

NARRATIVES OF LOSS AND LONGING

**LITERARY DEVELOPMENTS IN
POSTCOLONIAL SOUTH ASIA**

Edited by Nukhbah Taj Langah and
Roshni Sengupta

ROUTLEDGE



Narratives of Loss and Longing

This volume brings together new research on the developing and transforming literary scene in South Asia in the aftermath of the partitions of 1947 and 1971. It thematically explores the transformations that have taken place in the literary spheres of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, since violence and irresolvable conflicts wreaked the subcontinent, through the narratives of loss and longing.

The volume deals with key themes such as feminism, minorities and marginality, vernacular history, Bengali literary representations, and post-Partition artistic and literary representations. It contributes toward fostering a network for academic exchange across the borders, thereby presenting diverse and in-depth studies on a plethora of subjects within the larger framework of literary landscapes.

Narratives of Loss and Longing will be of interest to scholars of literary studies, postcolonial and decolonial studies, Partition studies, minority studies, refugee studies, gender and women's studies, and those interested in South Asia, especially India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

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Literary Developments in
Postcolonial South Asia

**Edited by Nukhbah Taj Langah
and Roshni Sengupta**

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7 The Symbol of Sufi Shrines in Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night*

A Kashmiri Journalist's Frontline
Account of Life, Love and War in His
Homeland

Nukhbah Taj Langah and Fatima Syeda

Introduction: Kashmir's Transformation from 'Fairy Land' to a War Zone

Zutshi has refuted the notion of Kashmiris as passive victims and, regarded them as intellectually contributing through active participation and promoting narrative discourse (Zutshi 2014). Based on Zutshi's premise in this chapter, we observe Peer as a participant who contributes to the historical narration about Kashmir. Hence, this chapter approaches Basharat Peer's non-fictional memoir *Curfewed Night* (CN) (2008) as a form of narrative practice (Zutshi 2014) that has significantly contributed to the development of the contemporary history of Kashmir.

Part I of CN is based on his memories of growing up in Kashmir's political turmoil. The memoir begins with Bashir's nostalgic memories of Kashmir as his motherland, its culture, and history, the fairyland that is much cherished by its residents and widely visited by tourists. The author narrates the transformation of his much loved 'fairyland' (Kashmir) into a space of crises through the active emergence of Islamic militants, trained in Pakistan, and countered by India's military operation in Kashmir. In the first two chapters, his focus is on the transformative impact of war on the aesthetic value of the region as well as its significant socio-political repercussions, resulting in widespread emotional trauma among the local population. He narrates the distress experienced by parents who are apprehensive of their children crossing the border and joining militant groups. As organizations like Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Student Kashmir Liberation Front (SKLF), and Hizb ul Mujahideen (HM) compete to reinforce their ideologies, Peer's family encourages him to leave Srinagar in pursuit of education initially in India and later at Columbia University (USA). This shift also has an impact on Peer's choice of career as a journalist. However, the love for

his motherland haunts him as reflected in this memoir and many other journalistic inputs despite settling in the United States later.

Part II of his memoir delves into Peer's emotional attachment to Kashmir, its culture, history, and identity, not just as a memory of his 'interrupted childhood' (Kabir 2009: 9) but also as a significant part of his ethnographic and journalistic journey. This observation is based on the compilation of oral histories of the Kashmiri people, which made him realize that Srinagar, once a popular tourist spot, has turned into a place where everyday life is impacted drastically due to the military presence and operations. This realization relates to both 'Indian desire for the Valley of Kashmir, and Kashmiri responses to that desire' (Kabir 2009: 1) and the paradoxical nature of Kashmir both as a war zone and as a 'territory of desire' (Kabir 2009: 1). Zutshi's theoretical premise allows us to deconstruct Peer's approach in two distinct ways: firstly, Zutshi identifies the paradoxical nature of Kashmir, where history is as embattled as Kashmir itself. Hence, her work 'historicizes both the territory, by drawing attention to a wide range of definitions in between – such as place, community, polity, country, region, and nation that are associated with it – which were rendered coherent at different points in its historical tradition' (Zutshi 2014: 2). As part of creating this historical practice, she is primarily interested in theorizing the notion of 'place-making', 'evocations of landscape', and 'organizing temporality and spatiality' in Kashmir's narrative tradition. History in her perspective is enacted in local spaces that remain largely a part of the divine landscape to which Kashmir adds as a microcosm. Thus, she regards temporality in Kashmir as historical and mythical and/or context-specific and universal simultaneously (Zutshi 2014: 3).

Secondly, Zutshi has identified Sufi saints and their legacies as an important part of Kashmiri historiography that depicts Kashmir as a sacred space and builds its political image through oral and textual evidence. In the introduction to her book, giving the example of Lake Satisar and the story of goddess Sati, who turned the lake into an abode for both humans and deities, she suggests that the story of Kashmir, 'was given subjective shape in the imaginings of its writers, storytellers, itinerant holy men, and ordinary men and women as they grappled with the spiritual political task of recounting its – and their own shared past' (Zutshi 2014: 2). Within the framework of Zutshi's notion of history writing, various forms of narrative practices have been utilized since the late sixteenth century onward, such as '*tazkiras*, *tarikhs*, stories, poetry and plays' (Zutshi 2014: 2). In this context, Peer's memoir can be observed as a contribution toward the historiography of Kashmir.

Based on this complex context of Kashmir, we consider the choice of non-fictional genre as an important decision on the part of Peer, because he aims to challenge the glamorized notions of Kashmir imposed by

Bollywood cinema and contemporary writers. This glamorous depiction of Kashmir by many popular Bollywood films like *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Fitoor* (2016), *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015), and *Haider* (2014) is discussed by Ananya Kabir (2009); Nishat Haider, in her paper 'The Vale of Desire: Framing Kashmir in Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* (2014; Langah & Sengupta 2022); and Meenu Gaur (2010). Whereas Deepti Misri has worked on visual texts and narrative strategies adopted using digital activism and photojournalism (print media coverage of Kashmir has been analyzed extensively as a discourse and through documentaries). Furthermore, the study of Kashmiri literature has gained extensive popularity through the fictionalized version of the identity politics surrounding Kashmir. This is reflected in works like *The Collaborator* (2011) and *The Book of Gold Leaves* (2014) by Mirza Waheed; *The Half Mother* (2014) by Shahnaz Bashir; *The Garden of Solitude* (2010) by Sidhartha Gigoo; *Mummu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2010) by Malik Sajad; *The Tree with a Thousand Apples* (2017) by Sanchit Gupta; *Gul, Gulshan, Gulfam* (2017) by Pran Kishore (Translated by Shafi S Hauq); *Night of Broken Glass* (2018) by Feroz Rather; and *Our Moon Has Blood Clots: The Exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits* (2018) by Rahul Pandita.

This chapter has identified a methodological and knowledge gap in the study of Kashmir. Firstly, the methodological gap is identified through a major focus on film, media, and fiction, emphasizing the glamorous vs. political depiction of Kashmir, which has sidelined the non-fictional narratives surrounding this region. Secondly, the knowledge gap that we discuss is based on the primary academic focus on nationalistic discourse excluding Sufism as a means of understanding the political concerns related to Kashmir, as argued in our chapter. Hence, we contend that the spiritual (mainly traced through Sufi beliefs) and the political are both intricately linked while projecting the identity concerns in Kashmir.

Based on four major sections, this chapter proceeds as follows: in the first part of the chapter, we discuss the significance of sacred spaces in Peer's memoir at two levels: Firstly, we observe shrines as a socio-political space. Secondly, we engage with a discussion on shrines as intricate symbols approached through the notions of *azadi* or 'freedom' (Kabir 2009: 4) and *Kashmiriyat* or 'Kashmiriness' (Kabir 2009: 10), on the one hand, and Zutshi's (2014) theorization of sacred spaces, on the other. Finally, we conclude by contributing to the discussion on the interdependence of the spiritual and the political in the context of this memoir.

Shrines as Socio-Political Spaces

If approached as socio-political spaces, Sufi shrines have multiple connotations for the Kashmiri people. On the one hand, they reflect the spaces that endorse their religious identity, and on the other hand, these shrines are also the spaces where they could acquire a sense of togetherness as a Muslim community. In other words, shrines are not just places of worship but also places to connect. Furthermore, for Kashmiris, the shrines fulfilled their important need – the need to be deeply rooted in their faith and community. As Peer writes, ‘People seemed to need faith; people seemed to need miracles.’ (Peer 2008: 193). The Kashmiris seek support from these shrines; for example, Peer’s friend (a poet) tells him, ‘No. In these times, it has become the support system for the rich, the famous, and the unknown poor’ (Peer 2008: 193). It is interesting to note that money, fame, or resourcefulness is of little help in times of crisis for the Kashmiris. People find the resources of this world as insubstantial: ‘People have no hope from the government or any politicians. They turn to the shrines, to the prophet and to God’ (Peer 2008: 193). Hence, they have shifted their focus from the visible to the invisible – the world of faith and belief.

The traumatized inhabitants of Kashmir use their connection with the Prophet and the saints as an antidote. At one point in *CN*, Peer meets a poet named Professor Rashid Nazaki, who, Peer was told, ‘had immersed himself in faith after a personal tragedy during the mid-nineties’ (Peer 2008: 193). Nazaki’s poetic works were composed in a mystical style that overwhelmed him. While digging into the origin of this element of mysticism in his poetry, Nazaki relates the account of how he lost his wife and two sons. This explains a break in his writing for he failed to write even a single poem for the next eight years. This condition of the poet was relieved only when the poet tried to establish a connection with the Prophet. Realizing that there is no other way to find compensation for his loss or justice, the poet turned to spiritual healers. Peer writes, ‘He had no courts to turn to for his loss’ (Peer 2008: 197). Thus, turning to the Prophet, Peer quotes, as Nazaki expresses, ‘I complained to Prophet Mohammed. I sent my prayers and complaints to his court’ (Peer 2008: 197). It seems that the poet Nazaki needed a replacement for his pent-up feelings of love. The loss became bearable by the thought that he had someone he loved. His love for his Prophet helped him to overcome the loss of his family.

Once the poet rekindled his feelings of love, his passion for writing also flourished. He started by writing the biography of the Prophet and realizes that, ‘You will feel the prophet’s breath when you read the book. I have used the stream of consciousness’ (Peer 2008: 197). The spiritual connection between the poet and the prophet was beyond

this physical world. It saved him from being emotionally destroyed: 'He was alive again. His eyes sparkled as he talked of his work' (Peer 2008: 197). Although this spiritual connection helped him to bear the brutalities of this world, it also created a feeling of detachment from the physical world around him as indicated in the following verse line, 'I asked the Dervish sitting on the pavement/How far is the world from here?' (Peer 2008: 197). This detachment of the mystics is, however, misunderstood, and some of the mystics are criticized for claiming to be the mediators between God and men and some for claiming to be one with God.

CN is replete with the stories of many such mystics, for instance, Nooruddin Rishi, 'the patron saint of Kashmir' (Peer 2008: 197); it was believed that 'In his youth, he renounced the world and prayed in a cave for twelve years' (Peer 2008: 197). This renunciation was based on a rationale that was very logical to him but was unacceptable to the common people around him. He faced criticism for stating that he did not read the Quran beyond the first syllable. He tries to explain it to his teacher as follows: 'There is one God, and I need not know beyond Alif' (Peer 2008: 197). His interaction with the Iranian scholar and Sufi Shah-e-Hamadan convinced him 'to focus on social reform rather than renunciation' (Peer 2008: 198). It is significant to observe that for Peer, references to this form of Sufism were new yet very relevant to Kashmir.

This indicates that the people of Kashmir have always responded to a spiritual aspect that is more practical and pertinent to their daily lives. Nooruddin Rishi preached in the language of Kashmir; 'His interpretation of Islam was rooted in the local traditions and culture' (Peer 2008: 198). He was against the conventional practices of the religious representatives who, in his opinion, had reduced religion to 'empty rituals' (Peer 2008: 198). The Kashmiris admired him for his liberal and practical approach toward religion. He was respected when he was alive and revered when he died. 'A shrine built at Chrar in his memory became one of the holiest places in Kashmir' (Peer 2008: 199). This shrine, located an hour's drive from Srinagar, is still a hub of devotees.

The shrine of the patron saint Nooruddin Rishi was severely damaged during a confrontation between militants and the Indian army. The battle eventually reached 'the shrine complex' (Peer 2008: 199), after the militants set thousands of houses on fire and killed hundreds of soldiers. The militants (Muslims) used the shrine as their hideout, which was incinerated as the Indian army fired mortars on it: 'Six hundred years of history were destroyed in a day. Kashmiris mourned and marched towards the gutted shrine' (Peer 2008: 200). There are accounts of other shrines and temples that were turned into military camps and are more of a battleground now. Peer writes about a famous Sufi shrine when he came across it on his way to Hari Parbat. He was informed by two old men that,

'There used to be a temple, a mosque, a pond and a few apricot trees there ... Now it is all military' (Peer 2008: 135). The spaces, once religious, are ruled by the political and military presence, making Kashmir not just the 'city of absences' (Peer 2008: 131) but also disappearances and transformations. The expectations of finding a 'medieval shrine flaunting verses from the Quran and poems of mystics on windows and facades, and the gentle greens and blues of papier mâché interiors' (Peer 2008: 111) are thwarted. The shrines exist, but the architecture lacks its original form. Peer responds, 'Elegance is granted little space in an age of wars' (Peer 2008: 111). He observes, 'The wooden bridges have either collapsed or were murdered. Their skeletons remain, in the shadow of new arcs of concrete' (Peer 2008: 111). Hence, the shrines continue to exist minus the elegance that is ruined due to the ongoing war in Kashmir.

Hence, it is crucial to observe how the shrine of Saint Nooruddin Rishi serves as a socio-political space for both groups to assert their identity and beliefs. Upon visiting the newly built town of Chrar, Peer describes how the 'new, government-built shrine' (Peer 2008: 200); the outer structure of the shrine was much changed. The 'elegant wooden shrine ... with impressive calligraphic designs on its ornate wooden windows, arches, and ceilings' (Peer 2008: 199) had changed into 'a white cemented building' (Peer 2008: 200). The artificiality of the outer structure was visible reflecting the changing political environment of Kashmir: 'Its varnished wooden window frames were shaped in clumsy arches in a half-hearted imitation of the originals. The galvanized tin sheets mocked the memory of the old shingles' (Peer 2008: 200). The reverence, however, has remained unaltered even after 600 years later. The firm belief of an old couple visiting the shrine does not go unnoticed by Peer. They pray for their children, 'Save them from storms and fires, save them as you have saved them till now' (Peer 2008: 200). Seeking the blessings of a saint is still one of the greatest beliefs for the Kashmiris to resist the misfortunes in their lives.

This unwavering faith as a source of spiritual solace reflected in one of Peer's schoolmate Mubashir's life; he sustained serious injuries from the blast of a hand grenade, which impaired him for life. However, his faith in a Sufi gives him hope, and when he urges Peer to find him a job – 'With Zain Shah's blessings, something might work out' (Peer 2008: 193) – Peer responds by expressing, 'I thought of his hopelessness, his clinging onto straws of faith' (Peer 2008: 193). This much-needed faith comes from the belief in the saints and their shrines which are a significant presence in Kashmiri culture.

Another instance involves Shameema, Shafi's mother, who has to deal with the dual trauma of Shafi's demise as well as the mentally unstable state of her other son, Bilal, who survived the tragedy. The Indian army deployed Shafi into a room teeming with militants, carrying a grenade,

but he perished instantaneously as the grenade exploded. Shameema was, however, able to save Bilal from the clutches of the army by volunteering to take the grenade into the adjacent room. Both Shameema and Bilal survived the fatal incident but were psychologically traumatized for the rest of their lives. Shameema tells Peer about the disturbed mental condition of Bilal, which was cured after he visited the shrine: 'I took him to Aishmuqam to the shrine of Zain Shah Sahib. He has been better since I prayed there' (Peer 2008: 175). This reflects her faith in the healing power of the shrine.

It was not just the people who believed in the healing agency of faith as a support system to which they remain connected through shrines and prayers, as expressed by Shahid, one of Peer's friends; even the doctors had started believing in the same (Peer 2008: 179). Peer observed the traumatized victims as believing more in prayers and in making connections with God; the saints were believed to be the intermediaries in establishing this connection. For instance, Shahid's cousin, rendered impotent because of the torture experienced at the torture cell Papa 2, prays more frequently after medical treatments fail to cure him. Peer's parents intensify their prayers after having survived the mine blast. The psychological disturbances brought on by the traumatic experiences left the traumatized Kashmiris with no other remedy. Peer writes, 'it appeared that God and his saints had taken on the role of the most prominent psychiatrists with the largest practice in Kashmir; along with faith as a crucial support system' (Peer 2008: 179). For them, the much-needed support came only from this singular spring of faith.

Moreover, the communal bond, formed during the religious gatherings, had a cathartic effect as described by Peer: 'After the prayers, they would settle into a quasi-musical recital of *darood*, the praises of the prophet and saints, in Persian and Kashmiri, rocking themselves back and forth as they spoke the revered, familiar words' (Peer 2008: 181). Even the ones who did not know the meaning derived solace from the ritual. Peer writes, 'My friends and I never really remembered the *darood* but we would play along, sit cross-legged, rock our bodies and call out "Ya Allah" in chorus, after the old men' (Peer 2008: 181). These choral incantations were therapeutic for all the afflicted souls.

There has been a continuous counter-discourse in religion: this Salafist group was against the practice of 'a mixture of text and tradition' (Peer 2008: 181) practiced and preferred by the Kashmiris. This group opposed the act of praying at shrines, believing that it was un-Islamic to make the saint an intermediary between the creator and the creation (Peer 2008: 188). The Kashmiri people, however, did not take this very well as they have a long tradition of Sufis and Saints and being devotees. For them 'a shrine wasn't merely a spiritual centre, but a club, a space for social gatherings and festivities, and a site for conducting

business as well' (Peer 2008: 188). The crises make their life all the more reliant on the support system provided by the shrines and in their belief in the saints being the best of God's men who may intervene and plead their cases in front of God. Kallu, one of Peer's family friends, 'turned to the shrine atop the hill and lifted his hands in prayer. "O! Saint Zainuddin! Be our mediator with the Almighty! Ask Him to take pity on these people! Ask him to forgive our sins! You are amongst His dear ones!"' (Peer 2008: 189). And how can they forget or ignore the ones who are so close to God?

Shrines form an important part of a Kashmiri's life; from the beginning of their lives they have a connection with the shrine. Peer writes, 'A child's first haircut, according to Kashmiri Muslim tradition is performed at a shrine' (Peer 2008: 191). There is a whole ritual that is performed, at the end of which the family distributes food among the devotees who bless the child in turn. From this point onward, the child may visit the shrine many times at different milestones throughout his life.

Understanding Shrines through the Notions of *Azadi* and Kashmiriyat

Furthermore, it is significant to note that the idea of spirituality associated with the Sufi shrines becomes further problematized within the highly politically charged environment of Kashmir. Western academia has identified the extreme notions of Islam as being peaceful and extremist through two key terms, 'Sufism' and 'jihad', respectively. Nevertheless, a close textual and discourse analysis of the memoir indicates that within the context of Kashmir, it is difficult to identify these two categories separately; they may complement each other for understanding the discourse of *Kashmiriyat*. This is mainly due to the complex nature of the historical context combined with diverse spiritual beliefs and bitter political experiences. In this section, we focus on the consolidation of the political and the spiritual through the symbols of shrines.

In CN, Peer uses religious symbolism as a means of consolidating the spiritual and the political self. He depicts a picture of the Muslims in Srinagar relating religious issues with their political concerns during their interactions in mosques, shrines, and religious festivals. These interactions run parallel to militarization and the struggle for redefining the political self within the context of Kashmir. For instance, he writes:

In our mosque, after prayers and before the recitation of darood – a song praising the Prophet Mohammad – people made spontaneous speeches and shouted slogans of azadi. I specifically asked God to give us freedom by next year. But there were also moments of

frivolity. One day a young man from our village who worked in Srinagar gave a speech at the mosque. He grabbed the microphone and shouted in the microphone 'KabiranKabira!' The slogan meant 'Who is the greatest?' But no one understood. None of us spoke Arabic. He shouted again and again, and there was silence – then the adolescents in the last row, the backbenchers of faith, began to laugh. Embarrassed, the young man explained that in reply to the slogan we were supposed to shout, 'Allah ho Akbar' (God is great). He shouted again, 'KabiranKabira!' He was answered by the hesitant, awkward 'Allah-o-Akbar'. For about a year we teased him.

(Peer 2008: 21)

Such conversations between local Kashmiris reflect the concern about the complexity of identities within the context of Kashmir. While carrying an Indian identity card (Peer 2008: 21) became a compulsion for Kashmiris, defining their religious identity is also their major concern. A political question that Peer raises here is: 'Who is a Muslim within the context of Kashmir?' He observes that while attending religious gatherings, none of the Muslims witnessing the discussion understand Arabic; paradoxically, the speaker wants them to eulogize God using Arabic terminology.

Two key terms that are relevant to our discussion here are *Kashmiriyat* (or the essence of being Kashmiri) and 'azadi' (meaning freedom), which are frequently discussed even at the gatherings around the shrines and mosques. These terms can be deconstructed by applying Kabir's theoretical premise that 'On a collective level, azadi indicates a yearning for a confident, well-defined Kashmiri identity' (Kabir 2009: 11). Thus, *azadi*

compresses a present-tense denial of the right to identity, memory, and history, with a messianic aspiration toward a different future. It confers on Kashmiris a folded temporality that compounds the political uncertainty crystallised around the LOC. But azadi also threatens the foundational myth of the Indian nation as a patriarchal 'joint family'. If adjustment of one's collective aspirations to the demands of this overarching structure is the basis of the pluralistic Indian Union, azadi represents Kashmiri rejection of the demand to adjust.

(Kabir 2009: 10)

Kabir further problematizes the discussion by deciphering the different approaches toward *Kashmiriyat*. On the one hand, it reflects the way Kashmiris assert their own identity, while on the other hand, it highlights

the approach offered toward Kashmiri identity by the liberal Indian discourse. In Kabir's view, the psychological and social repercussions of political conflict in Kashmir are important to consider because 'when the Kashmiris will have obtained *azadi*, *Kashmiriyat* will have returned to them' (Kabir 2009: 21). She critiques the contrasting view offered by the Indian discourses that 'invokes *Kashmiriyat* as a placebo', which is 'assimilated to another discourse around secularism, syncretism, and Sufism that seeks to eject all that is troubling about Islam to the national imaginary' (Kabir 2009: 21). She concludes by proposing that 'Because *Kashmiriyat* so easily signifies a malleable Islam that sits yielding with a benign Hinduism, the spectre of its endangerment causes disproportionate alarm in the Indian public sphere' (Kabir 2009: 21). Kabir's stance takes us back to our exploration of the problematic nature of Sufi shrines when understood within the context of Kashmir (as discussed in the earlier section of this chapter) to decipher the intricate combination of Sufi practices entangled with the political discourse within Kashmir.

Peer notes that the sacred spiritual spaces are significant in Kashmir – every hillock has a shrine and every spring had a temple (Peer 2008: 175). He observes that 'A child's first haircut, according to Kashmiri tradition, is performed at a shrine' (Peer 2008: 175), while the disciples at a shrine become healers for common people. However, Peer is critical of the ways people in Srinagar have altered the traditional concept of Sufism and shrines. In a different context, Hoffman suggests that traditionally, people visit the shrines of Sufi saints as the bearers of 'prophetic light' (Hoffman 2023: 89); they are considered as being particularly close to God; their prayers are answered and subjugation of their passions and worldly desires have been complete to the extent of uniting their spirits with God (Hoffman 2023: 90). The Sufis believe that one important element of sainthood is its hiddenness (Hoffman 2023: 91). The death of the body does not stop the saint's ability to communicate with the living saints or ordinary people. They can communicate over geographical distances with those who have an 'inner vision' (*basīra*). It is an important Sufi connection for the Sufi disciples who have attained a spiritual connection with their shaykhs (Hoffman 2023: 95–96). Any country where saints are found is supposed to be the source of blessing. Their presence provides the people to be in touch with the '*baraka*', or 'spiritual power', which was introduced into the world through Muhammad. A saint conveys blessings to those who love God. In this way, loving a Saint is expressing love for God, and the saint becomes a means of intercession before God (Hoffman 2023: 96–98).

After death, the Saints are believed to be alive in their tombs; they can hear the greetings offered by the visitors, and make 'intercession for them'. Their spirits are free to roam and possess even more power after death; the *madad* (assistance) of the dead is stronger than the *madad* of

the living because the dead are closer to God. The miracles of Saints are called 'graces', or *karāmāt*, whereas the graces of prophets are *mu'jizāt*. The Saints can read hearts, talk to animals, speak any language, banish evil spirits, provide physical and spiritual healing, 'and cut bureaucratic red tape, among other things'. The status of the saint within the Sufi hierarchy also depends on the extent of his/her power to perform these miracles.

This complex understanding of Sufi presence through the physical shrine and spiritual belief reminds us of Zutshi's arguments based on the temporal and the spatial. Zutshi proposes that the tradition of writing about the past incorporated heterogeneous temporalities and spatiality that brought together the past, present, and future into one seamless frame of discussion. Furthermore, this allowed for mythical time and space to interact with historical time and territorially bounded spaces. Embedded within these narratives, and sometimes overtaking the overall linear and chronological recounting of the rule of kings, lies the narration of the activities of Sufi mystics and other divine and semi-divine individuals who transformed Kashmir into a blessed landscape beyond historical time (Zutshi 2014: 7).

This is the reasons why Peer confers the visit of Kashmiri people to the sacred shrines of the saints. The sanctity of the shrine is indicated by the fact that it contains its spiritual center, its axis that reaches toward heaven. It is also a truly sacred space like a mosque. The devotees regard the shrine for its spiritual worth like *hajj* (Muslim pilgrimage). While the living Sufis go to shrines as a regular expression of devotion, the common people visit shrines as a place of refuge from their troubles; they appeal to the saint for intervention. Holy shrines are perceived as places of mercy for the oppressed, as much as 'they are places of power' (Hoffman 1995: 102). The Sufi saint is a mediator between God and man, with his shrine as the focus of religious activity and a strong emphasis on the development of spiritual understanding (Ansari 1992: 4).

Through this complex political context of Kashmir (as in Sindh, Pakistan, discussed by Sarah F. D. Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power* 1992), Sufis also turn into mediators between the rulers and the ruled (Ansari 1992: 9). This is the kind of Sufi practices that Peer interrogates through how people in Srinagar start initiating political processions from shrines. Various Muslim preachers respond differently to this. For instance, a Salafi teacher belonging to one of the puritanical groups in Kashmir discouraged the belief that 'making the saint an intermediary between the creator and the creation was un-Islamic' (Peer 2008: 173). The significance of a Saint's shrine as a socio-political space is beyond the one-sided notion of a shrine; he regards it as 'the social and cultural significance of the shrine in Kashmiri life as he

writes, it wasn't merely a spiritual center but a club, a space for social gatherings, festivities, and business' (Peer 2008: 173).

Traditionally, the camaraderie between the Sufis and common people visiting the shrine is seen as part of the spiritual life, promoting brotherhood, love, mutual service for the sake of God, mutual informal exhortation, and instruction in the spiritual life. However, in Kashmir, such religious practices blend with sociability and exchange of political views. The mystical experience is also achieved in the communal setting but combined with political experience and response toward it. The purpose is to establish a bond with fellow Sufis and ultimately with the Prophet, transcending boundaries through a spiritual connection between the souls of the living and the deceased saints to finally achieve closeness to God. The contrast between social and sacred space is spurious in Srinagar (115–116). In the 1990s, as protests and killings mounted (17), marches to the shrines of Sufi saints became popular. People started marching to the shrine to pray for *azadi* or independence (Zain Shah Sahib at Aishmuqam) where they were offered food and respect replicating the practices at the shrines (Peer 2008).

At a deeper level, shrines as social-political spaces somehow also turn into political spaces when people raise the slogans of independence and pray for political benefits at these shrines (165). To possess faith, people had to pray regularly. The complex discourse surrounding these shrines is further intensified when during militarization, people have also developed certain improvised Sufi practices. According to Peer, an occurs when one of his friends, influenced by both Sufi tradition and militarization, starts wearing a Kalashnikov along with his amulet in the string.

As indicated above, our discussion focused on the complex spiritual spaces which also become Peer's focus in an essay written soon after writing this memoir. Peer's essay entitled 'Kashmir's Forever War' published in *Granta 112: Pakistan* (2010) delves into the theme of Kashmir's autonomy through ethnographic observations and interviews. This essay is based on Peer's nostalgic reflections based on traveling back to Kashmir in December 2009. His prose notably sketches the picture of the beautiful yet traumatized Kashmir that haunts him. On occasion, even in this non-fictional account like Agha Shahid Ali, Peer draws a parallel between the context of political crisis and the beauty of the valley. He writes:

On an early December morning in 2009, I was on a flight home to Kashmir. It doesn't matter how many times I come back, the frequency of arrival never diminishes the joy of homecoming – even when home is the beautiful, troubled, war-torn city of Srinagar.

Frozen crusts of snow on mountain peaks brought the first intimation of the valley. Silhouettes of village houses and barren walnut trees appeared amid a sea of fog. On the chilly tarmac, my breath formed rings of smoke.

(Peer 2010)

Paradoxically, later in the essay, he narrates the stories of Dr. Arshad Bhat and several local people (such as Yasin Malik and Khurram Parvez) who go missing during the 1990 conflicts between the Indian military and Islamist militants. Unlike an idealistic image of Kashmir that he tries to portray at the beginning of the essay, these interactions result in his bitter realization that 'The dead speak in Kashmir, often more forcefully than the living' (Peer 2010).

Concerning our earlier discussion, it is significant to mention his comment on the peaceful spiritual spaces of Kashmir turned into symbols of traumatized memories as he writes,

All this has taken its toll. Srinagar used to be a city of elegant, latticed houses, mosques, and temples on the banks of the river. Srinagar was people strolling on the wooden bridges and wandering into old bazaars or stepping with a prayer into a Sufi shrine with papier-mâché interiors. Now it is a city of bunkers, a medieval city dying in a modern war. One of the most prominent landmarks of war is the sprawling Martyrs' Graveyard in north-western Srinagar.

(Peer 2010)

Peer observes that the Sufi clerics themselves are turning into political perpetrators as demonstrated through the example of Moulvi Mohammad Farooq, who was launching a campaign to sign an agreement between India and Pakistan. In his essay, Peer refers to a character, Farooq, whose dual status as a modern politician and the head cleric in Kashmir reflects the complexities of spirituality and politics discussed earlier. He observes Farooq holding a meeting 'leading his followers in a sing-song voice humming Kashmiri and Persian devotional songs and then moving effortlessly to the question of Kashmiri politics' (Peer 2010). Peer notices how Farooq has consolidated his role as a spiritual leader and a political activist through this speech full of spiritual references, and painful memories of human loss while ending the speech with political slogans like, 'Kashmir is for Kashmiris!' Farooq shouted. 'We will decide our destiny!' (Peer 2010) to mobilize the enthusiastic youth attending his sermon.

Conclusion

The integration of the spiritual (read as Sufi) to the political has been our key concern in this chapter focused on *Curfewed Night*. Zutshi regards Peer's memoir as reflecting his effort to 'redefine the meaning of tradition'; in this context, Sufi beliefs and faith are seen as representative of these traditions. While commenting on this tradition, Peer is also following its practice according to his 'own social locations and political objectives' while immersing himself within the the political discourse of Kashmir. Zutshi has aptly made three key points that are relevant here: firstly, the narratives on Kashmir reflect historical practice not just based on a historical context but also on a literary tradition; secondly, historical practice and the articulation of religiosity are interconnected; and finally, historicity depends on the linkage between time and space. In this context, we have discussed the significance of the shrine as a space of 'self-representation' emerging within Kashmir as a space of crises. The shrine (both as a physical space and a metaphor) becomes a unifying element for the construction of a subversive and resistant self, which is Peer's main concern in his memoir. This is important because during the 'coming of age with war' (Peer 2010), Kashmiri youth used technology and media to retaliate against the role of the spiritual leaders in Kashmir. This is when, as readers, we wonder why Kashmiris on Fridays around prayer times fear *kani jung*, or the 'war of stones' (Peer 2010). Their aspirations for a quality education are shattered, as evident in Peer's discussion with a young university student named Shahbaz with whom he loses connection upon his return to New York while fearing that he may be another case of a missing person. Peer responds to this intermingling of spiritual and political issues critically in *CN* while his approach to Sufi beliefs and faith also represents traditions. Hence, the reading of *CN* is incomplete without understanding this nexus between the spiritual and the political.

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