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Life under Siege: Unravelling the Gambits of Coercion in Farah Bashir's Rumours of Spring

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ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary study examines Farah Bashir's memoir Rumours of Spring:A Girlhood in Kashmir (2021) to explore representations of state coercion in Indian-held Kashmir during the 1990s, arguing that the coercive tactics, psychological in nature, obliterate subjectivities of ordinary Muslim Kashmiris. Focusing on the 'how' of coercion, this critical inquiry draws behavioral parallels between Albert Biderman's chart of coercion—derived from his analysis of Chinese treatment of American prisoners of war during the Korean War—and the Indian state's coercive mechanisms employed in the Indian-held Kashmir. In doing so, this paper investigates how protracted curfews, unwarranted interrogations, media censorship, and ubiquitous surveillance–all these strategies–damage self-image, curtail independent thinking, monopolize perception, foster degradation, and derange the equanimity of ordinary Muslim Kashmiris. The analysis of Bashir's autoethnographic narrative reveals that the 'captive environment' is created to silence dissent, enforce conformity, and submissiveness of Kashmiri subjects in a bid to solidify the Indian state's hegemonic overreach in the region. While offering fresh insights in the interdisciplinary research paradigms, this study also helps in understanding variant strata of coercion in besieged zones. Taken together, it highlights the significance of life narratives in generating emancipatory discourses in South Asia and beyond.

Introduction

The Kashmir question continues to shape academic research and public discourse in South Asia, right from Hari Singh's controversial decision–dishonoring the demands of the Muslim majority–to accede to the Indian Union on 26 October 1947 to date. Initially, Kashmir was granted the special status in the Indian constitution via Article 370 under the leadership of Jawahar Lal Nehru. This inclusion of Kashmir under Article 370 was poised as a temporary settlement measure, and the Kashmiris were promised plebiscite to decide their own destiny. The plebiscite never occurred; self-determination was altogether denied. Furthermore, the situation in Kashmir worsened substantially following the peaceful activism among section of the local population advocating their legitimate demands. In response, the Indian government imposed Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that unleashed a kind of reign of terror (starting from the shrine of Hazratbal) in Indian-held Kashmir. (Pal, 2021) The besieged territory was "converted into a bloody region in 1989s when the peaceful resistance against the Indian atrocities took a very crucial and cruel turn" (Shakeel et al., 2020). Sadly enough, third parties' efforts including the United Nations' (UN) resolutions to bring peace in the region, have ended in utter failure. (Lamb, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 1999; Peer, 2010) Consequently, the valley of Kashmir, envisioned by many as a paradise on earth, morphed into one of the most 'militarized zones on

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earth'(Bose, 2003). Far from achieving autonomy or self-determination, the lives of ordinary Kashmiris-especially Muslims-became terribly harrowing and disdainful, precipitating a sustained confrontation between Kashmiris and the Indian troops. Besides, Indian forces have been using physical subjugation and torture, as well as psychological tactics to create a 'captive environment' where the ordinary Kashmiris' subjectivities have become precarious, terrified, and paranoiac.

Echoing features commonly associated with fascist states both in antiquity and in contemporary times, Indian state has relied extensively on coercive tactics–both physical and psychological–to subjugate and control the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of Kashmir. Along with physical control and body torture, the Indian state orchestrates different gambits: dusk-to-dawn curfews, unwarranted interrogations, media control, ubiquitous surveillance, illegal trespassing, patrolling and intimidating Check Posts, to cultivate a terrified sociopolitical landscape in Indian-held Kashmir.

In the wake of Kahmir's agonizingly terrified landscape, writers emerge–as P.B. Shelley once observed in a different context–'the unacknowledged legislators' of the Kashmir conundrum, articulating Kashmiri suffering while simultaneously preserving cultural ethos and contesting dominant Indian-centric narratives. Kashmiri writers expose the layers of state brutality and belligerence through their poignantly profound storytelling that has helped present to the world the plight of ordinary Kashmiris subjected to an "abominable outrage" (Shane, 2008). Writers like Agha Shahid Ali, Basharat Peer, and Mirza Waheed, among others, expose sufferings, suffocation, and survival in the "world's most militarized zone on earth" (Bose, 2003).

Drawing upon Albert Biderman's chart of coercion, which he formulated after studying Chinese interrogators' treatment of the American prisoners of war in the Korean War, this paper argues that the Indian coercive tactics aim at damaging self-image, curtailing independent thinking, monopolizing perception, fostering exhaustion, and deranging the equanimity of ordinary Muslim Kashmiris. In doing so, the study has found striking resemblance between the American prisoners of war under Chinese interrogations during the Korean War and the plight of ordinary Muslim Kashmiris under Indian siege with varying outcomes: the purpose of the Chinese interrogator was to elicit information, famously known as 'false confessions' from the American prisoners; whereas, the Indian state apparatuses employ such tactics to silence the dissent of Kashmiris, and to solidify the Indian state's hegemony and omnipotence in the region

Farah Bashir's plangent and evocative memoir *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* (2021) is analyzed and evaluated in light of Albert Biderman's postulates on coercion and its manifest outcomes in case of Indian-held Kashmir. The study stimulates the debate that psychological manipulation through variant tactics is more debilitating and abominable than the physical coercion. Biderman was a socio-psychologist who "first described a framework for understanding psychological coercion in the context of confinement" (Baldwin et al., 2014). The application of Biderman's framework on the text to accentuate Indian coercive mechanisms in Indian-held Kashmir is an interesting phenomenon. Given the political and popular appeal of the Kashmir dispute, the author has considered it a relevant juxtaposition to inform and discuss the plight of ordinary Kashmiris in a bid to stretch the debate beyond existing scholarly debates based on paradigms like feminism, biopolitics, geopolitics and necropolitics, among others.

The memoir *Rumours of Spring* [re]captures lived experiences of authoress's girlhood days during the turbulent 1990s in the Indian-held Kashmir. Farah's impeccable narrative interweaves state aggression and its debilitating methods of oppression with the personal loss and agony. Overall, the analysis of the memoir reveals that Indian state employs variant tactics such as prolonged curfews, unwarranted interrogations, media censorship, and ubiquitous surveillance, among others to create a "captive environment" (Biderman, 1957) that robs Kashmiris of their individuality, free thinking, sanity and even the equanimity of life. The endpoints of Biderman's theorization are compared with Indian tactics' outcomes in the memoir. The study offers a fresh standpoint to understanding the besieged life in Kashmir valley. Adding on to the Kashmiri cultural imaginations, it (re)opens new avenues in interdisciplinary studies bringing art, sociology, criminology and psychology together. Moreover, it also highlights the role of writers in creating liberating and dissenting voices travelling beyond regions, borders, and also censorships. This research could also be utilized as a blueprint in understanding the complex nature of coercion in occupied territories like Gaza Strip under Israeli occupation and Rohingyas in Maynmar, among others.

Literature Review

In the literature written under siege, scolarly attention often focuses on the physical brutality and punitive tactics used by occupying states to dominate occupied territories. Such analyses frequently emphasize the overt and unrestrained exercise of power against largely powerless subjects. The use of coercive power to silence the subjects; to seek conformity; to establish omnipresent state control: all such moves are usually brought under rigorous discussion. At the dawn of twentieth century, scholarship and research started focusing

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upon the psychological imprints of the physical torture on the sufferers or victims in the wake of modernist philosophy especially psychological underpinnings primarily initiated by Sigmund Freud and William James. So much so, the communist revolution that promised to create equality and freedom for the oppressed class, too, took refuge in coercive control and manipulation. Communism's counterpart, Western liberal democracy that took the world by storm with its emphasis on dignity of human life and respect for human rights and liberty could not change the old pattern–the coercive use of power. So, the literary creations written at the backdrop of these circumstances either expose the power nexuses and physical brutality or their imapcts on the minds and psyche of people, as it has often been seen in literary works written under siege, or in the literature of war, including narratives from Palestine, Syria, Myanmar and Kashmir. However, less attention is paid to the psychological coercion or the nature of torture itself in scholarship and research paradigms. The use of psychological torture as a mechanism to elicit information became popular during Americans' treatment of prisoners of war at Guantanamo Bay prison facility. Although Biderman had given his understanding of the mechanisms of coercion way earlier, but his theories got popularity in the 21st century in the wake of America led 'war on terror'. Having said that this research paper tries to unravel the gambits of psychological coercion employed by the Indian military in Indian-held Kashmir during 1990s, making India, arguably, more draconian and brutal occupying state. The researcher has chosen the medium of a memoir to further explicate the argument.

Memoirs provide powerful tool to understand the power nexus because "the power of memoir stems from their ability to enable the readers to locate a personal narrative within the larger socio-political contexts of a specific moment in history" (Taber et al., 2017). In the context of writing life under sige, memoir writing assumes particular significance because it chronicles the lived experiences of the author, thereby bringing verisimilitude and authenticity in the depiction of events. Such writing could also be positioned within the relatively recent genre of autoethnographic narration. Autoethnography ruminates the personal experiences of an author vis-à-vis exposing the sociopolitical contexts of the writing. (Sparks, 2000) Commenting upon the efficacy of autoethnographic narratives, Laslett opines that the "intersection of the personal and the societal offers a new vantage point" (1999, p.392). Similarly, Farah Bashir reminisces her formative years during 1990s and beyond, which reflects her "personal experience through the shared narrative" (Frank, 2000). The intermingling of personal experiences and the outer realities is a viable narrative style to dig deep into the power relations, and the intricacies of autocratic statecraft. It is not just the Kashmiri writers including Basharat Peer and Farah Bashir who use this kind of modus operandi, but this form of writing has been put to use all over the world. Related to memoir is the diary writing that, too, has been used as a veritable arm of depicting the suppressed lives throughout the course of history.

Kashmiri literature, owing to its geographical sensitiveness and rich culture, has gained much popularity across the globe. Kashmiri writers expose Indian brutalities through their culturally rich narratives. As mentioned earlier, most of the scholarship available on the Kashmiri literature focuses either on the blatant uses of power or on the psychological impacts of such brutalities. Starting from Aroosa Kanwal who has utilized Francois Debrix's idea of 'pulverization of the human body' and Adriana Cavarero's 'horrorism, evaluates the Kashmir dilemma via analyzing Feroz Rather's *The Night of Broken Glass* and Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator*. She opines that Kashmir is a space "where sovereignty operates, not biopolitically, but thanatopolitically–the politics of death that does not merely aim to kill but focuses on the destruction of Kashmiri bodies" (Kanwal, 2021). She argues that mutilation of bodies, in response, does not invoke sympathy in the international community what she calls 'the spectator'. She points to an important perspective of brutalization of Indian state, but her study does not discuss the nature of the coercive mechanisms employed by the Indian military intervention. Therefore, this research goes beyond discussing the physical brutality or even its psychological impacts; it deals, rather, with understanding the mechanisms of coercion themselves.

Reviewing the memoir in the daily *Dawn*, Fatima Ijaz equates *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* with Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*: both narratives encapsulate the traumatized girlhood in the agonizingly stressful spaces. However, such nightmarish conditions do not hinder growth, willpower and determination. (2022) Childhood under siege is stressful and terrifying. Farah Bashir's memoir recounts her girlhood days during the tumultuous days in Indian-held Kashmir, a time marked by the naked use of power by the Indian patrolling troops. Farah becomes witness to the traumatized sociopolitical landscape in the 'world's most militarized' zone. Moreover, Ijaz concurs that the memoir also talks about the atrocities and belligerence of the conflict zone, where children have to go through unimaginable strain and hardships.

The book review published in the *Times of India* has focused on the resilient nature of Farah Bashir's girlhood in the Kashmir valley. Living under the siege, Farah's unabated acts like going to school, visiting the cinema, or listening to pop music, reflect her resilience and determination against all odds. Adding to the scholarship, Aiman Masoodi opines that the memoir blurs the line between personal and political; the personal

life of young Farah is entangled with the political maneuvering and real politics, recounting days spent amidst gun shooting, kidnapping, torture, curfews, and surveillance. The personal life of Kashmiris is interrelated with the outside happenings, making survival and living difficult (2022).

Shambhavi Sidhi has evaluated the linguistic and artistic hallmarks of Bashir's memoir. Although the events are narrated in terse prose, the recurrent use of Kashmiri idiom and local dialect embedded into the text add an indigenous flavor to the narration, vis-à-vis celebrating the nativity and indigeneity. Even the title of the memoir is taken from poetry of a Kashmiri poet-Agha Shahid Ali-evinces Bashir's attachment with the local culture and society. Sidhi is of the view that Bashir's memoir weaves the present with the past to replicate the daily lives of Kashmiris who have been robbed of the freedom to live normal lives in the Indian-held Kashmir. It's not just a story of a girl who experiences terrorizing conditions, but it is also the condition of every person living in the conflict zones. Moreover, the narration also exposes the real picture of the traumatized selves living under lockdowns and curfews. Sidhi concludes the argument by implying that "Farah Bashir's memoir is an epistemic resistance to the epistemic violence perpetrated by the State-backed, Machiavellian and megalomaniac modus-operandi of the modes of knowledge productions on Kashmir" (2021).

Adish and Mathew's intersectional understanding of the memoir *Rumours of Spring* deals with the impacts of militarism on the lives of Muslim Kashmiris in particular. They argue that the religious identity of the Kashmiri Muslims plays a dominant role in Indian military's naked exercise of power, and such a militaristic mindset is the brainchild of the BJP's Hindutva ideology that castigates the Muslim identity from the mainstream Indian polity. Going deeper into their analysis, their study reveals that the life of the Muslim female subject is even more precarious. On the one hand, women face the challenge of patriarchy, and on the other, the backlash of the Hindutva exclusionist world vision. They are also of the view that violence has become an 'ordinary' phenomenon for the common Kashmiris, a phenomenon reflected through the perennial presence of death and funeral motifs in the memoir. The memoir starts with the portrayal of 'evening' and then ends with 'afterlife': these recurrent images show the 'ordinariness' of violence and death in Kashmiri life. The ubiquitous presence of violence, constant surveillance, unwarranted search orders, illegal trespassing of domestic spaces, curfews and other tactics of necro power and biopower ruin the normal lives of Kashmiris. (2024)

Sikha Sharma (2021), too, has studied the memoir from the feminist viewpoint, exploring the plight of women subject and agency in the traumatised and militarised Kashmiri space where women are doubly subjugated: firstly, at the hands of patriarchal system and secondly, due to the debilitating conditions of violence-prone geographical entity. Women have to face the brunt of militarism more than men. The violence in Kashmir impacts women's physical, emotional and psychological spheres of life in the form of assaults, rapes, prostitution, kidnapping, and infringement of all female rights in the Indian-held Kashmir.

Dr.Raf Shakil Ansari et al, in their article Echoes of Silence: Unveiling Fear, Violence, and Trauma in Farah Bashir's Rumours of Spring, eloquently foreground the besieged life of the adolescent protagonist in the terror stricken and chaotic landscape of Kashmir where ordinary people, despite being repressed and traumatized, face the spectre of violence with courage and indignation to attain peace and tranquility. They argue that Bashir's seminal work breaks the silence of the harrowing and dreadful siege of the Kashmir valley. In a way, the storytelling turns into the art of giving words to the voiceless and hope to the grief-stricken Kashmiri subjects. It is the narration of the events that "paint vivid pictures to give a real experience of the suffocation, trauma, and anxiety of living under surveillance" (2024). Concurrently, Dr Ansari et al highlight the motif of death: the memoir even starts with the death of Bobeh, the grandmother of the protagonist. Further, they opine that the memoir interweaves the communal conflict in India with the Kashmir problem, reflected through the demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1993 by the Hindu hardliners. The memoir recounts, discussed through a new-historicist perspective, sociopolitical history by mentioning the siege of the Hazratbal shrine, the exodus of Kashmiri Pundits, and the funeral procession of Mirwaiz Maulvi Mohammed Farooq. Farah Bashir makes an "attempt to convey the grievances of a generation that witnessed mental and physical violence" (Ansari et al., 2024). They sum up highlighting Farah Bashir's narrative ability to capture the plight of Kashmiris living under siege, terror, violence, militarism and surveillance through the poignant tale of her adolescent days spent in the turbulent times during the 1990s in the Indian-held Kashmir.

Marufa Kouser (2022) has investigated the memoir from the perspective of trauma studies. She opines that the memoir delineates the misery of the traumatised selves, loss and nostalgia perpetuated by the excessive militarisation in the Kashmir valley, which, once 'a heaven on earth' turned into a wilderness in the wake of military occupation. She argues that literature has the power "to traverse the mindscape of humans marked with memories, retrospection, introspection and reminiscences, which are again poignantly coloured by sufferings, pains, wounds and trauma" (2022). She further states that it is the female subject who suffers the

most. Women have to bear the brunt of violence and trauma in the Kashmir valley, and they "continue suffering silently behind the veils of ignorance, illiteracy and discrimination" (2022). Consequently, the repetitive horrifying incidents, in the words of Kouser, create in the victims the "uncontrolled hallucinations". Trauma, being the mental agony as a result of a shocking incident, causes neurotic problems. She quotes Sigmund Freud by arguing that "neurotic illnesses, particularly hysteria, are caused by psychic shock, which he views as a three-part process: a traumatic incident, the victim experiencing this trauma, and the victim's psychological defence against this trauma, either by forgetting or repression" (Kouser, 2022). Unearthing the adolescent narrator's disturbing thoughts, accentuated by the crackdown, the funeral of the grandmother, and refusing to attend festivities like Eid: all these praxis reflect different manifestations of trauma in the memoir. The spillover effects of trauma are even more horrifying. Kouser concludes her argument informing that trauma disassociates the inner self of the sufferer from the outer reality.

Overall, the existing scholarship reveals that Bashir's memoir has been discussed in multifarious ways. It has been discussed with regard to childhood trauma, the pangs of memory, and the sufferings of common people living in the highly militarized geographical zone. The Feminist perspective is also employed to expose the plight of women and how they face the patriarchal system, on the one, hand and the backlash of brutalities that deeply affect their personal, domestic, and public lives, on the other. It has also been discussed through the lens of biopolitics and necropolitics. The present research is an aberration in the existing literature.The study of violence and coercion is another topic of most of the available scholarship whose focus rests on the 'what' of coercion, but the current study establishes the gap by stressing the 'how' of coercion. Psychological coercion through memoir has rarely been discussed in the previous studies. Farah Bashir's ethnographic narrative demythologizes history by positing challenge to mainstream pro-Indian media discourse.

Furthermore, the memoir has never been discussed in parallel to Albert Biderman's chart of coercion. It is being argued that the coercion does not simply mean the use of naked power over the oppressed, but it goes deeper into the psyche of the sufferer: obliterating the self that, resultantly, loses the ability to resist and raise a voice against injustice and oppression. The Indian state puts to work various mechanisms of coercion to spread terror among the Kashmiris, and to silence dissent with the purpose of solidifying the Indian hegemony in the Kashmiri space. Before unraveling the gambits of coercion in Bashir's compelling memoir, the theoretical framework is elaborated in brief in the following section of the study.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Coercion, defined in Oxford Learners' Dictionary as "the action of making somebody do something that they do not want to do, using force or threatening to use force" ("Coercion," n.d.), has been widely used by the authoritarian states as a tool to terrify the subjects since antiquity. The cruelest form of state fascism tries to debilitate the personal, psychological, emotional and even intellectual spheres of the subjects to solidify the hegemony of the state and its regressive ideology. (Lukács, 1942) Bodily wounds heal with the passage of time, but the mental and psychological scars become part and parcel of human memory. The purpose of coerciveness is to compel the subjects to bring them to submissiveness and complacency. In George Orwell's celebrated novel *1984*, the authoritarian state uses different tactics such as erasure of memory, propaganda, ubiquitous surveillance, and denial of free expression of love, among others, to rob people of their sanity and human values.(Rodden, 2007) A thinking individual is an anathema to the fascist state. India's fascist tactics of coercion are no different in the Indian-held Kashmir. It is not just the use of naked power, pellets, or bullets, killing of people and bloodshed that keep people silent and terrified, but also through the terrifying atmosphere created by coercive means, a sphere where even home like space becomes insecure, and the private space turns into a terrified geography.

The ongoing study of Farah Bashir's memoir has taken insight from Albert Biderman's theory of coercion. Albert Biderman, an American social psychologist, postulated various facets of coercion, out of his experience of interviewing the American air force prisoners of war. He was deployed to study the Chinese and Korean tactics of torture meted out to the American prisoners of war during the 1950s Korean War. His assumptions of coercion are based on his experiences, quite similar to Sigmund Freud's method of deducing theoretical views following the treatment process initiated against the sick people. Biderman came up with eight methods of coercion: "isolation, monopolization of perception, induced debility, threats, occasional indulgences, demonstration of omnipotence, degradation and enforcing trivial demands" (Baldwin et al., 2014). Biderman's views are widely read and discussed in spheres dealing with coercion, interrogation, and punishment theories. Some sociologists are of the view that the security apparatuses and agencies use his theory in acquiring information from the detainees. In his article "Communist Attempts to Elicit False Confessions from Air Force Prisoners of War" , Biderman enunciated that the coercive methods were used by Chinese interrogators to elicit information , which later on came to be known as 'false confessions', from the American prisoners of wars. Albert D.Biderman's ideas are also contained in his book *March to Calumny:*

The Story of Americans POWs in the Korean War (1963) which he later put to use in submission of his dissertation to the University of Chicago in 1964 titled as "The American Prisoners of War in Korea, Interpretation of Data*"*.

Biderman is of the view that the coercive tactics used during the interrogation cripple the Self, both psychologically and emotionally, of the prisoners or detainees under interrogation. The coercive tactics make the detainees loathe their own selves, which often, leads to suicidal attempts. Not just damaging the 'self-image', such draconian mechanisms monopolize the perceptive power of the victims to an extent that they lose their independent thinking process, converting them into merely a heap of flesh. The terrified existence that the victims are pushed into via non-physical mechanisms destroys the nobility of character and willpower. The loss of willpower makes the victim accept the dictum of the powerful without showing dissent or difference of opinion. The psychological limbo the detainees are pushed into foregrounds mental exhaustion, and as a result, their desire to taking pleasure in the simple joys of life is banished forever. Such tactics simply create paranoid selves lacking individual autonomy, reducing the capacity of sufferers to think otherwise. Biderman is of the view that terror is the primary weapon used by the interrogators to bring the detainees and victims into submissiveness and complacency. His ideas are known as the 'Chart of Coercion', and, likewise, accepted by Amnesty International in 1975 report as a tool of coercion and torture. Biderman's ideas were also used by the American soldiers in the notorious Guantanamo Bay detention camps. The framework became popular when it was mentioned in a United States Senate Armed Sevices Committee that "Biderman's principles were used as the basis for aggressive interrogation techniques used against suspected terrorists held in Guantanamo Bay" (Baldwin et al., 2014). The caretakers at Guantanamo Bay were trained in "coercive management techniques" for possible use on prisoners, including "sleep deprivation, prolonged constraint, and constant exposure" (Shane, 2008).

Biderman's chart of coercion is utilized as conceptual frame of reference to understand the coercive tactics used by the Indian troops aimed at ordinary Kashmiris, creating the "captive environment" in the Kashmir valley. Therefore, the behavioral convergences between Biderman's concept of coercion and the Indian state's mechanisms of spreading terror in the Indian-held Kashmir are made the subject of research and exploration in this paper. The implication of Biderman's theorization informs that coercive methods are used to generate stress and behavior manipulation in a bid to silence dissent and to weaken the resistance. Although Albert Biderman's theorizations are often neglected in the academic discourse, but its framing in this study opens new vistas in research and scholarship.

Claiming to have established the gap in the existing scholarship, this research focuses on the 'how' of coercion instead of simply emphasizing, like the previous research on the 'what' of coercion and violence. Therefore, the current study can be called an interdisciplinary in nature, and is relevant to understanding research paradigms- both theoretical and practical-across diverse academic fields and genres. Although the psychological impacts of brutality on human bodies might have been explored in the existing scholarship, the psychological coercion that aims at creating captive and terrified environment have rarely been discussed. Therefore, this paper offers fresh understanding in interdisciplinary studies. The memoir is, now, analyzed and discussed in the light of Biderman's theorizations in the forthcoming section of this research paper.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

Farah Bashir's poignant memoir *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir* (2021), encompassing her childhood memories in the turbulent times of Kashmir in the 1990s, was written in 2021 right after the Indian state's decision to revoke Article 370 of the Indian Constitution on 5 August in 1919 that integrated Kashmir's special status into Union Territory of India, robbing Kashmir of its semi-autonomous status. The BJP-led Indian government's decision to abrogate the article reflects Hindutva ideology, which is antithetical to a heterogeneous and inclusive society. The so called secular Indian state, inspired after Nehru's ideology, is oblivious of her role in " creating the alienation and suffering of the Kashmiri people" (Chinoy, 2006, p. 26) In the backdrop of such an Indian move, Farah Bashir unearths debilitating conditions in the Indian-held Kashmir in the 1990s by portraying the life under siege during her formative years. Her lived experience in the terrible times, reflects all-pervasive, perennial and ubiquitous coercion perpetrated by the Indian state apparatuses against the ordinary Kashmiris. The memoir captures the funeral preparations of the grandmother, Bobeh, in 1994, during the turbulent times in upper area of Srinagar while delving into the memories of life in the pre and post-1989s at the same time.

The narrator of the memoir, much like the narrator of Bapsi Sidhwa's child narrator, is a young girl who grows up amidst the precariously oppressive conditions. The memoir tells the happenings of only a day, a time when the funeral preparation of the grandmother of the protagonist, Bobeh, is underway in 1994, comparing past memories of comparatively peaceful environment in the pre-1989 idyllic with the volatile life in post-1989s times. The personal grief and loss of the family of the protagonist is juxtaposed in the debilitating

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world outside. The external fear is overshadowing to such an extent that even the funeral of the late grandmother gets delayed, however, this delay lends an opportunity to the narrator to delve into the distressing childhood memories. Farah vividly recalls unabated brutality of the Indian troops who not only harmed the bodies of the ordinary Kashmiris but also affected their subjectivities deeply, creating an atmosphere of fear. The debility of the situation can be gauged from the fact that not a single event in the memoir is narrated without the insidious intervention of the Indian aggression. The oppressive state, the researcher claims, used different mechanisms of coercion such as prolonged curfews, constant surveillance, among others, to spread terror and fear among the populace, and in a bid to solidify the state's unassailable control in the region.

In the first section of the memoir called 'Evening', the father of the narrator is apprehensively preoccupied with the safety and security of the condoling relatives, instead of being grief stricken with the death of his mother. This shows the debility of the captive environment in which the Kashmiris are thrown into. The narrator recalls another important occasion-Eid- that is a sacrosanct occasion for Muslims full of mirth and joy, but the Eid after the 1990s Indian aggression, turned out to be a woeful event. Farah's cousin, who was accompanied by his father, was "hit by a bullet" (Bashir, 2021, p. 11) in the car on Eid day. This incident marred the festivities of Eid, and the resultant psychological impact is reflected through her comment: "I plucked a chunk of my hair from right behind my ear. It hurt to pull the hair out" (p. 11). Fearful existence of the narrator is reflected through her words: "If I ever heard a knock, a wail, or gunshots, I would hurriedly and mercilessly jerk out and strand after another…come morning, I didn't want anyone to see my hair gone and bald patches appear" (p. 17). The Indian troops psychologically monopolise attention of the ordinary Kashmiris; fear and petrification unconditionally occupy the minds of the characters. Indian troops create captive and coercive atmosphere that affects deep recesses of the mind, making the sufferers struggle with their thinking ability and resisting the injustice. The fear of being constantly watched creates social isolation as reflected from the invisibility of mourners at the deathbed of the deceased grandmother. The intervention of prolonged curfew even during the mourning creates sense of sheer "anxiety about leaving the house and a sense of futility about even venturing outside" (Baldwin et al., 2014).

Social isolation largely causes stress and anxiety among sufferers. This is what exactly the Indian state does to affirm the state hegemony in the region. The coercive mechanisms like curfews, Check Posts, troops patrolling on roads and bunkers, abet in creating socially isolated existence. During the dusk-to-dawn curfews, the equanimity of the ordinary Kashmiris is badly disturbed. The communication channels are broken. The provision of basic necessities, let alone amenities, gets stopped. It affects almost all spheres of life in the memoir, right from the provision of medical facilities to schooling and education for young Kashmiris. The curfews complement the ubiquitous surveillance. Even the phone calls are liable to be tapped, as Aunt Nelofar in the memoir "didn't rely on the phone too much" (p. 23). The metaphor of 'windows' is pervasively used to portray the creepy existence in which windows become a source of communication among the urban neighborhood in Srinagar, Kashmir. After the belligerent intervention of the Indian military, even the windows get closed, because an open window could cause suspicion and consternation for the troops. The open windows could cause flimsy justification to illegally trespass into the house in the name of searching hiding 'militants', and to conduct unwarranted interrogations. Making the situation even more grivious, the closure of windows inside and tear gas outside aggravated the asthmatic condition of the grandmother. The narrator recalls that "those inescapable blue fumes from tear gas shells crept indoors through closed windows and her lungs hostage" (p. 24), took life of grandmother finally taken in 1994. An open window could be the source of fresh air, and a link with the outer world, but both these avenues got sabotaged because "open windows were an easy and unobstructed passage for bullets and grenade splinters to make their way inside" (p. 24). Such a terrifying world causes 'induced debility', exhaustion and socially isolated living, where resistance and dissent get suppressed. This coerciveness through creating debilitatingly stressful circumstances, on the other hand, seeks conformity of an authoritarian state bent upon vociferously obliterating Kashmiri subjectivities.

Coinciding with the monopolization of perception, the Indian hegemonic state also seeks to gain omnipotence over all spheres of life- both intrinsic and extrinsic. The militaristic intervention in 1990s entirely changed the sociopolitical conditions in the Indian-held Kashmir. The narrator opines that life in the pre-1989 period was comparatively calm and peaceful, but in the post-1989s, it was the period that was not "just dark and dreary. It was also a harbinger of the drearier ones to come" (p. 31). The fear of being labeled as a 'terrorist' or a 'militant' disturbed the whole existence of the narrator. Farah remembers the Indian troops' trespassing into her home when the assistant to her father, Ramzan Kaak, was badly assaulted by a steel monster that turned "his face and neck bleeding from violent scratch marks", and "his kantopi was missing, and the collar of his *pheran* was ripped" (p. 32). Farah Bashir recalls that the soldiers' interventions not just assaulted houses, but the military bunkers were also constructed at the hotels, cinemas, educational institutes, residential areas and even villages. (Bashir, p. 40) The underlying situation affirms the researcher's point of view in this article

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that it is not just the slice of life that gets affected, the entire habitat inside out gets affected and sabotaged by the predatory Indian aggression, manufacturing the monopolisation of terror and fear in the Indian-held Kashmir.

The second section of the book called 'Night' is also ripped with threat and fear causing anxiety and stress. The fear seeps into the existence of the characters, which changes their choices, thoughts, modes of enjoyment, and even interpersonal relationships. Horrifying impacts of the ubiquitous surveillance and the prolonged curfews are such that the characters get disturbed through dreadful dreams, in which the cacophony of gunshots and the slaying of bodies haunt the dreamer. Farah Bashir recalls her girlhood when she drifted into "a state between sleep and wakefulness, where the eyelids may shut the world out, but the ears hear everything" (p. 46). Sleep deprivation seriously damages mental health. It is "associated with impaired mood and cognitive functioning, as well as motor functioning" (Pilcher and Huffcutt, 1996). Moreover, psychologists are of the view that sleep deprivation, disturbance of sleep pattern and intervening horrible nightmares develop "pathological fear by increasing the susceptibility of the sympathetic nervous system to stressful experiences" (Peters et al., 2014). So, the draconian state coercion affects the core of Kashmiris' existence as to make their beings docile and conformist in the face of state hegemony.

Social isolation and detachment are related to the invisibility and 'burning' of Post Offices in the Indian-held Kashmir. As a matter of interest, the metaphor of a dying post office is employed as a motif that almost all the Kashmiri writers glaringly use in a bid to expose the institutionalized oppression and totalitarianism in the Kashmir valley. A post office is a symbol of connectivity and communication among the people. It is narrated in the memoir that the military intervention during the 1990s in Kashmir also destroyed this beautiful cum ritualistic medium of communication. Owing to the surveillance and communication control, "staying in touch was proving to be a challenge, and the posts were largely unreliable, and phone lines were frequently dead" (p.66). Adding to the controlling tactics of the Indian state, the availability of newspapers in the Indian-held Kashmir also gets disrupted. The Father in the memoir lamentably says that the "newspapers had turned into nothing less than mortuaries laid out on broadsheets" (p. 47). Recurrent visualization of incarcerated dead bodies and obituaries erodes an individual's sanity, and the sufferers start doubting "their own sense of reality as well as demonstrating that they were not in control of their own fate" (Baldwin et al., 2014).

Coercion affects the tranquility and quality of life in many ways. Small pleasures in the Indian-held Kashmir come to a halt in the memoir. The love for folk tales is a hallmark of Kashmiri culture, through which the elders transfer cultural ethos and wisdom to posterity. However, the curfews and surveillance replace folk tales with an obsession with newspapers (p. 47), and looking at the photographs of dead people printed in the newspapers become a pastime activity. Along with the obsession with seeing the dead bodies printed in the newspapers, the urge to listen to melodious music also died down after the 1990s in the Indian-held Kashmir. It is narrated in the memoir that the father was fond of music in pre-1990s period, but then he stopped listening to music because "he was always on the alert for anything amiss and perhaps thought that the relaxation from music would come in between him and what was happening on the streets" (p. 53), shows the monopolization of terror on the bodies and souls of the ordinary Kashmiris. Even people's eating taste got changed in life under curfew in the way that "the aroma of the bread blended with the sound of jackboots" (p. 204). It is not denying the fact that coercive strata aim at dehumanization, depriving victims of basic human needs such as food, sleep, recreation and health. Indian aggression does this all. Deprivation of proper food and nutrition "trigger emotional lability and irritability that weakens victim's resistance to the dehumanizing conditions" (Baldwin et al., 2014).

Unwarrranted and illegal trespassing coincides with creating 'captive environment' that keeps Kashmiris terrified even in their own houses in the memoir. Any sort of noise that could ignite troops' forceful trespassing into the house, therefore, "all the staircases inside the house were made of wood" (p. 72) fearing that any crack could invite "troops barge inside the house" (p.72) , and at the same time, " sounds could attract a volley of bullets fired in your direction, unwarranted" (p. 72). This abrasive military intervention helped "the carefree circumstances of the time before 1989 had turned into ghosts" (p. 70), which made the Kashmiri Self a paranoid kind-the worst form of torture. Bodily harms heal with the passage of time, but the mental and psychological scars are difficult to erase. Biderman's charter of coercion is not aimed at physical harm but at the psychological obliteration. The sanity of the self gets lost. Such anxiety robs the meaning of life, and the sufferer could lose the value of life as the narrator recalls in the "Night" section of the book that: "In 1993, just before I turned sixteen, I showed symptoms of heightened anxiety. I'd get palpitations, sleeplessness, and was inexplicably restless. I often contemplated various means by which to commit suicide" (p. 79). It is the worst form of coercion in which the sufferers lose the desire to live. Like the prisoners in the Vietnam war, the narrator-girl child-also goes through post-traumatic stress disorder which is aptly commented by the friend of

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the narrator that the concept of PTSD "needed a revision in Kashmir" (p. 79), and that it should be replaced with Perennially Traumatic Stress Disorder, was the true reflection of the state of affairs in the Indian-held Kashmir.

Moving further, the 1990s was the time when "no midnight noises were worthy of laughter anymore" (Bashir, p.92). It was not just the physical torture, kidnapping, unwarranted search operations, tear gases, and shelling in the streets, cross-firings, and abduction that not only caused 'unnamed' and unceremonious burials but also created trepidation, sickness, which made the whole existence "constantly nauseous" (p. 96). In the memoir, the unannounced and illegal search operations leave behind a "misery that was pasted on to the doors and walls…a misery that couldn't be wiped away" (p.98). The insidiousness of the coercive stratagems disturbed the equanimity of the households. Farah Bashir poignantly recalls the assault inside her house, and she barely remembers how many times her house has been searched "without anyone entering it physically" (p. 159). The smoke from tear gas, and shelling in the streets affected indoor dwellers as well. The grandmother's asthma aggravated owing to the smoke created by the shelling and tear gas in the streets. Bobeh grudges by saying that "this Zulm is worse than the war of 1965" each time she sees two-year old Moosa suffer from it. Terror, fear and noise affect the baby in the womb as well. The gunshots not only affect the pregnant Hina but also her baby, Moosa, who carries the fear even after his birth. "Otherwise a healthy child, as he grew older, he turned out to be petrified of sounds. He'd cry bitterly if someone shut the door loudly" (p. 196).

Degradation, insults and humiliation are used as coercive tools to such an extent that even the knowledgeable, confident, witty and fearless person like Aunt Nelofar becomes helpless and truncated in the memoir. One such tactic was the issuance of ID cards to Kashmiris that they had to keep with them round the clock because at any CheckPost, its availability could be asked. The non-availability of this identity marker could put anyone behind bars, or get thrashing or beating at the hands of the hawkish troops who were ready to put any 'violator' of the draconian law in the detaining cells on whimsical and illusive grounds. Any Muslim Kashmiri lacking an ID card during investigation or interrogation could be liable to be declared 'militant'; therefore, "the absence of an ID card meant walking on a mine field" (p. 147). Similar to other victims of coercive methods, the Kashmiris too are "insulted, humiliated, denied privacy and dignity, and reduced to animal level concerning without power or control over their lives" (Baldwin et al., 2014). Degradation and humiliation naturally curb the dissenting urges amongst sufferers.

The way coercive tactics push innocent people on the verge of madness and paranoia is elaborated through an episode in the memoir. Naseer was a neighbour of Farah Bashir and was a simpleton person. Once, he was severely thrashed and beaten because he could not produce an ID card while travelling in a bus. Upon being asked about the availability of ID card, he became furtive and confused, and this anxiety made him a suspect before the security forces. He got beaten by the troops to the extent that Naseer turned into a paranoiac and petrified self. It has been narrated that Bashir's wife Nasreen committed suicide by jumping into the river. It was believed that her suicide was abetted by the beatings that she received from her husband, Naseer. It is no denying the fact that suicide is an act when a person gets tired of the prevailing situation. It is the severest form of depression and stress. Taken together, psychological coercive mechanisms create chronic health problems, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, headaches and other debilitating conditions. The state ultimately desires to suppress resistance and dissent among Kashmiris; yet, Kashmiri writers continue to challenge its absolute control over personal and social self in the region.

Findings/Conclusion

This paper, through rigorous analysis of the memoir, informs that India continues to behave like a modern day, ideologically driven, fascist and colonial state, that does not just rely on political maneuvering and physical subjugation of the occupied territories, but also tries to manipulate Kashmiris' subjectivities psychologically and emotionally. This paper has also revealed that the mechanisms of coercion in the form of prolonged curfews, ubiquitous surveillance, cross-firings, torturous interrogations, search operations and shelling, among others, are employed to rob ordinary Kashmiris of their fundamental rights and basic freedoms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a matter of fact and textually supported in the memoir, this paper has highlighted that the tools of coercion spread terror and instill fear amongst the populace in a bid to silence dissent, and to establish unassailable hegemony of the oppressive Indian state in the region. Albert Biderman's chart of coercion, which he deduced after his research on the American prisoners of war during the Korean War, has been used as a blueprint to understand the coercive techniques used by the Indian troops in the Indian-held Kashmir during 1990s. It has been found that there are many behavioural parallels between Biderman's conception of coercion and the Indian gambits of coercion employed in the occupied territory. The psychological impacts of coercive tactics debilitate the inner selves of ordinary Kashmiris in the memoir, pushing the sufferers to become victim to post-traumatic stress disorders, loss of sanity, suicidal attempts, inauthentic living, oblivion, loneliness and social isolation. Such coercive mechanisms are employed

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against the terrified and paranoiac Kashmiris to curb the freedom of speech and right to live as to solidify the Indian hegemony in the region.

It has also been discovered in the analysis of the memoir that Biderman's concept of monopolisation of perception, in which the prisoner is compelled to distort the truth, turns out to be the monopolization of fear in the case of Kashmir. Fear lodges into the core of Kashmiri life, as observed in the memoir, where almost every event or incident Farah Bashir narrates is submerged in an ambience of fear. The presence of fear is not just limited to the outer spheres; rather, its reverberations could be felt inside the houses as well. Both the public and personal spheres get inflicted with fear and anxiety. Not only do the daily routines of the characters get affected, but their very existence becomes shell-shocked; their capacity to think otherwise is crippled. This paper has found out that the coercion brought forth through curfews, surveillance, trespassing, among others, has been carried out to establish the demonic and fascist state that does not allow dissent or resistance wherewithal. The coercive state aims at shattering dissent and resisting abilities of the Kashmiris. Aneshensel and Mitchell are of the view that "stress refers to the arousal of physiologic responses to environmental demands or pressures that exceed an individual's ability to adapt and absence of means to obtain sought-after end" (Baldwin et al., 2014).

It is also well established that "writing is a testament to the power of literature to capture the essence of the times, to connect with readers on a deeply personal level, and to challenge established norms and narratives" (Shandil and Sharma, 2024). Therefore, the importance of memoirs like Farah Bashir's *Rumours of Spring* increases manifold. Writers become the harbinger of human values and human rights, and Farah Bashir does no less than that. Literature becomes an agent of change and transformation. Moreover, life narratives or autoethnographic narratives based on lived experiences become the veritable arm in exposing the true face of power and coercion. Writers like Farah Bashir continue to resist and expose the Indian state's demonic militancy and illegal cum dreadful capture of Kashmir through their poignant tales.

Over all, this research would also help in understanding the methods of state coercions in the territories under siege, especially in Middle Eastern region and beyond.The deconstruction of history in the autoethnographic narrative challenges the mainstream Indian-centric scholarship and media discourse.The current study, also, illuminates the importance of life narratives in creating resistance, and as a viable tool to generate liberating narratives in oppressive and besieged spaces. Hopefully, it will invite scholarship on the importance of life narratives in the colonized and occupied territories of the contemporary times. It will open new vistas for researchers working on genres like creative non-fiction, autobiography, biography, autoethnographic narratives, among other life narratives.

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