Chapter V

The Half Mother: A Woman’s Journey for Justice

Kashmir and its people share a history immensely reflective of the era that heralds the turmoil of late 1980s and early 1990s. The conflict of 90s has taken a massive toll on the lives of this unfortunate land rendering thousands of youth missing and dead. The unending conflict of Kashmir has evoked many contemporary writes like Shahnaz Bashir to expound the reality and bring to the fore the tragedy and angst of the people living there. Since he himself has experienced the ugly and unfortunate events of 90s, it has all seeped into him and forced him to write a novel, The Half Mother which brings out the scenario of the chaotic years in black and white. It was published in the year 2014. While praising the art of narration of Bashir Greater Kashmir writes:

... As far as the aspects of the art of narration and the power of description are concerned, The Half Mother is certainly in a different league. ... The book impels the reader, at once; to admire the grandeur of graphic artistic expression and relive some of the forgettable memories...the author deserves kudos for craving out such a wonderful work of fiction from the humungous mass of the realities of Kashmir tragedy. (Web)

During 90s enforced disappearances used to be a common repressive measures used by the army to curb the armed rebellion against India. People of any age and background were being taken up by the army and put into detentions never to return mere on the basis of suspicion. In most of the cases, armed forces abducted the victims in the presence of witnesses, often family members, and then army denied any such action committed by them out rightly. Bashir, through his artistic expression has tried to relive the forgettable memories of the chaotic times when detention almost invariably meant disappearance. In The Half Mother, Bashir has addressed this issue of enforced disappearance in Kashmir as one of the ugliest reality of the conflict of 90s.
The title of the novel, *The Half Mother*, is highly symbolical and allegorical. It refers to those mothers in Kashmir whose sons disappeared in army and police custodies during the conflict of 90s. The term “Half” is borrowed by writer from “half widow” which is used for the wives of those men who are picked up by the defense authorities and there is no trace whether they are alive or dead. The term “half” is used for the brevity while drawing up a list of people whose family members are missing. When one does not know the status of the respective relatives who have disappeared the term “half” is used for them. Similarly Bashir has used “Half Mother” as a metaphor for the plight of all the devastated and robbed mothers of the conflict whose sons have disappeared:

... So, for all such uncertain cases for women whose husbands have disappeared, we will prefix their status with “Half”,’ Advocate Farooq explained. Half. The word ringed in Haleema’s head. A cold pinch. ‘And what about mothers, Farooq sahib?’ Haleema asked. ‘Are they half mothers by rule?’... He didn’t know how to respond to Haleema. He couldn’t be certain what status of victimhood should be attested to her. ‘So am I a half mother?’ Haleema repeated. (142-143)

It is apt and suggestive to the theme of the novel. It portrays the pain of a bereaved mother and her epic search to find her only son lost in the void of conflict. Bashir has successfully given a voice to the agony and pain of those who have lost their loved ones in the burning cauldron of ongoing conflict. It is a kind of tribute made by the writer to the grief and unending wait of the mothers for the return of their disappeared sons whisked away by army. In an interview, “Turmoil Between the Pages” with Jayanthi Madhukar in *Bangalore Mirror* Bashir remarks that novel is highly allegorical of the events of 90s’ when disappearances became common practice. He writes:

It is based on my imagination, memory and experiences. I grew up through these chaotic years in strife-torn Kashmir. I have witnessed and felt things as much as Haleemas have. It has all seeped into me. In Kashmir, interestingly and unfortunately, there lives Haleema in almost every mother. All those mothers in Kashmir whose sons disappeared in
custodies have, though, a similar story to tell but each has something unique to say about her respective tragedy. I have just tried to portray them collectively through Haleema. (Web)

It is evident that the common experience of political upheavals, historical upheavals and conflicts provide rich material to the novelists. These forces generate thoughts in the writer to bring to light the horrors of conflict. These thoughts are revealed in their writings. Again, the writer is, undoubtedly a product of his milieu, he is bound to reflect his own time in his works. Lucien Goldman believes, “at any given moment social and historical reality always presents itself as an extremely complex mixture not of structures but of the process of structurization and destruction…” (Rockwell 3). This quoted statement of Goldman proves that the relation between the literature and society is so closely interrelated that the study of literature can be regarded as the regular tool of social or historical investigation. It is observed that during 90s’ conflict the devastation that befell the people of Kashmir became difficult for them to handle. Hence, in order to curb the unrest in the Kashmir India militarized the whole valley. The military occupation of Kashmir and the insurgency caught the lives of the innocent people of Kashmir. Against this backdrop, Bashir has tried to give voice to the social sufferings and pain of the people of valley caused by the conflict. He brilliantly presents the dark era of 90s when the people of valley were caught in uncertainty of life and death. During those days everyone was apprehensive because there was no guarantee of return to home once one was out of the house. The idea of involuntary disappearance was constantly at the back of the mind of the writer and is poignantly crafted in his novel, *The Half Mother* to make the world recognize profoundly tragic human story of Kashmir.

The theme of *The Half Mother* is discussed realistically by the novelist and surrounds around the phenomenon of enforced disappearances in Kashmir that has been happening since the late 1980s in Kashmir. He mainly focuses on the events which were order of the day during 90s. He attempts to portray the ugly side of the conflict which claimed the lives of many innocents, some of them got killed and others went missing. The novel reflects larger dilemma and the helplessness of the relatives of disappeared persons. Through the main protagonists of the novel, Haleema, he depicts the heart
breaking story of the thousands grieving mothers who have lost their children and are not located till date. In an interview with Safwat Zargar in *Kashmir Life*, Bashir remarks:

I have dedicated this book to all mothers and sons of Kashmir because not only those mothers or wives or sisters or daughters who have lost their sons, husbands, brothers and fathers have been victimized, but I think almost all Kashmiri mothers and sons are indirectly victims of this unfortunate phenomenon of enforced disappearance. Because all mothers in Kashmir fear, they are very worried about the safety of their sons. Making it home in the evening in Kashmir would be a miracle. (Web)

*The Half Mother* has its setting in the village Natipora, an area located in the outskirts of Srinagar city, around three kilometers away towards the south. Like other parts of the valley, this part was also trapped between brutalized wilderness of defense authorities and militants. As the insurgency intensified, the residents of Natipora came under the grip of vicious cycles of curfews, crackdowns, encounters, killings and enforced disappearances. As Bashir himself hails from Natipora, he attempts to immortalize the ruins of the place and its people by making locale of his novel. He awakens the world to the pain of the people of Kashmir in general and Natipora in particular by primarily focusing on the sensitive issue of enforced disappearances. In an interview with Souzein. S. Mushtaq, Bashir says that he wanted to locate the story in a place he knew well and understood best. By doing so he attempted to draw Natipora on the literary map of the world and he is glad to see it on that map now. Enforced disappearances in Kashmir have created an aura of fear that weakened the families of the missing invasion “collateral damages.” There is hardly any study of any conflict zone, primarily focusing on the half mothers. No severe attempt has been made to highlight their plight in war-torn place like Kashmir. Bashir, unlike his contemporary writers has articulated the agony and extreme sufferings of half mothers in his novel through the character of Haleema.

The use of the couplet in the beginning of the novel by Sir Allama Mohammad Iqbal, “Rivers, hills, the moon and the stars, what would they know of separation’s
indelible scars!” from “Juddai” (Separation), *Baal-e-Jibreel* aptly brings into focus the plight and pain of those who have lost their loved ones. The poem has been written by Iqbal for his mother. In this couplet he is referring to inanimate things of the universe: moon, stars, mountains, rivers whether they are aware of or unaware of the sufferings of human beings. In the same way Bashir by using this couplet in the epigraph of the novel wants to convey that the whole universe, or metaphorically the world is silent out there and watching indifferently to the plight of those devastated mother whose sons have been missing since the conflict of 90s. He wants to know whether the universe will respond to these things or would continue to be indifferent to the sufferings of the human beings caused due to separation of their loved ones. In an interview with *Kashmir Life*, Bashir explained the reason of using this poetic couplet. He remarks:

I was looking at Iqbal’s poetry and then I came across this couplet (epigraph of the book). I had not decided that this couplet would become the epigraph. But I just read the background of the couplet and I came to know that this poem *Judaai* has been written by Sir Iqbal for his mother. . . Everything: stars, moon, the whole universe— it is all silent out there, watching indifferently what happens. So in a way, we do not know whether they know it or not, that what it means to them, or metaphorically to the world, to know what happen to the human beings. It is not the question of being living or non-living but I am just taking in universal terms. I would really be interested in knowing that whether the moon would continue to be indifferent. Whether the star would continue to be indifferent. Or they would change their shine? They would change their light? Like we say that universe also responds to these things. Because already Iqbal has put a challenge for all those universal things, so he says that “what would they know of separation’s indelible scars?” Invisible scars which you cannot wipe out. Scars cannot disappear. So it struck like me anything. (Web)

The novel is divided into three parts namely Book I, Book II and Book III. Book I introduces the protagonist of the novel, Haleema and her beautiful world which shattered
after the death of her father, Ghulam Rasool Joo and the arrest of her only son, Imran by
the army. Book II delineates the miserable plight of a mother and her desperate and futile
search for her disappeared son. Book III, the culminating part of the novel as well as of
Haleema represents the random notes by one of the characters in the novel, Izhar, a
correspondent worker of BBC.

_The Half Mother_ revolves around its central protagonist, Haleema and is mostly
written in third person that provides narrative freedom to characters except towards the
end, where writer uses first person narrative to describe the plight of the journalist, Izhar
while covering the conflict and its offshoots. Bashir has portrayed the essence of the story
by delving deep into the plight and psyche of the characters. He has created niche for
himself in the list of the emerging conflict writers of the world by mapping pain of a
mother for her disappeared son. The story of the novel revolves around three generations
of Joo family with Ghulam Rasool Joo, famous as Ab Jaan being the pole bearer of the
family, the main protagonist of the novel, Haleema being the second generation and her
son, Imran being the third one. The novel starts on a melancholic note as Haleema, whose
only son, Imran has been whisked away by army and is not located till date, seems to
relate everything in the universe to her son’s absence. With the burden of separation of
her son she slips into a reverie and murmurs:

The colour of everything is sorrow,
The colour of the moon is sorrow,
The colour of the streets is sorrow, and
The colour of memories is sorrow.
The colour of my heart, in its own heart, is sorrow.
The colour of my breath is sorrow,
The colour of sorrow is sorrow. (5)

Through these lines, Bashir expresses the agony of a mother engulfed in the pangs of
separation of her son. Haleema’s pathetic condition, her love for her son can be traced in
the song sung by her. These lines express her misery and longing for the return of her
son. The loss of the child is generally the most angst and is considered the foremost root of a prolonged misery and it leaves Haleema broken and absolutely devastated.

The story begins much before the birth of Haleema with the struggles of Ab Jaan, father of Haleema, in finding a decent means of earning a livelihood and his failure to retain job. He dabbles into various odd jobs. First he works as a cart puller and when the job does not earn him much money he leaves it. Then he tries others including gardener, salesman, candy maker, and apprentice to a tailor master. And finally he joins as a cook in the office of Central Public Works Department and retires as a senior planning assistant. After his retirement he opens up a grocery shop in his locality, Natipora.

Haleema, who has been a sufferer in all respects of life, is the only child of Ab Jaan and Boba. Her first encounter with misfortune is the untimely death of her mother. At the age of eight she loses her mother to tuberculosis. Her mother’s death forces her to leave school and take care of household chores. The second misfortune which Haleema endears is her failed marriage. She marries a medical assistant, since she is Ab Jaan’s only child her husband lives with his wife’s family in their home rather than his own home. The marriage ends within just three months after she discovers that her husband has an extra marital affair with a nurse. It is excruciating for her and she becomes reticent and unchains her husband from the scared knot of marriage by divorcing him.

Haleema was eight when tuberculosis killed Boba... Haleema devoted herself fully to household chores then... Slowly, the chores became a habit; the habit seeped into her and then became a part of her being...&

Haleema married a medical assistant from a Srinagar nursing home, who began having an affair with a nurse at the hospital within two months of the wedding... Haleema became reticent, and let him go. The marriage ended in a whimper when Haleema divorced her husband in just three months. (10,13)

After a period of time, much disappointed Haleema gives birth to a baby boy who brings back some life to her after the tragedy of divorce. Ab Jaan who is attached to the
baby boy names him as Imran. Since he is born after only few months of the divorce, Imran becomes the stark reminder of her past, of her nuptial knot to the medical assistant. Though most of his facial features resemble his father, much to the dismay of his mother, except the dimples on his cheeks but she resolutely claims Imran as her and hers only and takes proud in pointing out the dimples to each and every scanning eye. She finds solace in loving and caring for him and he soon replaces all her priorities. Bashir captures the emotion of a single mother raising her child delicately:

Ignoring the stark similarities between him and his father, Haleema passionately and desperately lied to herself. She dismissed the similitude and likened the boy to herself, declaring that he was a part of her being. ‘See, my dimples, my fingernails,’ she would readily offer while praising the baby before people could begin saying that he resembled his father.

Bashir through the pristine world of Imran’s childhood depicts the picture of Kashmir before the onset of insurgency, a land of peace and unmatched beauty. Imran is shown enjoying his childhood with his mother and grandfather. Their house is located on the edge of a plum orchard in Natipora. The writer with his deft imagination draws the beauty of the land in late autumn. There is a description of rice fields with the dragon files which are near to their house, tall poplars and willows, and water that smells of the earth and it is through Imran’s eye that a reader discovers the beauty of his land. The idyllic childhood of Imran serves as eulogy to an idyllic past of blessed landscape of Kashmir defined by peace, beauty, friendship, etc. Bashir writes:

In late autumn the hens hatched their eggs inside the barn. . . . Not far from the house were their rice fields, where hovering dragonflies mated while flying, the air thick with the buzz of their wings . . . At one end of the orchard was Ab Jaan’s vegetable patch. Like all other vegetable patches in Natipora, it was fenced with the barbed wire, nailed into willow boles along the edges of the land. The farm had a deep well—lined with moss and ferns—whose water smelt of the earth.
The writer describes the first month of the winter. This month begins with a snowfall and it always thrills Imran to get up early on the day of the first snowfall of the winter. He describes his childhood memories of winter; how he used to make ice-cream from icicles and snowmen. He then elaborates on the meaning of winter in Kashmir, “It meant pilfering potatoes and eggs from the storeroom, roasting them in the kaanger and eating them hot— meant to savour saffroned hot kahwa— meant arranging the hamaams and the bukharis, the enclosed tin braziers” (25). But the winter of 1990s proves most unfortunate for the Joo family. As Haleema is living peaceful life with her father and son, the events in Natipora take an ugly turn. The insurgency begins to overthrow the political order which in turns proves catastrophic and disturbs the calm of the Valley. The whole valley roaring with the cries of insurgency and political crisis turns into a land of mass destruction. The turbulent period of 90s shatters and disrupts the lives of many innocent lives including Joos’. In the novel, chapter five named as “Tempest” expounds the situation of 1990.

The smell of burning tyres hung in the air of Srinagar. Hundreds of thousands began to march on every street and road in an endless stream of processions. Men, women, children, old, young— all. Their green headbands, the banners they brandished, the flags they waved, the placards they held, the slogans they shouted and painted on the walls repeated the same word over and over: Azadi. (32)

Bashir artistically presents the tragic happenings of 90s in Kashmir in such an enthralling way that it becomes difficult to realize whether it is a work of fiction or facts. The pictures of the plight of victims of 90s are presented in an unimaginable disgusting form by Bashir which are not an exaggerated one, but the true factual images. Anyone can relate to the gore happenings of insurgency that turns the garden of bliss into a battlefield. For Georg Lukacs, there is a correlation between reality and artistic truth. Artistic truth is a reality presented in a special way— in which the artist must be a truthful observer of life and presents it in all details of life. Thus, the critic must not be concerned with technique only but his aim is to examine the faithfulness with which the reality is presented in a text.
Natipora like the rest of the Valley too witnesses the outbreak of insurgency. The anti-India uprising reaches the narrator’s locality too when Shaheen Bhat and Imran Bhat, the first two boys from Natipora cross the border to get training in Pakistan, “The war has begun, Ab Jaan said . . . Valley Times, the newspaper he carried under his arm, had a report about a gun battle in Srinagar. . . . Young boys had begun sneaking into Pakistan to fetch arms and rebel against government” (23). The author sketches a captivating picture of the events following the unrest of 90s as Imran continues to grow into a conscientious child. The failing health of his mother, who falls prey to the lung diseases, burdens him not only to carry out daily household chores but also look after her mother’s small and petty needs. He sets up to help the family out, yet manages to study well enough to score good marks. But Imran’s life too does not remain untouched by the ugly happenings of war. As he grows up, he becomes a helpless witness to the deplorable conversion of his place into a battlefield of army and militants. As the insurgency intensifies, the government uses repressive measures i.e. deploys military and paramilitary forces in massive number to put an end to anti-India uprising. The landscape of Natipora turns into a garrison with the eruption of myriads of paramilitary bunkers and army camps. The residents of Natipora are caught in curfews, crackdowns, encounters, night-raids, arrests, killings and disappearances. Bashir writes:

The year 1990. As the insurgency in the valley intensified, the government resigned, paving the way for governor’s rule. Tears, blood, death and war followed, as did curfews, crackdowns, raids, encounters, killings, bunkers, an exodus of people, burning markets, schools and buildings… Hundreds of thousands began to march on every street and road in an endless stream of processions. (32)

Fahad Shah, a young Kashmiri writer and journalist also commented on the brutal years of 1990s in his book Of Occupation and Resistance. The first few years were the most atrocious in the history of the conflicted Valley. The early years of 90s saw a wide spread armed rebellion. The outbreak of unrest not only changed Kashmir but also lives of its people. During those years both the communities, Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims suffered equally. Both the communities lived under constant fear as they were threatened
by the defense authorities and militants. A web of torture, imprisonment, killings, rapes, exodus and similar other brutalities ensnared the common masses of Kashmir. He comments:

During early years of militancy, Kashmiri Hindus called Pandits left the Valley (their homeland) and went to Jammu (a part of the state). Their migration from one region to another came to be witnessed after more than 200 of them were killed by militants... Since the armed resistance started, around 70,000 people have been killed; thousands have been injured; 10,000 have been involuntarily made to disappear; and orphans, widows and several others languish in jails. Thousands of unmarked mass graves have been found. (17-18)

As army bunkers crops everywhere in Natipora, one winter morning when Ab Jaan and Imran goes out to clear the path covered with snow outside the gate, they see military troops posting a bunker right in front of their main gate. Ab Jaan objects for the post of the bunker and argues with them, “The bunker will be nuisance-you will always be intruding into our homes. Our women cannot come out of their houses. Please take the bunker a little away here” (26). The angry trooper hits Ab Jaan with the butt of his rifle and he falls on the snow. Imran, who comes to help him to stand up, sprints towards the trooper who pushed Ab Jaan. But soon Imam (religious head) arrives and rescues Imran from the wrangle and he cleverly manages to stop troopers from constructing bunker inside the neighbourhood. The insurgency has spread to every nook and corner of the Valley. Even the school children instead of drawing flowers and fruits on the back of their notebooks used to sketch all the things associated with insurgency; the masked militants, pistols, kalashnikovs, bullets, etc. People begin to march on every street and road in stream of processions with the slogans of “Azzadi” in response to the brutalities inflicted on the civilians by the army.

In the novel Bashir describes the ways in which people of Kashmir used to protest. Like once they march towards Chrar-e-Sharief, the shrine of Sheikh Noor-u-din Wali, patron saint of Kashmir. The march towards the shrine is a sign of protest against
the injustice carried out on the people of Kashmir. Through these demonstrations, the people of Kashmir are showing their revolt to the government and expressing their demand for self determination. Ab Jaan too joins the procession of the marchers. But the endless and swelling procession makes it impossible for Ab Jaan to reach the shrine and he leaves to return back home.

At Natipora crossing a kilometer away, he joined a cavalcade of marchers rallying towards Charar-e-Sharif, to the shrine of Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali, patron saint of Kashmir. A dense traffic of vehicles, hoisting small triangular green flags on their bumpers, plied sluggishly on the road, interspersing with an ocean of humanity. People climbed their roofs and walls to boost the morale of the masses.

The traffic jammed and honked and proceeded at intervals. Trains of various vehicles, bumper to bonnet, were smothered by men of all ages. They hung from the backs of buses. Many dangled out the windows. Young boys stood on the roofs of the buses, initiating a rallying cry for others who sat crammed around them. (38-39)

The Government in order to take control of chaotic situation announces curfew with shoot-at sight orders for anyone who defies curfew. Restrictions on movement of population within their localities, villages or towns are a common feature in the conflict zones. This is the worst human rights abuse in a democracy. At the slightest suspicion or provocation or even scant information about a militant movement, authorities impose curfew. This disrupts daily life. They have to remain indoors; the collective retelling of stories by recalling bitter memories of the past. Forcing people at gun point to remain confined to the four walls of their homes in Kashmir reproduces a natural stimulus to counteract even when there is just the slightest indication to that effect. However with their regular frequency and collateral damage suffered during these curfews people have learnt to come to terms with their fate. Aliya Anjum and Saiba Varma in an essay, “Curfewed in Kashmir” commenting on the restrictions imposed on the people during curfews remarks:
Indian armed forces have severely restricted civilian mobility by blockading roads, neighbourhoods and entire towns with barricades, checkpoints and spiral of concertina wire. Police and paramilitary units guard the streets and often intimidate local residents by shattering the windows of their homes, chasing them off the streets and at times beating them without provocation. Past experiences of life under curfew have led some neighbourhoods to set up their own rock and cement pipe barriers to deter police vehicles from patrolling their streets and causing further damage. (57)

The endless curfew makes the life of the people of Natipora miserable. There is shortage of food material and when people are left with nothing to eat, they begin to boil rice with a mixture of salt and chilli powder, “For three consecutive days, the Joo family ate cooked onion with boiled rice. When the beans too ran out, only the rice was left. They began boiling the rice with a mixture of rice and chilli powder” (40). Apart from curfew, residents of Natipora are subjected to various others humiliations and atrocities.

Women too were subjugated in Kashmir by security forces. Hundreds of women were raped, tortured and murdered in reprisal attacks. Violence against women in valley during 90s existed in various forms. They were often beaten, mutilated, burned, sexually abused and raped. There are many heart rending stories of the sufferings of innocents at the hands of military machinery. In the novel the one is that of Rukhsana, the first woman in Natipora to be beaten and humiliated by the army. She is stripped off by a trooper in front of her parents who are tied with ropes. In another incident poor Ramzan Dar’s ripe paddy is set on fire when he refuses to hand over his son to the army.

The novel vividly portrays true picture of the life of people of Natipora who are the real victims of the situations over which they have no control. In a battle between the army and militants, the innocent people of valley suffered. They had to bear the consequences of militant activities. Bashir describes the callous behaviour of defense authorities towards the residents of Natipora after they are being attacked by militants. They have come to accompany a Kashmiri Pandit to his abandoned house in the same locality. The Pandit, Mr. Tickoo intends to secure some belongings that his family had
left behind following the hurried exodus of their community from Kashmir to safer places outside the Valley. The incident disturbs the relative calm of the locality as the follow-up raids and combing operations by the army turn violent and indecent. After the attack, the army which is stationed in the region to fight the armed rebels exercises its anger against the local civilians, even Tickoo falls prey to their anger. They drag him out of the truck, beat him and set fire to his things, “with no one around to avenge for the damage, dragged the Tickoo man out of the truck and began to beat him severely. They jettisoned his things into a pile on the road and set it on fire” (44). The angry troops begin to beat the people of the locality who are trapped in their homes. They even set the shops and houses on fire by sprinkling gunpowder on them. Throughout that night they keep on searching the insurgents by raiding the houses and beating the boys they encounter in the houses. Bashir remarks:

The angry troops began to indiscriminately beat those trapped inside their homes. They sprinkled gunpowder over the shops and houses on either side of the road and set them on fire . . .

Haleema and Ab Jaan couldn’t run away. . . . They saw troops burning the chicken coops outside the butcher’s shop. They heard the slamming of doors and the shattering of glass and the screams of young boys pleading for mercy … the army pulled their pherans over their heads and shoved them one by one into the truck. (44)

Next morning, a patrolling party headed by Major Aman Lal Kushwaha begins to conduct search operations to find out hidden insurgents. They start their house to house search. Soon the army reaches Ab Jaan’s house and asks him whereabouts of the militants. During the investigation Major Kushwaha hurls abuses on the people of Kashmir and treats them ruthlessly. Bashir captures the humiliation and shame that the civilians have to go through in a search operation conducted by army. He remarks:

The army called out the male members once they were outside the gate. Ab Jaan decided to go and open the gate. . . . No sooner had he opened the wooden gate than he found Major Aman Lal Kushwaha facing him. . .
‘where did you hide them?’ the irate major asked, shoving Ab Jaan to the ground. ‘Whom?’ Ab Jaan said. He hit Ab Jaan hard on the arm with his rifle. ‘Don’t lie. All you sister fucking Kashmiris lie! You know you lie . . . Sisterfuckers, your orchard is so vast and dense’. . . (48)

While frisking Major Kushwaha asks Ab Jaan about the militants. He answers Major Kushwaha in negative and this makes him furious and he uses abusive language and tells that all Kashmiri tell lies, orders his man to take Ab Jaan aside and slaps the young boy Imran, who watches the humiliation of his family. Ab Jaan objects to Major Kushwaha’s humiliating and torturing civilians and tells him that that the real reason of army being here is to protect them and not to humiliate and torture the innocent civilians. Major Kushwaha in a fit of anger kills Ab Jaan mercilessly by shooting him dead.

Kushwaha held Ab Jaan by his collar and drag him towards the large mortar beside the small ornamental lawn in front of the house. Two troops held Haleema and Imran back . . . three bullets were pumped into Ab Jaan. One in the neck. One in the heart. One in the stomach . . . ‘Sister fucker!’ Kushwaha said after killing Ab Jaan, the fevered barrel of his rifle still smoking. (48-49)

Through the death of Ab Jaan, Bashir unveils the inhumane rule of the defense authorities and their abuse of military power. He condemns and criticizes the draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Acts (AFSPA) and Public Safety Act (PSA) that legalized and legitimized extra judicial killings through fake encounters in the Valley. Same is the case with Ab Jaan; he is killed by Major Kushwaha out of hatred. He hates Ab Jaan since the episode of construction of bunker in front of Ab Jaan’s main gate. The death of Ab Jaan comes as a jolt to Haleema leaving her broken and shattered. She does not accept the harsh reality that his father is no more. The death of Ab Jaan is the first of its kind in Natipora. His death means a colossal loss for Haleema because his death for her means the loss of a responsible guardian, a lone bread-earner and a sympathetic father. Bashir portrays the pain and misery of a daughter who is deprived of her protector, her father:
. . . the women tried to prevent Haleema from hurting himself. She was conscious now and in shock. She wanted the women to tell her Ab Jaan was still alive. . . . Her tears had dried. The skin beneath her throat was red from chest-thumping. Her cheeks had the imprints of her own slaps. . . . She laughed, and then abruptly ran towards a wall barefooted to bang her head. (50)

As Haleema is mourning the death of her father, she is struck with another tragedy which shatters her life forever. After three months of her father’s murder, fate again plays its dirty role. One fateful night Imran gets arrested by Major Kushwaha during a raid at night and is pushed to oblivion never to return back. He is picked up by army on the pretext that he shares the name with other known militant from his locality, Imran Bhat. The namesake surrogate of Imran has crossed the Line of Control and is active as an area commander of Natipora for JKLF, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front. Bashir strikes a purple patch as he vividly portrays the heart rending incident of Imran’s arrest with a desperate mother begging before the troops for mercy. Haleema fruitlessly pleads to army to leave him. But her tearful pleas and requests are mercilessly rejected:

The trooper bundled Imran into the Gypsy and hastily leapt behind him. He stood there, holding on to the railing of the Gypsy’s roof. Haleema ran in front of the vehicle and knelt in front of its bonnet, breathing hard, begging and crying for Imran’s release. A trooper dragged her aside and the Gypsy picked up speed . . . Haleema collapsed on the dirt road, wailing, barefooted, bare-headed. . . . ‘Gaed ha kaertham, patro! I am a perforated soul, my son’, Haleema muttered in a sing song voice. Two frozen trails of tears glistened on her cheeks. (57)

Imran’s arrest marks the beginning of the most agonizing phase of Haleema’s life, the repercussions of which take a heavy toll on her physical and psychological health. She embarks on a long interminable and wounding journey. A journey of the unavailing endeavours to find out the whereabouts of her only son. Bashir delineates the account of Haleema’s desperate and futile search for her disappeared son. In this process she runs
from pillar to post trying to seek even a smallest piece of information concerning her son. The night Imran is arrested, she keeps weeping and sobbing the whole night. Next morning she makes it to Imam’s house with swollen and moist eyes and both of them decide to go to the police station to lodge an FIR against Major Kushwaha. On reaching nearby police station she is shocked to hear that police is not in a position to lodge complaint against army. Their job is reduced to identify the dead bodies, carry and deliver the bodies to the families of deceased. The officer in charge tells Haleema that they cannot be of any help to her and suggest her that only way to get any information about her son is to approach the army directly:

. . . it has been a long time since we filed an FIR. A long, long time. Actually we cannot lodge an FIR against the army. The constable spoke in a country side dialect. Our job is now confined to identifying; carrying and delivering dead bodies to their families…the only way is to approach the army itself. They take everyone they pick up to their local camps. (63)

Fahad Shah, a writer and journalist in an essay, “I Live with the Dead” shares his experience of how army used to deliver dead bodies to local police stations and they in turn handover bodies to gravediggers to bury them. In his essay he also shares an experience of a gravedigger how every time after burying the nameless dead he suffered from mental trauma. It was painful for him to see the corpses in pathetic conditions. He narrates:

The army used to handover bodies to local police stations and the policemen had to bury them. The policemen in turn used to come to gravediggers like me with the bodies…It used to be one body, three bodies or sometimes more than six per day. It continued for years and I would bury them here in the same graveyard . . . when I returned home after burying them. I couldn’t stop myself from weeping. (71-72)

Haleema’s journey for the search of her disappeared son and justice begins. Her journey about the whereabouts of his son takes her to all places not only in Kashmir but also to the places outside Kashmir. Through her frenetic and desperate search for her son,
the writer brings to the fore the struggle and the plight of all those who have lost their loved ones to the barbaric, involuntary disappearances. It leads to a frustrating never-ending cycle of chasing the authorities, sleepless nights and entertaining a lingering hope of seeing their loved ones’ return safely. Haleema along with Imam at the suggestion of police constable approaches the army camp which is situated a kilometer away from Natipora. On reaching the army camp they ask a guard to fix a meeting with Captain who has picked up a young boy last night from Natipora. The guard agrees but before he could say something more, he is interrupted by one of his colleagues by saying that Major is not here and they can meet Lance Naik Sharmaji:

‘Yes, I saw major Sahib bring a boy last night. But . . .’ before the soldier could complete his sentence, one of his colleagues emerged and interrupted him with a wink and a cough. The Imam insisted on meeting the major. ‘He is not here,’ the second trooper said stiffly . . . ‘you can meet Lance Naik Sharmaji, but only you,’ the trooper told the Imam.’ (66)

The first trooper, who gives a clue about Imran steps out to check Imam before telling him to meet Lance Naik Sharmaji while frisking him, he murmurs, “Major has shifted your boy somewhere else. And then he loudly pretended to be strict, chalo, chalo! All of you wait here” (66-67). The Imam discloses the things to the crowd which the guard told him and leads the crowd back by telling them that there is no point of meeting Naik. After leaving from the camp, Haleema along with Imam and other people in order to attract the attention of government starts protesting in the middle of the road near a Shrine. They block the traffic by placing big stones and discarding tyres on the road. But soon army reaches there and dispels the crowd, “they caught hold of some of the boys by their collars and kicked their behinds repeatedly. . . . They shooed the people away and continued beating the boys. They began dismantling the blockade and beating the drivers of the vehicles that had stopped because of the obstacle” (67). Each day Haleema with other people assembles at the Shrine and march towards local camp to protest and every day they are beaten and made to disperse. Shah in an essay, “Blood will be Avenged: An Introduction” in the book Of Occupation and Resistance talks about the tactics used by government to curb peaceful protests. He comments:
Dissent voices are crushed. Gatherings are banned. The right to protest has been taken away. . . . And whosoever comes to the streets to fight knows that being hit by a bullet or a tear gas shell or by a policeman’s baton is a possibility . . . For decades now, India has been undermining these protests and the voices of dissent emerging from Kashmir. (11-12)

In the meantime Imam gets to know about a boy of the same physical appearance as of Imran from his neighbour, Mohammad Shafi. He has seen the boy at the camp where his son is detained. Imam with Haleema approaches to the army camp named “Malaysia.” She desperately describes Imran’s feature to the Major and then show him his picture. But the army Major out rightly denies of ever having picked up any boy of the name Imran, “. . . no boy called Imran was in the camp, and therefore, they should leave. . . . He declined to acknowledge his battalion’s role in picking up anyone from Natipora. I do not know anyone called Major Aman Kushwaha” (68). Bashir, like Marx believes that literature not only provides pleasure and relaxation to the human beings but also makes them conscious about their environment in a significant way:

Literature helped human beings to become conscious in their minds about actual conditions of existence. In this case, consciousness pointed towards the knowledge of social contradictions (conflicts, problems and issues linked with the class) which would help Productive group to attain freedom from needs and wants to control the domain of society collectively. (Panja 163)

Throughout his novel, Bashir brings out the problems faced by the relatives of victims of enforced disappearances. The relatives of arrestee exhaust all the extra judicial remedies to locate their dear ones. The officials who are approached to know the whereabouts denies the arrest of detainees at all. The relatives in a desperate state approach the other security officials for the help. They move to different interrogation centers in and outside the state. And finally with the passage of time exhausting all the channels the dejected relatives either helplessly wait for their return or die in their wait. In an essay, “Reproducing Regimes of Impunity: Fake Encounters and the
Informalization of Everyday Violence in Kashmir Valley” Haley Duschinski comments on the prolonged wait and sufferings of the families of disappeared:

The problem of extrajudicial killings has been highlighted by the relatives of the disappeared working with human rights organizations to promote accountability and rule of law. . . . For the families of the disappeared, waiting— for the return of a loved one, for news about his fate, or for justice in the form of state transparency and accountability— is truly the defining characteristic of their lives in the margin. (120)

Haleema does not lose hope. The search for her only son becomes the purpose of her survival. She decides to track down her son at any cost. She sells her cattle, jewellery, orchard and even her expensive copper utensils to raise money she might need to free her son. In order to seek any information concerning her son she first reaches radio station to take help of news producer to broadcast the news of her son’s enforced disappearance but the news producer snubs her, “Radio doesn’t air this kind of news, he said stiffly. Look for a newspaper instead. Behind the radio station is the TV station. . . . You can try there, may be they will . . .” (72). After that she proceeds to TV station in a hope that it might broadcast the news of her son. But to her dismay it proves futile, as she is told by a young woman that news producer would be of no help to her and he always refuses to broadcast any such news by calling it as “dangerous and unconventional.” The legendary philosopher Karl Marx wrote in the Rheinische Zeitung:

If the censorship is honest in its intention, it would prevent arbitrariness, but it makes arbitrariness into a law. He said that the free press is the ubiquitous vigilant eye of a people’s soul, the embodiment of a people’s faith in itself, the eloquent link that connects the individual with the state and the world, the embodied culture that transforms material struggles into intellectual struggles and idealises their crude material form. (qtd. in Shah 8)

Bashir also hints on the restrictions that the government puts on the media. They are not allowed to narrate the woeful stories of Kashmir and its people. Fahad Shah, a writer and journalist commenting on the freedom of press in Kashmir remarks:
In Kashmir, however, the state neither allows for ‘frank confession’ nor makes space for a ‘spiritual mirror in which a people can see itself.’ The Indian forces will not permit free press in the Valley. The brutal repression of the demand for rights always leads to a tragedy. Such calamities and losses have been faced by almost anyone who has tried to unearth the truth; dissenters have inevitably faced the wrath of the government forces. Those who are aligned with alternative media to narrate Kashmir’s stories have been either threatened or banned. (9)

And when the official electronic media refuses to narrate her story and bring her plight to the notice of authorities, she finds her way to BBC’s bureau office at Srinagar. She meets a BBC journalist, Izhar who helps her and promises her to narrate a small report on the BBC and even takes her to a local Urdu newspaper office. It is with his help she gets her tragic tale published in a local Urdu newspaper, *Waadi ki Aawaaz*. The editor of the local daily, G.N. Shaida too talks about the government’s restriction on publishing such stuff, “You know, Izhar, the government has already stopped advertising with us because we publish this human right stuff . . . But I don’t care. Haleema’s grief will still be printed in my paper” (76). The narration used by the writer to depict the agony of a mother when she scans the newspaper for the news of disappearance of her son is par excellence. She sees the first page and finds the photo of Imran at the bottom of the page surrounded by the news of his disappearance in Urdu. She reads the report many times and when she is satiated she puts the newspaper into a trunk.

Haleema began looking for the news about Imran . . . She scanned the first page while simultaneously walking and tripping on the pebbles. And there it was, at the bottom of the page. A small photo of Imran, … was printed with the story. She kissed it, her eyes moist . . . A portion of the news continued on the third page . . . She continued to read the report, erring with some long and twisted words she was unfamiliar with. She read the report several times. And when she was satisfied, she folded the newspaper carefully and tucked it into the heirloom tin trunk. (78)
As the time passes there is no sign of Imran and this affects her both physically and mentally. It has been observed that when parents lose their child, a part of them dies. Thus by losing Imran she loses her life. The condition of her health now goes from bad to worse. Beside her physical health, her mental health deteriorates day by day. She is now having auditory hallucinations and believing that the things talk to her. She also use to converse with Imran’s clothes; kissing and sniffing them, “She began talking to herself or to the walls. Sometimes, she would talk to the things that belonged to Imran, crying and wailing alternatively. She would open the dented heirloom trunk and take out his notebooks. She would slowly run her fingers over his scribbles” (69). She often has psychotic beliefs and dissimulations of having Imran around her. She has now become an inevitable victim of circumstances with major psychological disability and seclusion.

Bashir has illuminated the invisible scars of conflict which are not visible like physical wounds. Through the character of Haleema he has addressed the psychological condition and the mental agony the people of Kashmir went through by losing their loved ones in the conflict. In The Half Mother Bashir has portrayed very strong facet of woman’s character that fight against all the atrocities at every level. She does not leave any stone unturned to search for her missing son. She does not feel traumatized; though her faith in law and justice is shattered. Her indefatigable spirit and rebellious nature of tracking down her son makes her a strong woman. It is the hope that can bring strength and transform a human being. Hope can instill determination even in weakest of human beings and makes one cross all the limits and boundaries. Hope instills a new life into a broken soul of Haleema and transforms her into a warrior. She is transformed from being simple homely woman into a woman with an iron-will in search of any piece of information about her missing son. With this resolve in mind she moves from one place to other and from one helper to other. In another desperate attempt she meets SSP in his office and there she is told by the officer that a young boy has been admitted to the army hospital and may be that boy is Imran. She reaches the army hospital which is located behind the Badami Bagh Cantonment, Srinagar. She searches all the wards bed by bed but cannot trace Imran. There she sees young boys and men who have been tortured and interrogated are admitted in the hospital. Here Bashir gives the picture of the inhuman
methods of torture used by army on the prisoners that left such indelible disorders both physically and psychologically making them vulnerable for life:

Haleema saw limbless, fingerless, nailless, hairless, toothless, eyeless, earless detainees—a variety of wriggling, howling, yowling amputated souls. The scene dazed her. . . She surveyed the boys whose kidneys had failed. They had been trampled over by cement rollers . . . She saw a handsome young man who was on a ventilator; they learnt his anus had been bleeding uncontrollably. (80)

No setback seems to be serious enough to weaken her resolve which is now firmly grounded in the elusive dream of seeing her son again. On 15 of August Haleema reaches the police station as the army has announced in a press release that they are going to release and deliver boys pressed on venial charges to the local police station, “It was an Independence Day Gift, the army said in its presser to the media” (83). Haleema waits whole day for Imran who is expected to get released by the army. Hour passes and there is no sign of Imran. After seeing Haleema in an endless wait, The Station House Officer sympathizes and informs that he does not know about any handover from any battalion. He suggests her to visit the “Papa 2” interrogation centre where army takes most of the arrested boys. “They have two main interrogation centres in Srinagar: Papa1 and Papa 2. Most of their detainees go to Papa 2, at Gupkar Road. You must visit it” (84).

On the day of Eid Haleema makes it to “Papa 2” interrogation centre. She joins a queue of relatives of detainees who are going to deliver things to their boys. Outside the gate of the center a guard stops her when she tries to follow others to enter the center. She is not allowed to go inside without having a confirmation. Haleema keeps waiting the whole day under the tree, while few boys are released from “Papa 2.” In the evening when the security forces ask her to leave, she chases the released boys to ask them about Imran. She sees a boy, Rehbar released from the interrogation center. She asks him about her son and shows him his photograph. He recognizes Imran and tells her that he has seen him at the Badami Bagh Cantonment and advises her to visit a barbar, Abdus Salam from Pampore. Abdus Salam is the only one who is allowed to go inside the camp to shave the
detainees. After giving information to Haleema, Rehbar and his mother go to hospital, Soura for the treatment of Rehbar, who is not well. Then she goes to meet Abdus Salam. She shows him a picture of Imran and asks him if he has seen Imran while shaving the detainees. He tells her that he has seen a boy who resembles the boy in the picture two months ago, who refused to get shave and was too scared to talk. But after a fortnight he saw a new lot of boys. And when he enquired about the previous detainees the guard told him that they have been shifted to some other place. The barber tells her the pathetic condition of the new detainees. Bashir paints the picture of the “Papa 2” as one of the heinous cells where the arrested boys were interrogated day and night. It is infamous for the methods of torturing the prisoners that make them both physically and psychologically impaired. The details about the torture and condition of the detainees are hair-raising. Abdus Salam narrates:

. . . They had been tortured recently. I couldn’t even shave them properly as the skin fell off their faces. “They pulled it out with pliers,” one of them told me with great difficulty. It was hair-raising. Some of them requested me to feed them the hot water I had washed my shaving brush with. They had been as thirsty as a desert. One’s forearm had turned septic. (96)

In 1989, when journalist Kuldip Nayar visited Kashmir on the behalf of the Indian government to assess the situation in Kashmir, he visited torture centers and wrote about the tortures meted out to the prisoners in book, Beyond the Lines. The physical and mental tortures meted out to the detainees in the torture centres were horrible. In these centres prisoners were treated worst than beasts. They were beaten ruthlessly and tortured brutally. He writes:

. . . that was when the torture chambers, called Papa One and Papa Two were established. Apparently they were interrogation centers where indescribable cruelties were committed . . . If ever the history of zulum by the security forces is recorded, the interrogation centres in Kashmir will rank quite high up the ladder. (Nayar 317)
At Abdus Salam place Haleema also comes to know about the sad story of his daughter. She learns that his son-in-law was killed by Indian troops in a fake encounter. The writer here deals with the issue of fake encounter which was common during the period of 90s in Kashmir. People were first picked up by the army and then killed in fake encounters without any fault. Salam’s son-in-law, Showkat was a tailor and worked in his shop outside his home. One evening he stayed back to finish a “bridal trousseau,” that night some troops came and took him away on the pretext of some talk. After seven days police truck delivered his body outside their neighbourhood, “It was a fake encounter. They put a Kalashnikov and two hand grenades on him and declared it as a “huge success” on TV” (97). Shah in his essay, “Blood will be Avenged: An Introduction” published in the book, *Of Occupation and Resistance: Writing from Kashmir* edited by him also criticizes the killing of the civilians by defense authorities, “There are draconian laws like PSA and the Armed Forced Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Both have been widely used to jail and kill civilians with impunity. Minors have been arrested and put in jails under PSA” (12). Hundreds of civilian men, women and even children across Kashmir have been reported to be extra judicially executed by Indian security forces and then the killings concealed as fake encounters. “Fake encounters” are those killings in which security personnels kill someone in cold blood claiming that the casualty occurred in an encounter. Haley Duschinski in an essay, “Reproducing Regimes of Impunity: Fake Encounters and the Informalization of Everyday Violence in Kashmir Valley” writes:

... These killings may take place after the victim has been detained in official custody for at least a short period prior to death, or they may take place on the streets, prior to detention, as security forces or police officers or paramilitary personnel kill the individual at the moment of observation or apprehension. The extrajudicial killing is then followed by the official claim that the victim died in a legitimate military encounter with police or army forces. (111)

Returning with the no news of Imran Haleema goes to see Rehbar Khan who is admitted in the hospital, Soura. He was tortured day and night by the army to the extent that his right kidney has nearly failed. The condition of Rehbar is worse; his wounds have
been severely infected and he has been passing blood in his urine. Much worse is that after getting discharged from the hospital he is killed in a fake encounter, “They forced him to piss on a red-hot heater. He has been passing blood in his urine since then” (101).

Haleema continues to fight though she is battered and bruised mentally and physically. Her journey continues and she teams up with another couple, Rafiq and Shafiq who decides to visit their son in Tihar jail. In a hope to meet her son, Haleema first goes to a jail in Udhampur, Jammu. But the warden after seeing the photograph of Imran informs that the boy in the photograph is not here. Next they reach a jail in Kuthua and once again she returns dejected. After that they start on their final destination that is Tihar jail. The repercussions of the chaos in Kashmir entangles Haleema and others in Delhi too where they are refused accommodation since they are Kashmiris. After visiting Tihar jail too she finds no trace of Imran.

Search for Imran becomes her habit. She has knocked almost all the doors. Jails and courts have become her daily affair. She even approaches an organization called SHRC, the State Human Rights Commission, to register her case in order to make her case strong. She meets the chairman of the organization who makes her clear that in order to register the case she needs a certificate from the “PCR” certifying that they have not received any such body who resembles Imran. He further makes clear that this organization would not help her to get any justice but to some extent the process of registration will make her case stronger, “We are a state government organization. . . . At the end of the day we will be able to register your case and claim for compensation. Not more. Nothing more than that. Don’t expect justice from us” (132). That evening at the PCR mortuary she meets middle-aged man, Khizir. He has performed more than ten thousand post-mortems throughout his service. She shows him picture of Imran and asks him if he has ever come across a face like him. Khizir tells her that the body of a young boy by the name Imran is with the police and will be delivered to PCR mortuary for autopsy soon. Next morning in a dismal state Haleema goes to morgue to identify the body. But luckily the body is not of Imran but of a Gujjar boy who is, “believed to have been tortured to death, in the Wular” (135). Khizir also tells Haleema about the prospect of his job. By making Khizir as a mouth piece, Bashir gives a scathing account of how
army brutally killed the young boys in torture centers or in fake encounters. Their bodies were mutilated and disfigured. Khizir narrates:

I have to stitched heads on bodies; heads, which anyway failed to form a face- so defiled, so disfigured . . . then there was a young— in whose stomach I found coals and strips of cloth. His gut smelt of kerosene. When I probed his nails I found something sticking to them. The forensic report later said they were traces of his own skin. (135)

The novel also brings in focus the bad political system of the state. Even the politicians did not spare the plight of poor victims. Power and unwillingness of the people in power to do anything about the plight of common people who often get cornered by militants and army is portrayed, when the writer talks about the meeting of Haleema and the chief minister of the state. Haleema with the help of different people manages to meet Chief Minister, Dr. Aiyesh Mir, heartlessly disregards her earnest request and expresses his inability to help them. He argues that the missing people have crossed the border and will never come back. Haleema reports him that their loved ones have been picked up by army from their homes in front of them and their neighbours, who are eye witnesses. Dr. Aiyesh argues that there is no difference between him and them. He too is going through the same trauma. His family is also scattered. His wife and son are away from him in America and he and his daughters are here, “I have gone through the same madness myself, he said. My wife is in America. My son is in America. My daughters are here and there. My family is scattered. I am here. . . . I am like you. Actually we are all the same. We can’t do anything. I can just pray for you” (151).

After trying almost everything she decides to file a case against army. She takes the help of Izhar who accompanies her to an advocate, Farooq Ahmad. In the following days she visits the court frequently and during her visits she meets other people who are fighting for justice as their relatives have also become victims of enforced disappearances. They all sit at the back of court rooms and wait patiently for hours for their respective hearings. As the number of relatives increase day by day the court forces the relatives to unite and form an association to fight together. Haleema urges the people who have also been the victims of similar fate to form an “Association of the Relatives of
Disappeared Person” so that they can fight together for the cause. After the association is formed, advocate Farooq makes the file of the case in which the status of victimhood assigned to the respective relatives is filled. Advocate explains to the women whose husbands have disappeared they are called as “half widows” instead of widows and the word “half” pinches Haleema so hard that she asks advocate about the status of those mothers whose sons have disappeared, “So, for all such uncertain cases for women whose husbands have disappeared, we will prefix their status with “Half,” Advocate Farooq explained. . . . ‘And what mothers, Farooq sahib?’ Haleema asked. Are they half mothers by rule?... So am I a half mother?” (143).

Finally, in the summer of 1999 after hearing all the witnesses Justice Aadil Khan concludes the long enquiry and summons the army. Colonel Ajit Kumar comes to represent the army. The case which she has filed against army too seems to bring no relief to her as army offers monetary compensation of two lakh rupees to her and the jurist who is supposed to look into the case also is not available on the day of hearing because he has to leave on an emergency. She refuses the offer of monetary compensation. Colonel in order to assuage her feelings informs her that Major Aman Lal Kushwaha is no more and was killed in an attack on the border. Major Kushwaha was her only hope and after hearing the news of his death she loses her last hope, “I won’t live longer than the money I have saved. And what would I do with the money. You are offering me? Would it assuage my pain? No I don’t want any justice from you. You are incapable of justice. If you honestly want to help me, tell me what happened to my son?...” (153).

Bashir narrates the culmination of the story and of the Haleema through personal notes of Journalist, Izhar. He helps her at every step. Bashir through Izhar portrays the true picture of real journalism. He is the symbol of real journalism. David Barsamian in an essay, “Journalism in Kashmir.” He writes that real journalism should unravel the truth by reaching the depth of the things. The interpretation of objectivity has been seen as the ideal trait in the ethical journalist. The aim of the journalism is to bring into light the actual scenario of events without obscuring the truth. The focus of real journalism
should be on depicting the plight of common masses and it also should be fearless to pursue their story despite the security risks. He remarks:

Real journalism should go where the silences are. It should go into the darkest corners and shine light into them. It should be fearless and courageous... It should be focusing on massive human right violation, collective punishment, custodial deaths, sexual molestation, fake encounters and the plight of the mentally disturbed, orphans and half widows. (240)

Haleema though broken physically and mentally continues her fight. She has become a legend. She not only fights for her justice but for all those who suffer the same fate as of Haleema, “I am not struggling for my son now but for all those who have disappeared” (164). At the end of the novel while Izhar keeps on brooding over the tragedy of Kashmir, Haleema breathes her last in the hospital, Soura. She collapses without seeing the return of her son. She becomes a complete tragic figure because of her misfortunes and heroic endurances.

*The Half Mother* extracted consistently high applauds from reviewer and critics. It brings out the novelist’s brilliant eye, great sense of timing for details, and exceptional gift for tolerant and painstaking honesty. It offers a glimpse of the lives shattered in the historical circumstances of unimaginable turbulence of Kashmir and how these lives attempt to apply the strategies of survival to such a traumatic experience. Bashir has successfully given voice to the issue of enforced disappearances in Kashmir and the plight of all those who have lost their loved ones in the burning cauldron of territorial war and their endless craving for their return. By making Haleema as a protagonist of the novel, Bashir focuses on the predicament of all the mothers who have lost their sons in the conflict. Thus in that sense, she sets out to be a universal mother who represents all those devastated mothers of the conflict. Beside this *The Half Mother* also throws light on the several aspects of life in Kashmir including a bad political government, the repressive measures used by army to curb the insurgency; arrests, fake encounters, tortures in interrogation centers, etc. and the media; both electronic and press dominated by the state.