

A Writer's Urge for a Cathartic Narrativization: A Study of the Narratives from the Traumatic Memory of Kashmir Victims in Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Nights*

Fatima Syeda¹
Rija Batool²

Abstract

*Kashmir, post 1990, has become a land rife with the struggle for freedom by the Kashmiri militants and the resultant military invasion by the Indian Government. As the clash between the military and the militants gains momentum, the native Kashmiris experience a major shift in their lives. The natives, irrespective of religious affiliations, endure the worst of violence. The collective cries for freedom resulted in attracting the antagonism of the Indian Army for the Kashmiri Muslims as well as the exodus of the Kashmiri pundits. The trauma of exile as well as the trauma of the violence perpetrated by the Indian Army is formative of a memory which becomes a permanent communal identity marker of Kashmiris. With each violent event, the traumatic memory evolves, and each tragedy contributes to complete the picture of victimization in the conflict Zone. Whereas the violent events reduce the Kashmiris to living ghosts, the narrations of the stories of these victims help them relieve the burden of their traumatic memory. Basharat Peer, the writer of *Curfewed Nights* (2011), feels the drive to write on Kashmir each time he comes across a victim. *Curfewed Nights* manifests the force of the traumatic narrations which compel the writer to listen to the tragedies and to pen these down. Writing becomes an obligation for the writer for it seems to work not merely as his own catharsis but also as a means to recover the victims. The study of the text *Curfewed Nights* is supported by the works of Cathy Caruth (1995), Shoshana Felman (2002), and other writers in Trauma Studies. This research argues that narrating the traumatic experiences by the victims is therapeutic in nature for them and narrativizing the collective traumatic memory is helpful in relieving the writer of the pain inflicted upon him by bearing the burden of an ever-growing traumatic memory.*

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, FCCU

² Research Scholar

Key Words: Trauma, Narration, Memory, Catharsis, Narrativizing

1. Introduction

Dialectics on trauma as a critical construct spring from a range of disciplines and domains including psychology, pathology, sociology, history, literary studies, cultural studies, memories studies, postcolonial studies etc. Since its inception in 1990s, the term has been studied, complicated, and expanded to incorporate and stage traumatic experiences to a range of audiences. There exists a range of definitional possibilities of trauma, but sticking to any one of them would be a reductionist approach which limits the scope of the concept. In the words of Cathy Caruth, who in one of her pioneering works in the field, *Trauma: Explorations in the Memory* writes, “I am interested not so much in [...] defining trauma [but to] examine how trauma unsettles and forces us to rethink our notions of experience, and of communication, in therapy, in the classroom, and in literature, as well as in psychoanalytical theory” (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). This research aims to study how the trauma of the Kashmiris settles to heal through narration and narrativization of their sufferings.

2. Literature Review

As identification symptom, traumatized individuals are possessed with repeated flashbacks of the accident/situation they faced, which pathologically is characterized as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD has potential for psychoanalytical interpretation and cure. Such grave physical experiences are termed as “traumatic neurosis” by Freud. Freud frames trauma as “successive movement from an event to its repression to its return” (Caruth, p. 7). Theorizing trauma and holistically understanding is difficult without engaging with the empirical event itself. Historical analysis of trauma suggests that it leads the experiencer to isolation, not only individual isolation but collective, cultural isolation too (Caruth, p. 10-11). In *Curfewed Nights*, Peer relates this collective suffering as thousands of Kashmiri youth are arrested by the Indian military in the winter of 1990. According to Peer, Kashmir had been changed in ‘profound ways.’ (Peer, 2011, p. 20)

Caruth’s poststructuralist and psychoanalytical modelling of trauma gained the status of an established model in trauma studies, which inspired many literary theorists and critics to adopt and adapt this lens. Elissa Marder in her paper, *Trauma and Literary Studies: Some “Enabling Questions”* observes how trauma ‘produces repeated, uncontrollable and incalculable

effects that endure long after its ostensible precipitating cause'. (Marder, 2006, p. 1). These accounts are present in *Curfewed Night* as well. Over the years, the perpetual abuse and torture fails to disable the freedom-fighter Kashmiri youth as more enlist with militant groups like Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and Hizbul Mujahedeen (HM). Their trauma manifests itself into violence and the drive to fight for their freedom. Marder mentions Caruth's astute description of trauma with experiencing trauma to be nearly "possessed by an image / event." (Marder, p. 4). For the Kashmiris, that event is divided into a series of violent episodes in which thousands of country men and women are killed mercilessly. Peer's grandfather's earnest exclamation on how he would deal with his grandson's death if he were to join the JKLF depicts the collective image of the persecuted families and their fear; the bodies of their children.

Marder further elaborates on how Caruth's and Shoshana Felman's work on trauma theory has channeled a new way of acknowledging "the impact of events that can be only known belatedly and of the listening power of experiences that can be expressed indirectly." (Marder, p. 2). Peer's difficult decision to visit Mubeena (a Muslim bride raped by Indian militants) is symbolic of sharing a traumatic episode which drastically regressed the course of many lives in Kashmir. The woman, while telling Peer about the incident reveals how she has lost painful snippets of the fateful night yet she experiences jarring flashbacks episodically (a cycle that might continue to repeat), those flashbacks are a testament to the trauma she has endured. Peer listens and sympathizes with her in a way few in her community have. The author's collection of that memory in a way, leads to her sharing the tragedy in a manner which is fully void of adverse judgement. This is because Peer intends to share her story in order to document the painful journey of the Kashmiris in the wake of its conflict with India and Pakistan. It therefore allows her to sew together holes from an incident which has been haunting her for years.

Caruth in her famed study *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* writes that trauma "refuses to be located in its insistent appearance outside of any single place or time." (9) The concept of belatedness in Caruth's study again explains the complicated anomaly that the Kashmiris are situated in. According to her, the victims tend to live the incident outside the bounds of place and time. That could be a manifestation of the trauma associated with the denial of power and authority the victim experiences during such times. Caruth terms the affected as 'living ghosts' a term that is sufficiently

depicted in Peer's encounters with many victims. Interestingly, Caruth further discusses how trauma's characteristic displacement can be only situated through the listening of another. The very act of a shared experience can assuage the isolation a traumatized victim lives through. Marder highlights Caruth's concerns regarding the avowal of a traumatic experiences and its consequences that ripple far beyond an individual. Such an episode bonds together a whole group of people in a phenomenon which is ill identified and misunderstood. Therefore, a collective affirmation has the power to form links of validation. This shared experience comes for the people of Kashmir in their defiant distancing from India, as the author state, they choose to support Pakistan over India, they cheer for Pakistan when it plays against India in cricket matches. The 15th of August, which is the day of Independence, is considered to be a 'black day' in the principality. Through such innocuous yet decisive acts, they exhibit their in-acceptance for the violence inflicted upon them as the Indian military forces continue to breach upon their rights.

Marder then explores Caruth's emphasized importance on literature and how it plays a role in binding together the emotions which transcend the bounds of any normalcy. Or the fact-based essence that literature lacks, focusing instead on an emotionally charged atmosphere and narration. In her acclaimed work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* too, links trauma theory with literary interpretations. She aptly puts forth the notion of literature exposing certain experiences that otherwise, are never done so. That, by default treats traumatic expression as something beyond its pathological periphery and adds a humanistic and emotional element to a phenomenon which does require subjective and an interpersonal approach. Peer's journey throughout his country encapsulates his desire to share the pain of his brothers through the mode of narration. The author's decision as he "came back, heard and remembered stories of brutality courage, love, faith, hatred, loss and even hope" (240) allowed him to not only share but spread the remnants of a traumatic memory far beyond Kashmir. Even though this manner of reporting can only be understood within the means of secondary witnessing, it does, far more than one hopes, to achieve in any other discipline.

Apart from Caruth and Marder, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's study *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992) place more importance on the act of witnessing a moment in a traumatic history. Felman and Laub's study of texts, poems, movies and

novels directly correlate Peer's contribution in narrativizing the perils the Kashmiris have faced. Not only does the author experience the tribulations of the conflicts directly, he then proceeds to collect the narratives of those who have faced dire consequences through it. That is precisely what narrativizing achieves, it serves not only to share but also to bear the burden collectively. According to Felman, the act of testifying is a difficult one as it situates the speaker into the shoes of a victim. This puts each witness in a unique position due to the incident tying the person in an individualistic experience hence perspective. To go through an incident without experiencing it directly still enables him/her to bear a burden akin to that of the victims. Testimony as a discursive antidote, may prove to be helpful for the trauma victims. This is a burden borne out of Peer's account. His writings forge a significant relationship with the trauma-stricken individuals in Kashmir. Such experiences have internally affected Peer to acknowledge and hopefully, shed the pain through writing. The witness shares a truth through his own experience, making his narrative an authentic amalgamation of the plight of his countrymen. This revolutionary point encourages an audience to read, to 'witness' with a heartfelt understanding and share the burden.

Laub too, points out the vitality of how the people through a traumatic incident, should be able to share their distorted version of a life changing incident, an act which can aid in connecting the broken paths within their memories that it can only be done so through the sharing with another. A link that can re-clasp the disjointed sense of self and their own narrative. According to her, the survivors of trauma do "not only need to survive in order to tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive." (Laub 78) Peer's own childhood is rife with instances which find him standing at the peripherals of a dangerous territory, a territory which guarantees a humiliating death. While in school, he and his friends admire the militants and desire to join the 'cause.' It is his father who confronts him, and this is why he now has had the opportunity to share Kashmir's story. It is after he himself is taken for an interrogation by the armed officers, and fortunately let go without further penalization, that he realizes the solemnity of the matter. (60). He is one of the lucky few who did not have to trudge forward in the throes of destruction, having had been lost in the process like the ones who did, and who still continue to be. His ability to later share the story leads him to deal with the trauma of that memory in a healthy manner.

Moreover, Felman in her book, *The Judicial Unconscious: Tales and Trauma in the Twentieth Century* proposes the possibility of a collective trauma implicating serious questions about how the law treats the times of and after a traumatic history. Kashmir's trouble has been treated as a taboo between India and Pakistan, all while the people continue to suffer. Millions of lives have been lost, their sons have either been taken away by the military or have joined freedom-fighter groups to fight for their rights. Countless families have been broken and separated, some of which the author personally knows. Such trials have indeed, over decades, morphed into historical events which are denigrating the pain of people through attempts at reopening them in trials. According to Felman, literature has the ability to translate the 'truth' of a traumatic memory without having it diluted within the restrictive trappings of the legal language. Gulzar, a Kashmiri youth Peer writes about, is murdered by a high-ranking army official and his family resignedly choose monetary compensation over an attempt to seek justice. As Peer laments at the frequency of such occurrences, he highlights a general feeling of helplessness which hangs thick in the air as Kashmir isn't a place to get justice, instead 'you try to save the living from further trouble'. (Peer, p. 170)

Michelle Balaev views Caruth's study of trauma in literature and society not fitting to structural and post structural laws of linguistics (Balaev, 2014, p. 2). The explication of the concept is tied to Caruth's over reliance on neurobiological and psychoanalytical theories. She rather broadens the definitional possibilities by incorporating social psychological theories that give weight-age to contextual aspects. Semiotic theories are also playing their part in understanding trauma, especially in how to realize the role of trauma in literature. In recent scholarship, pathological impacts of trauma (for example, silence, disassociation) are studied rhetorically rather than psychologically. This brings in social dimension of trauma introduced by contemporary critics, which are additive to existing approaches. Balaev' edited volume *Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered* discusses them as Neo-Freudian, neo-Lacanian and new semiotic approaches (Balaev, 2014). With the evolution of the concept trauma theory is becoming more pluralistic having inputs from postcolonial analysis, cultural studies and social psychology etc.

Stef Craps projects trauma as 'essential apparatus' to understand the world and change it. 'Listening to the trauma of another can contribute to cross-cultural solidarity and to the creation of new forms of community'

(Craps, 2013, p. 2). He provides a thorough critique of existing established trauma frameworks by highlighting four aspects: one, marginalization of trauma experiences of non-Western communities; second, universalized account of trauma; third, reliance on 'modernist aesthetics of fragmentation'; fourth, ignoring the connectivity between western and non-western traumas (Craps, p. 2-3). This in turn creates and promotes a Eurocentric bias. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1948, urged India and Pakistan to resolve matters through a just plebiscite (Hanif and Ullah). Data that enumerates the sufferings of the Kashmiris reveals that 47,000 individuals have been killed in separatist violence and that 62% of the people have witnessed or gone through highly traumatic incidents. (Hanif and Ullah) Peer depicts this throughout the novel, when he is a young boy, his village is attacked by the militant group planning to attack a military convoy. The fear and despair his villagers feel while fleeing their homes is not only evident but jarring. (p. 49)

Sandra L. Bloom explains the evolutionary effects of trauma and the inevitability of it incorporating itself into the victim's psyche, that being a response to the onslaught of negative and assaulting sensations. (Bloom, 1999, p.1) Not only that, she builds upon the concept of 'learned helplessness', a pattern which develops on the victims who are exposed to a trauma over a stretched amount of time. Such a cycle conditions the affected to subjugate themselves to further torture. This is thoroughly exemplified in the book through a plethora of traumatic memories in the narrative written and collected by Peer. Young Kashmiri freedom fighters known as the Guerillas are under constant threat whenever they risk venturing home to meet their families. Their loved ones too, live under constant fear which over the years, become the norm as evident from Peer's matter-of-state style. His cousin, Tariq, the son of a police officer who joins the JKLF is killed after being discovered in his hideout. He is one of the thousand young men who have been killed and his household one of thousand others for whom there is no choice but to accept and lament.

3. Methodology:

This paper is a qualitative study of the narrativization of the tales of the Kashmiri victims to study the art of Narrativization as a therapeutic technique which not only urges the writer to write but also to have a cathartic effect for both the writer and the victims. This paper employs the theory of Trauma to examine the narratives of the traumatic memory of Kashmir victims in Basharat Peer's non-fictional work *Curfewed Nights*.

4. Discussion

The points highlighted above depict the space which narrativizing allows for victims of trauma to heal. Like Caruth, Bloom also touches upon remembering a traumatic event and how it adversely affects an individual. According to her, the incident is “engraved” in one’s memory and even after it has transpired, it is not situated easily within the person’s memory, hence becoming an entity rife with the victim’s inability to have it fully remembered, understood and out to rest. This is possibly caused by the extreme stress a traumatic incident falls under, where the victims are pained to a point where their recollection is disrupted. It is overwhelmed by a sensational overload. As Peer meets the men sexually assaulted by the Indian military while in captivity, they all still remember the pain they experienced years ago. During such instances, all that they truly capture are phenomena like “touch, taste, smell and even pain, and strong emotions.” (Bloom, 1999, p.6.) That is what stays and when reminded of the trauma, the victims experience clear flashbacks of these sensations which become the ‘core’ of the incident. To them, it is not a remembrance but rather a ‘reliving’ of the experience they have gone through.

Again, as Caruth mentions, Bloom projects the individual’s fragmented explanation as a torturous impression of the pain they went through. A ghost of their past which is either too painful or too hazy to articulate. In order to avoid any possibilities of exposing themselves to further pain, they avoid any situations which might trigger an emotional arousal and therefore choose to live a life of a numbed mental disposition and awareness. There are people like Hussein who despite facing continuous torture while in captivity, chose to live a life of mortified resignation, accepting the fact that they will never be able to live a life of normalcy. Like the researchers before her, Bloom too, is of the opinion that through sharing traumatic experiences, the victims can find a healthy release and share the burden of their isolated pain. It can be a monitored facility or through an artistic expression that such a catharsis can be achieved. Having researched children affected by trauma, Bloom highlights the inability to verbally express their experiences which should be channeled in various nonverbal modes of communication. According to Bloom, the field of arts (drama, music, literature) all prove to be helpful outlets for the individuals afflicted.

Another tool subconsciously used in curbing trauma is cultivated by the body itself. Disassociation is a coping mechanism that interrupts the normal functions of memory, consciousness, environment perception and identification. In order to forget the painful moments endured during a traumatic incident, individuals, biologically, often disassociate themselves from the incident which enables them to carry out routinely tasks. This aids them in forgetting the flashbacks temporarily. (Bloom, 1995, p. 8) Disassociation is expressed in a multitude of ways as depicted in the narrative; victims either numb themselves to the atrocities being inflicted upon them or they act up by fighting against the military. Peer aptly showcases all forms resulting from this, the people who resigned themselves to their fates and the ones who were propelled into a different direction altogether. Parveena, whose disabled son is taken away by the army refuses to give up the struggle to search for her son, in the process she transforms into an activist, attempting to help hundreds of others like her. (p. 136)

Another form of disassociation less talked about is one where the person tends to 'reenact' the scarring incident through his/her acts. This can mean that the person might be led to act rebelliously and in the process not only cause external havoc but become 'retraumatized' again. The reason again, boils down to the blow that the victim has faced, a tumult which has shaken all of the preconceived notions pertaining to their lives, loved ones, even religion. Hence, they are zoomed in on that one single experience which their psyche, even their bodies react to very differently. (Bloom, 1999, p. 9). In 1987, after years of delayed elections in Kashmir, their final execution results in rigged results and the Kashmiris protesting against this are persecuted. Yasin Malik is one of the tortured youths who attempts to take back the autonomy Kashmir still desperately desires. It is what begins the war of Peer's 'adolescence' which has not only continued but worsened till date. Peer's narrativizing of the traumatic history makes him the perfect source as he has experienced the terror himself. (p.19)

As inundated in the story many times, the author is understandably deeply familiar, connected and involved in the people, history and culture of the valley. His prose is clear, direct and expository which make his reporting kaleidoscopic yet personal still. Each narrative is seamlessly tied to the panoramic chaos which these very narratives convulsively add to. This perverse cycle of pain and suffering compel Peer to share the stories of the thousands he comes across; some of whom he is personally

acquainted with. As a nation, Kashmir is a prime example of how a collective 'trauma' is exhibited. Peer's drive, as a storyteller, to write it, enables the burden, in a way to be shared, not only within the local community but a global one too. Mubashir Ahmed Mir and Vinita Mohindra in their paper *Writing Resistance* argue how Peer has one of the most prominent voices within Kashmir and due to the turmoil, he has lived through, his narration has too, in a way, has traumatized him. This can be particularly seen before his return to his country to record the stores of his people. While living in Delhi, he feels compelled to write about Kashmir. (p. 104)

Susan J. Brison in her paper, *Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self* (1999), states how the victims of trauma often lament about 'forgetting' or 'losing' their true self. As mentioned previously, having gone through such a harrowing experience, the individual loses the linearity of time due to the disruption in memory. However, as the person's self-perception is affected by the experience and the perpetrators behind the act, it can be 'reconstructed' and healed by the help of others too. Not only that, she argues how a narrative memory gives the power back to the victim who was prone to a feeling of helplessness and terror not just during the incident but long after those events transpired. In that narration, the victim sheds its garb of passivity and assumes a more active role, one which even aids in the reconstruction of the disruption in time and memory (Brison, 1999, p.40.) Mubeena, the raped bride, while recounting her experience, pauses, stating that she doesn't remember what transpired fully as she possibly might have blanked out at certain painful instances and it is only an example of how victims are unable to retain memories which are too harsh. However, after sharing it, she, as a victim, has finally attempted to 'take back' power in narrating an incident which affected her the most. Peer, in narrativizing her experience helps her unload some of her burden.

Furthermore, one's identity and self are cultivated through a series of experiences they happen to be situated in, however as Brison quotes Annette Baier's stance, an individual's self is largely determined by the social forces and people that shape his/her life. They are essentially an extension of the person(s) they surround themselves with, it then ripples beyond that one person and becomes a social environment that breeds another self. A self which, through a successive period of time and events matures into an independent individual and creates his/her own narrative. When the individual goes through a traumatic event or time, that self is

shattered to the extent where it simply fails to make sense; there is an absolute break in their narrative and they enter a dangerous territory where the 'self' is lost. Since the cultivation of one's self is largely dependent on others, it can be, according to Brison, rebuilt by others. Listening is a powerful tool which aids in rebuilding the broken chain of events, it might be able to form a link through the episodes which are blurred out in the victim's memory. (Brison, p.44) According to Brison, the person who bears witness to the trauma not only aids a 'shift' in turning the passive stance into an active one, it helps the victims to rebuild the broken narrative into a coherent one. That then enables the survivor to take back their lost sense of self and gradually their view of the world, their place and role in their community. (Brison, p. 39-40). Peer's role in the victim's lives happens to be such where he becomes the pillar of support to the trauma they have endured. The manner of his conduct which is translated through his sympathetic intentions conveys a sense of unity and that factor ultimately ties several narratives together in his account.

Such a curative association would be apt because traumatic memories are innately social for, they cannot be entirely explained without a social context. The events which transpire would be incomplete without a 'symbol system' referring to cultural contexts and therefore incidents such as these, even when happening to an individual, would hold a collective cultural significance as it is the barometer on which instances apart from the 'normal' will be judged. Moreover, not only does the society or others affect the aftermath of an incident, they hold the influence to shape the perspective of the victim as well. Interestingly, traumatic memory morphs with time and it is quite possible that it transforms in a direction for the victim which society has preconceived centuries ago. (Brison, p. 45) That is shown to be the case in Peer's account as well.

The unjust rejection that Mubeena faces after her rape is embedded in the belief that a tainted woman brings dishonor and ill- fate in to the lives of others. This idea not only worsens her state, it festers her wounds in a way which isolates her increasingly throughout the years to the point where she is driven away from the merest comfort of communal support. Hussein, one of the former militants who is sexually tortured by the forces, carries the weight of that shame with him throughout the years. His pain and humiliation are trebled by the perception that a scarred man is one not worth any joy that life might have to offer. As he recounts his story to Peer, he admits to being impotent even though he has not heard any conclusive

opinion by a doctor, and reiterates his decision to never marry. The torture has rendered him uselessly submissive to the societal notion of an accepted manhood and any scenario varying from it, in his opinion, is unrealistic.

Many individuals such as Mubeena and Hussein are victims to the societal opinion, such a thing can only be rectified through the effectively narrativizing it in a way which is void of any negative judgement. Peer's decision to leave his job in order to share these stories is a testimony to his involvement on a deep level, as stated in the text. *Curfewed Nights* shows that how sharing a traumatic experience ensures empathy and narrativizing it brings cure and comfort to the traumatic individuals. For the protagonist of this non-fictional work, the collective trauma of the Kashmiris becomes an "essential apparatus" to develop a clear understanding of the world around him. He feels the compulsion to write whenever he comes across a victim. From narration, he further moves towards providing a relief to the burdened memories of the affected and himself feels the curative impulse of narrativizing the traumatic experiences. According to Brison, this is exactly the way victims of trauma should be listened to and through this, their selves can attempt to be reconstructed.

Kelly Mckinney in her paper, *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence* (2007) discusses the narrative surrounding the victims of political violence and how they are pushed into a collective and coercive silence which only worsens with their mental status. She quotes Yael Danieli, a trauma therapist, who is of the overpowering view that once the affected are pushed to articulate their narrative with the right encouragement and in a therapeutic setting, they can not only reconstruct the incident which has distorted their identity but this will lead to an end in breaking the silence collectively which has covertly promoted violence on a persecuted group. Moreover, she asserts that narrating the trauma can play an important role in furthering the cycle of healing for the victims for it is a way which will bring closer a community (Mckinney, 2007, p. 275). Peer's way of listening to their stories and specifically narrativizing them all in a way which presents them as representing Kashmir, it depicts a cohesion and an active struggle which can prove to be quite cathartic. The manner in which he discusses Kashmir's loss and the way in which thousands of countrymen dealt with the loss of their sons as they joined the militant groups or were taken by the army reflects his earnest concern for the country as it is his. His words bind together the pain and the exportation of his words, globally

and in Kashmir, has given them a voice which echoes back empathy and kindness instead of aversion.

As Mckinney argues, laying out one's trauma completely, as difficult as it is, can give a clarity of perspective which otherwise would be impossible for a victim to receive. Encompassing such individuals with an open and unbiased atmosphere (as stressed on before in the paper) can prove to be excessively healing. That can in turn bond them with the rest of their community and strengthen their will in the face of adversity. Collective healing is not only progressive it can shed the culture of isolation the traumatized often find themselves in. Dialogues in such situations are vital as they involve the affected in a warm and empathetic discussion which would give them the courage to face the atrocity they have lived through. That act in itself is cathartic in a manner in which it promotes a rebuilding of confidence, self-esteem and strength for the survivors. (Mckinney, p. 270)

As it is evident in the novel, there is not a single person who is not affected by the ongoing conflict in the country, whether it is someone like Peer who reports and yet has not faced the most grueling of circumstances or Hussein, whose life is permanently scarred due to it. The intensity might vary but collectively they have a story of injustice, pain and struggles inside of them. Peer is the one who takes the initiative to tell them all. According to Mckinney, in trauma, every person has a desire for a sympathetic ear which can eliminate the fear of judgement. That very need, if fulfilled, holds a promise of a healed self that many often are not given. (Mckinney, p. 274)

The author, who feels for his countrymen and has seen the extent to which the conflict is affecting everyone, decides to use his profession as a writer and tell the story of thousands. Being in Delhi, he feels an urge to pen down the happenings back home, it only increases every time he visits back as he sees the picture of chaos which has infiltrated his village and family. His cousin Tariq, who joins the militant group, is killed like the thousand others who choose this path to fight against injustice. He is surrounded by people who each have a different and painful story which seem to beckon him to pen them all down. From the very beginning of the story, he recounts the incidents which at times, threaten to completely swallow his identity as well but thankfully, due to his father's position, he is spared that pain. As the narrative moves on, each traumatic event works to add to the collective traumatic memory of the Kashmiri community. It is the intensity as well as

the frequency of the tragic happenings which force Basharat Peer to narrativize the trauma which exists both on individual and collective level. He points towards the start of this conflict as “the longest, the most eventful winter in Kashmir, a season that still remains.” (p.15) His years spent reporting in Delhi are tainted by a restlessness which may be owing to his own need to contribute to the struggle which his countrymen have faced. His book aptly weaves his tale with that of his people and collectively conveys the trauma suffered by all of them.

Wolf Schmid in her book *Narratology: An Introduction* discusses the method that a writer employs in order to cultivate a story in full effectiveness and zooms in on the process of ‘eventfulness’ which promotes a focus that every story needs to establish. Eventfulness is vital as it furthers the narrativity in terms of the sequentiality which is inherent to the story. Peer’s account is exemplary of this through all of his stages. His decision to complete his education and begin a job in Delhi sets the stage for the eventfulness or ‘change in state’ that is the attack on the bus which his parents are travelling in. This later proves to be necessary when he feels the need to return and tell the stories of his people. (Schmid 10). Employing the techniques used to maximize a response to his narrativizing, Peer then begins his journey and begins the therapeutic process of sharing the narratives of the survivors of trauma.

Contradictory to the overwhelming amount of research which argues for the narrativization of trauma, there is literature which goes against it and highlights the adverse effects of sharing one’s trauma. According to certain researchers, sharing a trauma and verbalizing a traumatic memory, instead of helping, can worsen the mental conditions of the survivors. It would fail to bind together individuals but rather would stress on the events one is trying to forget and would not have any ‘therapeutic efficacy’. (Sommer & Satel 2005). In other instances, it can compel the victims to take a negative path. In the story, many of the young men joining the militants do so being under a traumatic stress, having seen their loved ones being affected continuously. Bringing up buried wounds can not only make things worse; it can push the affected into violence, a haze of made up tales sure to bring a heroic and definite ‘victory’ of freedom, a victory after which all of the sacrifices would be paid with interest. Peer touches upon the fallacious promises of glory and revenge that would come with being a militant and how it lures in thousands of young men.

However, despite the contradictory viewpoints, there are numerous sources which reiterate the benefits of sharing and narrating a trauma. The psychologist Pierre Janet saw trauma as a disruption in memory and narrating the incident was a reliable way of rebuilding that memory. Onno Van Der Hart, Paul Brown and Bessel A. Van Der Kolk in their essay *Pierre Janet's Treatment of Post-traumatic Stress* (1989) talk about Janet's approach to treating his patients and discuss how he believed a therapeutic approach surrounding a discussion would be effective. According to Janet, memory, essentially, is a series of event that emulates the action telling a story, when a traumatized individual is heard, that gap in the story is repaired or rebuild.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Peer's efforts in narrativizing the horrors in Kashmir do indeed lead to a collective relief as they bind together decades of cultural trauma. He, as an author, uses the narrative design as a therapeutic device (as a device to relieve the individuals of their personal burden of traumatic events). The technique, however, burdens the collective traumatic memory driving Basharat Peer, as a writer, to narrativize the trauma. In this way, instead of letting such narrative accounts become a re-traumatizing experience, Peer uses them to help in curing the traumatic memory. The evolving traumatic memory, resultantly, finds this narrative tool as an antidote which may help in healing the wounded consciousness of the victims of the Kashmir conflict.

References

- Balaev, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*. London: Palgrave.
- Bloom, S. L. (1999). *Trauma Theory Abbreviated*. From the Final Action Plan: A Coordinated Community Response to Family Violence.
- Brison, S. J., Bal, M., & Crewe, J. (1999). *Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self. Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. London: University Press of New England.
- Caruth, C. (Ed.). (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore : The John Hopkins University Press.
- Craps, S. (Ed.). (2013). *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. London: Palgrave .

- Hanif, S., & Ullah, I. (2018). "War Trauma, Collective Memory, and Cultural Productions in Conflict Zones: Kashmir in Focus". Sage Open, 8(3).
- Hart. O.V.D., Brown. P., & Kolk B.A. (1989). "Pierre Janet's Treatment of Post-traumatic Stress". *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol 2, No. 4, 1989.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226134094_Janet's_treatment_of_post-traumatic_Stress.
- Kolk, & Bessel, A., et.al (1989). "Pierre Janet on post-traumatic stress. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*", 2(4).
- Marder, E. (2006). *Trauma and Literary Studies: Some Enabling Questions*. Reading on 1.1.
- Mckinney, K. (2007). "Breaking the conspiracy of silence: testimony, traumatic memory, and psychotherapy with survivors of political violence". *Ethos*, 3(35).
- Mir, A., Mudasir, & Mohindra, V. (2015). *Writing Resistance: A Study Of Basharat Peer's Curfewed Nights*.
- Peer, B. (2011). *Curfewed Nights*. Random House India.
- Schmid, Wolf.(2010). *Narratology: An Introduction*. De Gruyter Textbook Series. De Gruyter graduate.Germany: University of Hamburg.
- Sircar, S. (2010, August 11). "'My nationality a matter of dispute': Basharat peer". WSJ. <https://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2010/08/11/my-nationality-a-matter-of-dispute-basharat-peer/>
- Sommers, C.H. & Satel, S. (2006). *One Nation Under Therapy: How the Helping Culture is Eroding Self-Reliance*. NewYork: St. Martin Griffins.