARY TEXT: A READER'S CRITICAL ESTIMATE

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### ABSTRACT

Distinction between a factual and a fictional narrative is a choice very hard to make. But a narrative text can be classified on the basis of its priority of orientation, one text can aim at representation of historical facts in a way they are viewed and understood by the majority of people. For such a text, a common, regular and unmarked understanding and analysis is more important. In opposition to this, if a text does not aim at plain, shallow and ordinary looking truths, but aims at artistic exploration and analysis of social, cultural and political situations, for such texts artistic truths get priority. An artist does not comprehend the world as common people do, but get inside it and explores those deep spheres and areas which are inaccessible to a common man. Then, he/she devises a suitable code in the form of artistic language, full of symbols and figures, to express his/her understanding and experiences. The present article explores Curfewed Night to be or not to be called a good literary text. Further, this article also focuses on some textual mistakes in translation of some Kashmiri lines in the text.

**Keywords:** Curfewed, Kalashnikov, Kashmir History, Kashmir valley, Militant, Violence.

### INTRODUCTION

Curfewed Night, apparently the firsthand account of the youth growing up in Kashmir during the peak of the insurgency, has attracted attention of people irrespective of profession and field of engagement. The book is in the form of a memoir of a journalist from Kashmir who leaves the valley first to pursue university education and later for a career. He himself, Kashmir, Militants and paramilitary forces are entities which bind the narrative, which otherwise is a collection of very commonly and ordinarily known events of Kashmiri life. He describes his life and events in and outside Kashmir, some famous incidents of Kashmir under siege in the form of interviews, famous episodes of Kashmir history, and famous heritage sites of Kashmir.

The Memoir is an ordinary story, heard and told almost by every Kashmiri several times in offices, in moving passenger vehicles, in barbers' shops, with the same intensity and in a similar fashion. There is nothing new neither in content nor in technique of narration in the book which I or any other Kashmiri have not come across

before except that it is in English. For me, the description and narration is too lucid, too shallow, too ordinary, and too superficial. It would not be too hard to say that the author, though being a Kashmiri, has not seen Kashmiri life too closely to be told with a deep analysis of internal and external pain felt by Kashmiris of his age and in that time. He has failed to express that state of despair, of powerlessness, of pain, and of what worse one could imagine. He has failed to show the inner self of the youth of his age at that time. The psychology, the feeling, the alienation, the restlessness, especially of his age and can neither be grasped nor felt by this account.

A literary artist possesses tender feelings, comprehensive soul and capability to unveil all the veils and see and comprehend the reality that is too deep for a common man to comprehend. He/she dies deep in life to show different things which the common people don't see. He/she is able to expose the ordinary and everyday things extraordinarily and leads his reader to that reality and feeling where he couldn't reach by himself/herself. A Literary text, as we know it, is capable of shocking your common sense and routine faculty of comprehension and understanding. It makes a reader stop and reconsider his thoughts. Literary devices intensify and condense

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ordinary language and exert a force on a reader to rethink those thoughts and practices which otherwise seem natural and absolute. The everyday world is suddenly made unfamiliar. As per Terry Eagleton "literature, by forcing us into a dramatic awareness of language, refreshes these habitual responses and renders objects more 'perceptible'" (Eagleton, 1983). The narration of this book is too straight to do that and to give an aesthetic pleasure to the reader.

Peer talks about how the adolescents and the teenagers in Kashmir are attracted towards militancy. But he doesn't mention the situation which has forced Kashmiris to resort to arms and start a war which, they know, they are never going to win. What situation can motivate a young man to give away his life by becoming a militant? It is easy to think and talk about the situation than to feel it. Kashmiris are also human beings, normal as in other parts of the world, not mentally ill, and they also love their lives as others do. It is a question worthy of asking to ourselves what makes them resort to arms and give away their lives so easily. Peer has so easily compared it with fashion just by saying whatever they wore, became the latest style. They were idolized by many of the boys who dreamt of owning their own Kalashnikovs. Life is life after all; nobody will give it away in such a cheap deal. If Peer is not able to understand the physical, psychological, and emotional predicament of the contemporary youth of Kashmir, it doesn't mean that Kashmiri lives were on sale. Instead of dying deep into their predicament and instead of describing the social, political and psychological restlessness, resentment, powerlessness, torture, psychological interrogations and despair, he portrays them as a commodity ready to be indoctrinated by various agents and agencies, that too, for making deals of their lives.

It is not known whether Peer tries to create his own character as a representative of Kashmir or he is just describing his character realistically as an individual. If the attempt is the former one, then I would say that it is a complete artistic failure for Peer as a protagonist in the story never visits his inner self to ask questions and demand answers as Kashmiris have always been doing. Peer in the story is always looking forward to build his career which most of the Kashmiris of his age never did. There was no future for them for which they could have made their career. Questions like, what has happened to us? Why us? Why don't they simply leave? Why are we occupied? Why are we so powerless?, were always

roaming over their hearts and minds. But if the case is the latter one, then one would say that he didn't feel the pain in the same way as other Kashmiris did.

Peer has altogether failed to make his readers understand how the whole affair had begun. The reader is thrown into wilderness and is forced to question himself that how come the Kashmiris suddenly got crazy and resorted to arms in 1989. Why 1989? Why not 1947 or 1990? Peer shares with the reader portions of his life, his fear of the well-being of his family after a devastating attack on them, the description of important heritage sites, glimpses of Kashmir history, ancient, medieval and modern, but he has no time to give an account of historical trauma of partition for Kashmir and Kashmiris. The author doesn't account for dominance, reconstruction, reproduction and representation of history, politics and territory of Kashmir outside powers in operation. He has been judgmental in choosing the dominant and power oriented views and discourses for various controversial issues like tribal attack, HM-JKLF rivalry, Pan-Islamism etc and has undermined the less popular views and discourses about these issues. It is, again at the end, an artistic incompetency not to include all the views in his narrative and remain apolitical.

One of the major issues with the story is that it is too a portion of it an account for too much a span of time. Instead of covering such a vast span of time, the author should have covered little more comprehensively. He could have perhaps been able to answer the questions like what Kashmiris want after all. What are they fighting for? Or simply why are they caught in?

Further, the use of some words by the author has been very loose. For example the word 'war' has been used to describe the situation in Kashmir the context of which one fails to understand. War is always between two powers or nations, declared by one, the aggressor, and defended by another, may be with less power. Neither imperialism and occupation nor the internal political situation, the two extreme description of situation in Kashmir, can be termed as war. Is it a war? If yes, between whom. Indian Army, termed as soldiers at most of the occasions by the author, a value laden term for nation's legal army mission, in such a way as if they were on a sacred mission in their still living integral part to make it silent and dispose of the still remaining life from it. Militants are neither defending any nation nor are they apparently capable of defeating an army of more than half million save that there happens a miracle. So, the

situation could be anything like occupation, assimilation, etc on one side and resistance, struggle for survival, etc on other but never a war. War often has the choice to accept the terms and condition and call it off which Kashmiris never have had. War is recognized and intervened by other nations and Kashmir problem has never been formally recognized and intervened by the International community. Another very loose term is 'conflict'. I don't understand between whom and of what. People of Kashmir and Indian forces? People of Kashmir and Indian Government? People of Kashmir and Kashmir Mainstream Government? Separatists and Mainstream? Kashmiris' aspiration and Indian aspirations in Kashmir? There can be conflicts rather than a single conflict.

One more issue which one comes across while reading the text is that the translations of Kashmiri, in the book, seem to have been handled very lightly. See the lines below:

Shukr khudayus, sahi salamat vot! Translated as 'thank God you made it back safe!' (Peer, 2008).

The Kashmiri sentence is incomplete and does not give exactly the sense as translated. The exact sentence in Kashmiri is:

Shukur Khudayas kun, Sahi salamat vot! (Thank God, he (not you) made it back safe!). If it would have been 'you' instead of 'he' the Kashmiri word 'vot' should have been 'votukh'.

Another Kashmiri Sentence in the book is;

Hooreh chayyih wanwaan nooreh mahraazo

Aakho shahreq sheerazo Aakho shahreq sheerazo (Peer, 2008).

Translated as;

Houris sing for the angel-faced groom

He is the jewel of the city.

Should be translated as;

Houris sing for the angel-faced groom

Did you come, the jewel of the city did you come, the jewel of the city,

'Aakho' means 'did you come' but has been translated as 'he'. 'Aakho' is a verbal phrase which has the suffix for past tense as well as pronominal of the second person singular 'you'.

We have one more line in Arabic from the azaan as;

Allah-o-Akbar! Ashadu An La Ilaha Illallah!

(God is great! There is no God but God) (Peer, 2008).

The exact translation of the line is;

(God is great! I bear witness that there is no god except the One God)

Which in other words means 'God is Great! And I bear witness that there is no deity except one God'. In this line a Muslim rejects polytheism and accepts monotheism as his faith.

To conclude, for people like Khushwant Singh the story may be 'beautifully written, brutally honest and deeply hurtful' but for any Kashmiri all these events are part of their memory and the description of these events can neither be more hurtful than the experience themselves nor more brutally honest than what they have experienced themselves. The narrative and its events can be a challenge to the prejudiced Kashmir for non-followers of Kashmir Politics like Pankaj Mishra But for those who is a Kashmiri or for those who have continuously followed Kashmir politics; it is a usual and average account.

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