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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

# Hysteric Subject between the Imaginary and Symbolic Orders: A Lacanian Critique of *Curfewed Night*

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**Abstract—** This research attempts to unearth the contrasting discourses that constitute the subjectivity in Basharat Peer's memoir. By highlighting the circulation of these multiple discourses, the research further endeavours to trace the resistance in the subject's agency. These discourses, often resorting to violent modes of disciplining, relentlessly struggle to configure the subject. However, with its potential for resistance, the subject's agency subverts all these hegemonic configurations. Drawing upon Lacan's imagery and symbolic orders along with Lacanian discourses: master's discourse, university's discourse, analyst's discourse, and hysteric's discourse, this paper reads the incidents as symptomatic of a problem beyond their literal signification. This paper concludes that the Kashmiri subject becomes a battleground for these contradictory forces: the military and the militants. However, their modes of fashioning and disciplining the subject go awry with the agency's resistance.

**Index Terms—** Discourse, Symbolic order, Imaginary order, Resistance, Agency

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## Introduction

This research endeavours to foreground the constitution of the subject in the contrasting and contradictory discourses and the consequent resistance the Kashmiri agency displays that subverts the hegemonic configurations. Basharat Peer's memoir, *Curfewed Night*, documents the character's psychological and moral developments that resemble a bildungsroman novel. Peer's interactions during his external journeys precipitate internal changes: psychological and moral developments. This memoir foregrounds the Kashmiri existence that becomes a battleground for contrasting and contradictory ideologies. Within Lacanian model of discourses, the hysteric's discourse plays a significant role in countering the hegemonic discourses. However, the constitution of hysteric's discourse takes place between the imaginary and symbolic orders. In their imaginary and symbolic orders, a Kashmir subject sees myriad images and 'letters' that find the discourse of hysterics. These images and 'letters' contain the undertones of ideologies. Resisting an individual's constitution in these opposing ideologies and asserting the agency by subverting the master's signifier, very few individuals like Peer can carry an authentic self. By drawing on Lacan's theoretical angles: operation of discourses, the role of the imaginary stage, and the formation of the symbolic order, I attempt to explicate the happenings concerning to the individuals. The incidents in the text are taken as symptomatic, "which focuses on the text's

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underlying presuppositions" (Buchanan, 2010, np). This kind of reading helps delineate the recurring trope: the Line of Control that tears the families living on both sides of the border asunder. This research is significant as it contributes to the prevalent discussions on the Kashmiri literature. Moreover, as the following discussion on existing research reveals, *Curfewed Night* has not been critiqued with the Lacanian model. This Lacanian model, particularly the four discourses, exposes these discourses' inconsistencies.

Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night* sketches the minute details of physical and psychological violence. The memoir is brimmed with stories of raids, disappearance, incarceration, torture, kidnappings, and massacres. These different forms of violence are not the outcome of a dispute between the fractions; rather, that is the outcome of the dispute either between the state and the civilians or between the state and the militants. According to Soma Mandal, the resultant violence is framed as legal or illegal by the state with its contaminated sanctimonious lens. Thus, the resistance and violence "by stateless groups of power are considered to be terrorism," while the ceaseless violence "carried out of state-sanctioned groups... is justified to be a legitimate attempt to secure justice and order" (Mandal, 2019, p. 96). Violence by these groups is disseminated with exaggeration through media, while all the manifestations of violence against civilians and criminals are "rarely reported on media" (p. 104). Most researchers have read *Curfewed Night* as a story of undocumented violence and very few have gone beyond the literal significance of the memoir. Juxtaposing the heavenly beauty with the macabre picture of Kashmir, Rakhshan Rizwan contends that the pleasures one gets from this heavenly beauty have often "been interrupted and overwritten by enunciations and experiences of violence and pain," thus, combining "happiness and suffering" to make "Kashmir a unique 'medley of torment.'" (Rizwan, 2020, p. 2). Neogi and Aneja echo Rizwan that Peer endeavors to show "how Kashmir deteriorated from a relatively peaceful, beautiful valley to a conflict-ridden land where people are ruled by fear and uncertainty" (2021, p. 84). Thus, according to Rizwan, Basharat Peer does not consider these interruptions as random occurrences, but he represents them "as symptomatic of the suspension of human rights in the region" (p. 78). Commenting on *Curfewed Night* concerning civil rights in postcolonial India, Stephen Mortan believes that the military power of India established checkpoints that would surveil to what extent the "human bodies are permitted to move through space and time" (2014, p. 23). The establishment of checkpoints and other constitutional institutions apparently seems to be rational for counterinsurgency; however, it infringes on civil liberties.

**Theoretical Framework**

It is important to note that the Lacanian subject differs from the Freudian or Cartesian subject. The Lacanian subject is split into ego and unconscious, "between a false sense of self and automatic functioning of language in the unconscious" (Fink, 1995, p. 45). Thus, this false sense of 'being' implies that the "subject is never more than supposed" (Lacan, 2016). According to Lacan, the very split between ego and unconscious is the subject. Throughout his writings, we come across such terms as 'split subject,' 'divided subject,' and 'barred subject' for this supposed subject. The history of this split can be in located the formative months of the infant. Lacan categorizes human life into stages/orders. Pre-mirror life spans over six months from birth. It is followed by 'imaginary order. In the pre-mirror stage, the infant does not have a sense of being an individual. In this period, according to Lacan, there is always a "lack of coordination of his own motility," and there is an "intra-organic and relational discordance during the first six months" (2005, p. 15). However, the images during this period have indelible and durable effects because, for lacan, these early visual phenomena become 'letters .'By 'letters, ' Lacan means the effect of symbolic order (language), which creates and informs the unconscious. This aspect of Lacan is very significant in dissecting the Kashmiri subject's language, which is the product of these early visuals: visuals of uncommon happenings that appall these infants. However, this poses a question of how a child introjects an object. Lacan answers this question that these images, sounds, their effects, and sensory response combine to form individuality. He further says that at this stage, the earliest linguistic and visual perceptions are inseparable because their residue keeps haunting the subject throughout life. Thus, the incredible effects of images condition each stage of the person. The analysis of the text reveals that the infants in this turbulent society are exposed to dreadful images, and desirous images of the fanciful world of mothers do not constitute their pre-mirror world.

Generally, language is thought to resolve the issues of his/communication and mis/understanding, but Freud and Lacan revealed its disruptive aspect. The imaginary sense of wholeness and totality of the infant is severely damaged and dented by the symbolic order. In Lacanian theorization, this symbolic order is a complex concept. The word 'symbolic' differs from what Freud derives from the word 'symbol .'Freud sees a natural connection between symbols and the objects referred to. Viewing the symbol from this angle severs "the symbol from the vast network of language" (Ragland-Sullivan, 1987, p, 167). In Lacanian terminology, the 'symbolic' is the order of language and culture. This very language causes alienation within a person: alienated from him/herself. In Lacanian alienation, two parties are involved: the child and the other. The child submits to the other, and resultantly he/she becomes the subject of language. According to Lacan, this other functions in different forms:

- The other as language
- The other as demand
- The other as desire (object a)
- The other as jouissance (Fink, p. 13).

Desire and language are inextricably interwoven in Lacanian theorization. According to Lacan, desires inhabit language. Without language, there is no such thing as 'desire .'We serve, sometimes, other people's desires while we pretend that these desires are ours. The desires of others come to us through discourse. Lacan says the unconscious is others' discourse: unconscious is full of other people's language, talk, discourse, aspirations, and goals. This other is our native language and this mother tongue. Beyond the language, there is nothing, and this nothing is Real.

Lacan's four discourses provide a very revealing paradigm for explicating literary texts. What makes these discourses significant are the different forms of discourses, such as speech, thought, and action, with multiple possible positions. These four positions, what Lacan terms in his seminar XVII, The other side of psychoanalysis (2007), "four structures" (p. 14), "four-footed apparatus" (p. 20), and "four formulas" (p. 31), "identif[y] four possible types of the social bond, four possible articulations of the symbolic network which regulates intersubjective relations" (Evans, 2006, p. 45). This 'four-footed apparatus' categorizes the discourse; these discourses come from different subject positions. This categorization of discourse strengthens my argument that there is a presence of agency in the Lacanian subject. An overview of these four discourses shows the operations of these different positions. The master's discourse possesses the knowledge and regulates it. This entails that the master possesses the power. Lacan believes that the signifier of the master's discourse "spreads throughout language like wildfire," and thus it "hooks on [and] creates a discourse" (2007, p. 189). The university's discourse orients "the conscious thought of the nascent subject" according to the designs and "ideological imperatives of the ruling elite" (Jenvey, 2016, p. 216). Thus, the university's discourse serves the master's discourse. The analyst discourse helps hysteric resist and counter the operation of the language and the master signifier. This discourse opposes all the wills of the master signifier. In countering the master signifier, the analyst discourse creates new signifiers. The subject's agency can be located in the discourse of the hysteric. The subject in this discourse is alienated and divided and always lacks. The alienation of the subject is the result of their accession to language, and this language is suppressed in the discourse of master and university. These four discourses: master's discourse, university discourse, analyst's discourse, and hysteric's discourse are at work in Peer's memoir. The Indian state and militants represent the master's discourse; the academic and religious educational institutions represent the university's discourse; the elders and, sometimes, the books represent the analyst's discourse; while the oppressed subjects, the protesters, activists, writers, and the rebels represent the hysteric's discourse. Thus, the subject's resistance dwells in the hysteric's discourse.

**Four discourses and the subject's resistance**

While these four discourses are complex and intriguing, they move along permeable boundaries. The operation of the discourses is not as simple as one assumes; it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the discourse of the master and the discourse of the university. Another level of complexity surfaces when there involve multiple masters' discourses and multiple Universities' discourses. *Curfewed Night* ushers us into this complex and contradictory play of multiple discourses. In this memoir, three master's discourses are at work: the Indian State, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), and Hizbul Mujahideen. Although the latter two master's discourses strive to secure freedom from the former one, they are at loggerheads with each other. JKLF is a pro-independence of the Kashmir region, while Hizbul Mujahideen is a pro-Pakistani movement aimed at merging Kashmir with Pakistan after it is liberated. To serve their interests, these masters have created certain institutions with mobile chains of signifiers so they could disseminate their respective ideologies.

One of the discourses of the master, the Indian state, while interpellating the subject through ideological tools, resorts to many forms of violence to discipline its subjects. Usually, the master signifier, or what Fink terms "the nonsensical signifier, the signifier with no rhyme or reason" (p. 131), operates in a hegemonic way. In other words, for the masses, the constitution of subjectivity in the prevalent ideology of the state seems to be inherent; the subject internalizes the ideology unconsciously. Thus, the master signifiers, Bracher contends, "are any signifiers that a subject has invested his or her identity in," and they "are simply accepted as having a value or validity that goes without saying" (Bracher, 1993, pp. 24-25). In the context of Kashmir, the master's discourse operates differently. On the one hand, by utilizing educational institutions, print, and electronic media, the state is striving to inculcate Indian nationalism and patriotism. On the other hand, the state attempts to establish oppressive forces and discriminatory laws by resorting to punitive measures. Hence, for this purpose, Border Security Forces (BSF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) are established with unrestrained powers. *Curfewed Night* enumerates myriads of stories that map the state-sponsored violence against innocent people. Narrating his worst experience in different detention centres, Shafi says, "They made you sit on a chair, tied you with ropes. One soldier held your neck, two others pulled your legs in different directions, and three more rolled a heavy concrete roller over your legs". If you still did not answer their questions, "they burned you with the cigarettes." (Peer, p. 179). For Shafi, the worst kind of torture was psychological: "They would make us say 'Jai Hind' [Victory to India] every morning and every evening" (p. 179). Commenting on the ruthless treatment from the authorities of jail and the pathetic condition of the victims such as Hussein, Ansar, and Sharif, Soma Mandal contends that the lives of 'prisoners of war' "had been dismantled beyond damage" (2019, p. 101). Telling his own story, Ansar, another victim, said that taking the alleged person out to the lawn, "You were asked to remove all your clothes, even your underwear. They tied you to a long wooden ladder and placed it near a ditch filled with kerosene oil and red chili powder" (Peer, p. 180). The trouble does not come to an end here; by raising the ladder time and

again, making it work like a seesaw, they "pushed your head into the ditch. It could go on for an hour, depending on their mood" (180). If it still did not work, "they burned your arms and legs with cigarette butts and kerosene stoves used for welding. They burned your flesh till you spoke" (pp. 180, 181). Moreover, "[t]hey tied copper wire around your arms and gave high-voltage shocks" (p. 181). This practice deserted many people's lives as they could not marry after these shocks. When Peer shares these incidents with his doctor friend, Shahid, he tells him, "We have had hundreds of cases here. Those electric shocks led to impotence in many, and many lost their kidneys" (p. 182). Hearing this, Peer wishes to meet some of Shahid's patients. One of the patients, Hussein, a college-going boy, tells him that during the investigation, they "inserted a copper wire into my penis. Then they switched on the electricity" (p. 184). These violent acts aimed at disciplining the subjects, forcing them to subscribe to the national ideology.

Militant groups constitute different kinds of master's discourses. What constitutes the master's discourse is the power a state, a group, or an individual exercises over a number of people. Thus, it "represents [s] anyone in a position of power" (Bailly, 2012, p. 112). Master signifiers have an important role in constructing and positioning the subject. Bailly believes that "they have a central place, like a skeleton around which the subject has been constructed" (p. 114). In *Curfewed Night*, apart from the Indian state, we have two opposing master signifiers: JKLF and Hizbul Mujahideen. They are up against each other. Apparently, both the master signifiers seem to counter the Indian state and liberate the region, but they are struggling to secure power. These, too, while disseminating their ideology through journals, almanacs, and religious institutions, resort to violence.

Moreover, by exploiting the young boys, they pursue power and money: the cause of the desire (objet petit a). When these militants are deserted, and unable to find employment, these separatist leaders turn a blind eye to poverty. However, the life of these leaders changed: "They live in big houses and drive big cars bought from the money that came for the movement. But they are not willing to help those who destroyed their lives for the cause" (Peer, p. 178). The Kashmiri subject has to cope with the oppressive ideologies of these contrasting masters.

As far as the university's discourse is concerned, it represents "any institution, whether academic, corporate, governmental, or commercial" (Bailly, p. 112) that helps facilitate the exercise of power for the master. The central point of the university's discourse is the knowledge that renders things logical. The existence of truth becomes questionable as knowledge covers it with language. Thus, knowledge becomes an object petit for the subject; a continuous desire to get more and more sets in. The subject, ignorant of the constitution of the knowledge, unconsciously internalizes the signifiers of the master, for knowledge is constituted by the master. Apparently, the subject seems to strive against the oppressive controlling of the master, but "beneath the appearance of dispensing knowledge, the university controls the subject by means of its master" (p. 116). In Kashmir, the controlling bodies are police stations, military camps, and jails. When Peer meets some of the old prisoners and asks about the jail where they have served a term: '"Papa-2 ?"' (Peer, p. 174), the answers: '"No, I was in Rajasthan." "No. I was at Kot Balwal." "No. I was at Gogoland." "No. I was in Ranchi."' (p. 175) dumbfounded him. Papa-2 is one of the notorious prisons that still contains traces of torture. Shafi, the prisoner at Papa 2, says he saw "Smears of blood blemished the whitewashed walls" (p. 177). Despite resorting to such inhuman and violent ways, the master is failed to make the subjects submissive. However, few subjects yield to the untrammeled power of the master and become informers for the master and provide information about the activities of the militants. Shafi's arrest was made possible by the information provided by one of the informers.

The subjectivity of Peers is initially constituted in the discourse of the university. From primary to higher education, knowledge has struggled to discipline the subject. It is to be noted that these subjects have not passively internalized the signifiers that the master's discourse imposes. Peer, along with his class fellows during his school days, was determined "not to chant the Indian national anthem" (Peer, p. 35) as the symbols of Indian nationalism have become detestable for these boys. These boys resist the coercive constitution of their subjectivity in the master signifiers.

Since the subject in the university's discourse is knowledgeable, it suppresses the common subject with comparatively less knowledge. Hence, the students of different institutions, particularly of university and religious schools, on the one hand, serve the master and, on the other hand, suppress the other subjects who possess less knowledge. Moreover, the master's discourse is hidden behind the university's discourse and legitimizes and rationalizes what the master propagates. Therefore, Lacan believes "philosophy has always served the master, has always placed itself in the service of rationalizing and propping up the master's discourse, as has the worst kind of science" (Fink, p. 132). Similarly, religion and ideology, with their sacrosanct undertones evoking divinity from the sacred scriptures, have served the master differently. The so-called sanctity of these religious and ideological discourses has tended to eclipse the critical scrutiny of overarching structures. In *Curfewed Night*, JKLF and Hifzul Mujahideen configure this religious and ideological discourse. Militants of these groups embody the knowledge the master wants to teach in his subjects. In the course of time, when the overuse of discourse brings monotony, the master has to revitalize his discourse. For this, he has to replenish his ideology by contextualizing his struggle in the religious scriptures. However, it is to be kept in mind that the positions these discourses occupy are never stable; they keep shuffling. The university's discourse may occupy the dominant position by replacing the master's discourse. Similarly, the alienated subject or Lacan usually terms the split subject (hysteric's discourse), may occupy the dominant position by replacing the master's discourse or university's discourse.

The inherent resistance of the subject requires an external stimulus; this stimulus provides the subject a chance to glimpse into the

possibilities. Lionel Bailly believes that the world is full of individuals who carry out their studies and work in institutions and, later, they realize that "the main interest of the institution is in perpetuating its fantasy of itself –in maintaining, brightly polished, it's master signifier" (p. 116). Similarly, the world is full of individuals who consent to the master signifiers, posing that the signifiers are their own and "imagining that in belonging to a 'venerable' or 'dynamic' or 'powerful' institution they too acquire these characteristics" (p. 116). There is a third category too. After internalizing the knowledge, this category consists of individuals who "feel more and more helpless, small, and castrated by the institution over the year" (p. 116). A single institution may produce these three categories. This entails that the master determines the formation and production of knowledge; however, the operation of the knowledge, to a greater extent, is determined and constituted by the subject. From Bailly's reading of Lacan, it can be deduced that knowledge, in a certain position, becomes a stimulus: subject cause of desire (objet petit a), hence analyst.

No single event, individual, or body of knowledge can be pointed out as the analyst in Peer's matter. It would be safe to say that the journeys, stories, individuals, interactions, and readings all combined form analyst for Peer. Over time, a subject comes into contact with many people and comes across several experiences. So, an analyst may be a person, an incident, an event, or a book with whom the subject has a relationship "which allows and elicits the discourses that move the subject towards a deeper personal insight" (Bailly, p. 112). The untrammeled power of the master signifiers during Peer's school days provides him a vantage point where he could have a 'deeper personal insight .'Books proved to be an analyst as Peer "heard echoes of Kashmir in the pages of Hemingway, Orwell, Dostoyevsky, and Turgenev, among others" (Peer, p. 87). Despite being coercive, these master signifiers failed to render the students submissive. Thus, the students resisted their configuration in the imposed signifiers: "We are Kashmiris, and now we are fighting for independence. We cannot go on chanting the Indian songs, even if the principal might like us to" (Peer, p. 35). This personal insight at an early age stems from the oppression these school-going boys witness and sometimes experience. But this kind of superficial personal insight does not liberate the subject from the unending chain of the signifiers of the masters. Challenging one of the masters, Indian state, the students tended to fall prey to other masters: JKLF, JKSLF, and Hizbul Mujahideen. Peer's propensity towards these militant groups evidences the superficiality of this personal insight.

Analyst, too, has knowledge whose roots are found in the signifiers of the master. However, this knowledge is "different from the knowledge of university and master" (Bracher, 1993, p. 47) because it is appropriated to elicit a deeper insight into the subject. Peer interpellation can be seen within a plethora of discourses. Also, his realm of analyst's discourse is constituted by multiple experiences, events, incidents, and persons. The knowledge he acquires in the realm of analyst is juxtaposed with the knowledge of the master. This juxtaposition, according to Bracher, may bring two possibilities: "either the ego ideal can prevail, in which case the fantasy is suppressed, repressed, or altered…or the fantasy can win out, in which case the ego ideal changes" (p. 47). The latter possibility will help the subject discard its old master signifiers and reconstitute its subjectivity. Despite the fact Peer's parents yearned for a bureaucratic life for him, his fantasy for writing about the painful lives of Kashmiris is neither repressed nor altered. Consequently, the ego ideal had to change.

So far as the discourse of the hysteric is concerned, it is not at all used colloquially, implying a person with uncontrollable emotions. Rather, the hysteric is a subject "who asks questions about exterior matters out of a position of genuine need and interest (Bailly, p. 112). The hysteric questions the power of the master and the knowledge of the university. Peer, initially constituted in the discourse of the university, gives up the systematic educational process, renounces what society deems as prosperous life, and adopts the one which counters, resists, and rereads the structures imposed by the master's discourse. Peer, along with other subjects in the memoir, keeps doubting, protesting, and questioning the oppressive power of the master. Thus, the hysterics "whose very existence involves radical doubt and questioning" (Schroeder, 2008, p. 149) epitomizes the very resistance the lacanian subject possesses. By raising their voice and protesting: "hum kya chahte? Aazadi"! (We want? Freedom!)" (Peer, pp. 26, 260), the agency of Kashmiri subjects not only shows a desire to have a separate land for themselves but also does challenge the university's discourse and pose a threat to the master signifiers. In essence, the hysteric's discourse is antagonistic to the master's discourse; hence, the hysteric continuously attempts to expose what the master is trying to do. Peer's writing exposes what has been hidden hitherto.

Exposing what the master does against the Kashmiri subjects, Peer foregrounds the master's deliberate designs of destroying religious symbols and historical remains too. The richness of religious symbols and historical remains entails that Kashmir has been a culturally diversified region. The symbols of peaceful coexistence of people of multiple religions and cultures, as "[t]here used to be a temple [and] a mosque" have now become non-existent; "now it is all military" (p. 167). The intrusion of the master into Kashmir has brought about a topographic disturbance. The schools have become barricades, grounds have become military camps, and other government buildings have become detention centers. This conversion of places aims to find a panopticon-like place where the master could surveil the subjects and where the master could nourish submissive behavior in the subjects. But the hysteric's discourse tends to reject the dominant ideology and to show alignment with the marginalized; hence it "appears as discourse about injustice," and the hysteric "enthusiastically pleads for the rights of that which remains outside or at the edge of the signifier as symbolic" (Zupančič, 2006, p. 164). The Kashmiri subject dwells on the margins, beyond the center of freedom; their fate is determined not by free will but by the forces of the master. The hysteric warns this master, "war till victory," and asserts their rights: "self determination is our birthright!" (Peer, pp. 28, 34, 40). The inherent resistance of agency/hysteric tends to pose a constant threat to the ideology of the master. Thus, this agency does not let master orient

the constitution of the Kashmiri subjects.

**Death: Receding and returning**

The Heideggerian conceptualization of human 'being-towards-death' is unfitting in the context of Kashmiri. The Heideggerian theorization implies that death is a natural imposition that usually comes in old age and takes life after a certain period. The fear and sense of death in childhood is almost non-existent; thus, the more one becomes aged, the more the sense of being-towards-death is acute. However, Monika Ardelt, in her research "wisdom, religiosity, purpose in life, and attitudes toward death," holds that "some older adults might have come to terms with the finitude of their life" (2008, p. 7). Similarly, Thorson and Powel find that "death anxiety is lower in later life" (1990, p. 389). Adult persons seem to have realized that encroaching death is a natural phenomenon. But the lingering death in Kashmir reverses what Ardelt, Thorson, and Powel have discovered in their research. In Kashmir, as the memoir demonstrates, the individual does not move towards death; rather, it comes to them without knocking at the door; it recedes and returns. It is not the adults but the teenagers who encounter death frequently. A report shows that more than 310 children and teenagers (between 1 to 17 years old) were killed between 2003 and 2017 (Rashid, 2018, para, 2). Thus, here it is not the father who is complacent about being shouldered by a son to the graveyard, but a son waits and weighs the strength of the father's shoulder whether it could bear the burden of the untimely death of a son.

Death, viewed in the context of Kashmiri, refutes all kinds of generalizations and meanings attached to death. Maurer, in his article ''Maturation of Concepts of Death,'' states, "At some level below true cognition, the child with naïve narcissism 'knows' that the loss of his parents" is equivalent to the loss of his own life, causing a feeling of abandonment "without a hope of rescue" (1966, p. 36). It is to be kept in mind that each Kashmiri child goes through the castration phase and is at a loss, as Maurer says. This is the symbolic death of the father. But in Kashmir, the child deals with real death as well as the symbolic death of the father. Apart from this, fathers are at a loss, searching for clues for their children in detention centers, torture cells, hospitals, morgues, and villages bordering the Line of Control (LoC). Concerning the Kashmiri existence, what Milan Kundera derives from Kafka's fiction are perennial questions: "What possibilities remain for man in a world where the external determinants have become so overpowering that internal impulses no longer carry any weight?"; "What are the possibilities for man in the trap the world has become?" (1988, pp. 26, 48). These questions become more revealing when the Kashmiri existence is juxtaposed with the hegemonic control: both militants and military, overpowering the subjects. The play of death: receding and returning ruptures the commonly held notions of existence and its culmination in death. In its place, "death, fear, and anger" have dwelled forever (Peer, p. 36). When the unquestionable power of the state allows its officers to raise the "gun like a baton" and one waits "to be hit by the weapon" (p. 57), the sense of existence may come to a halt. Life and death come to a standstill and the individual at that moment is unable to figure out the time s/he spends between life and death. Peer's memoir is brimmed over with stories showing death receding and returning. Narrating the story of a Mukhbir-"a Kashmiri man who had become a collaborator and identified militants and their supporters" (p. 70), Peer reveals that the militants took an alleged Mukhbir on the mountain and shot him, two bullets piercing his neck, threw him into the canal. But "the canal's cold water coagulated his blood and saved him" (p. 70). Similarly, when Maqbool, the postmortem expert, sifting through the bodies badly battered in a mine blast, realizes the movement of an arm and tries to pull him out so he can save the dying boy (p. 105). During the time between the mine blast and his arrival at the hospital, the boy must have visualized both death and life umpteenth time.

Thorson and Powell's research has further discovered that death and dying have different effects on the human beings. Their finding shows that most people dread dying (p. 388). The people of Kashmir, too, dread this dying; they wish that there is a nuclear war between India and Pakistan: '" they should fight a war... and settle it"' (Peer, p. 109) once and for all. '"It will be better than dying slowly every day"' and '"we are tired of dying every day"' (pp. 108, 109). In certain circumstances, the subject counts down the seconds, waiting for the instant that could bring an end to their life. Wajahat, the younger brother of Peer, during a battle between the militants and the military, try to run from the school only to find a patrolling army tank "rode alongside him" (p. 79). Seeing the tank, the barrel of the gun rotating and pointing at him, Wajahat's heart must have skipped a few beats as he says, "I thought the soldiers would fire a shell at me. Then I saw the machine gun mounted on the tank and thought they were more likely to shoot me with a bullet" (p. 79). The whole concentration is drawn to the movement of a finger pressed against the trigger. This moment of thought, though, lasts for a very short time. It constitutes a time that keeps repeatedly returning, reminding the subject of their vulnerability in this region.

**The Lacanian desire and the formation of the symbolic**

Peer's desire for peace, tranquillity, security, and other characters' concern for the life of their children, future, and culture can be viewed from Lacan's formulation of desire: the Thing, objet petit a. This objet petit a is "the lost object which must be continually refound" (Evans p. 207), and this desired Thing is the one that promises to fill the gap brought about by the entry of the subject into the symbolic order. Symbolic order is not to be taken as the acquisition of language in early childhood; rather, "the symbolic is manifest in language, laws, and social structures (Bailly, p. 69). This implies that the process of learning, particularly social structures and laws that govern our

society and our identity, is not so simple and hierarchical. Moreover, this entails that utterance of the grammatically correct sentences does not confirm our entry into the symbolic order. Since the social structures and laws involve complex construction, the comprehension of symbolic order cannot be complete; the presence of an aporia is inevitable. Thus, it is the rupture in the totality of what one has seen as a complete truth. Furthermore, every realization of the triviality of what had been held reverent is an instance of entry into the symbolic order. Hence, learning about the operation of a structure is a step into symbolic order.

Desire has no existence in a child's pre-symbolic life. In the pre-symbolic order, the child pursues only needs. It is the symbolic order that brings about the desire. Need is physical, while desire is psychological. Bailly comments on Lacanian desire that it "grows around objects that fulfil a psychological need, rather than a physical one" (p. 83). Peer's entry into the symbolic order causes a destructive desire as he says, "Like almost every boy, I wanted to join them. Fighting and dying for freedom was as desired as the first kiss on adolescent lips" (Peer, p. 36). This kind of desire has no object; it does not aim at anything. This is the characteristic of the desire that the desire is a desire of nothing. Rather, it tries to fill a loss. In Peer's context, his desire for militancy seems to be childhood castration. Moreover, his desire epitomizes the loss of something all the Kashmiri children try to fill the aporia. Another vivid instance of this desire is seen when the militants, with their Kalashnikovs, started living in the dorms, opening the weapons and cleaning them. The curious crowd of students huddled around a militant with Kalashnikov, yearned to touch the weapon. One of the militants, "who was barely eighteen, did let me hold a Kalashnikov. I felt its cold steel barrel, ran my fingers along its banana-shaped magazine of bullets, posed with its aluminum butt pressed against my right shoulder. It felt fascinating!" (p. 37). This fascination does not stop anywhere; it keeps going on from one object to another object. This constant substitution of objects or displacement of desire from one focus to another is in Lacan terms 'the unstoppable metonymy of desire' (Evans, p. 41). Apart from boys' desire to join the militants, wearing the green uniform, crossing the border for arms training, Yusuf's switching roles: first, a police constable, then a militant trained in Pakistan, then a member of the counter-insurgent camp and finally a contestant in the general election demonstrates this unstoppable metonymy of desire.

Desire can be seen from another perspective. As a child's desire is the result of both castration and entry into the symbolic order, parents, too, nurture a desire which is the result of something unfulfilled. Adrian Johnston contends that "the child's image is a receptacle for his/her parents' dreams and wishes, with his/her body image being always-already overwritten by signifiers flowing from the libidinal economies of other speaking beings" (2013). Peer's father's unfulfilled desire to join the Indian civil services keeps haunting him; he tries to substitute that desire by motivating his son to Indian civil services. Peer's childhood desire of joining the militants is overwritten by the signifiers of parents' desire. This new signifier motivates him to give up the early desire and accept the new signifier imposed by his parents: to become a bureaucrat. However, this new signifier does not last long. Peer's body remains a place of contestation for contrasting signifiers, being written and overwritten. There is a moment in Peer's life where the agency intervenes and asserts itself. This intervention results in the renunciation of both violent and bureaucratic ways of life and culminates in the production of a chronicle of the sufferings and the pains of Kashmir.

Kashmiri subject comes across a new symbolic order. Growing amidst these turbulent circumstances, one has to come into contact with new signifiers and metaphors. In the winter, following the first massacre in Kashmir, Peer entered the symbolic order of "political education" (p. 30), where he acquainted himself with the unusual signifiers in the shape of acronyms: "JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front), JKSLF (Jammu and Kashmir Students Liberation Front), BSF (Border Security Force), CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force)" and phrases unknown to him: "frisking, crackdown, bunker, search, identity card, arrest, and torture" (p. 30). Thus, a new kind of language, though unspoken, encroaches on the symbolic order of the day. Its signification can be comprehended only by the Kashmiri boys. What they had heard earlier: the stories of thundering sounds of guns, now comes personified. They now discern the language of these guns and recognize that it is the sound of "LMG" (p. 77) and that is of "Kalashnikov [and] self-loading rifle (p. 77). Thus, the boys were exposed to numerous metaphors, both abstract and concrete. These new signifiers have enduring effects on the mind of the author.

As the movement for freedom gets momentum, the meaning of freedom assumes to take on a metaphorical attire; for this freedom, "almost every Kashmiri man was a Farhad, ready to mold the mountains for his Shireen: Freedom!" (p. 28). The word 'freedom' in the Kashmiri context, carries an unending chain of significations. Its signifier seems to signify differently: for school-going children, it signifies demilitarization and independence from the Indian state; for women, it is freedom from both Indian state and patriarchal society; and for knowledgeable individuals like Peer himself, it is a negation of all those forces, including military, militants and the elite, that perpetuate the sufferings and limit the individual's search for his/her own authenticity. This memoir underlines two vivid sources from where the passion for freedom emerges: religion and stories. On the one hand, religion provides a rationale for becoming a martyr by sacrificing one's life, while, on the other hand, the love relationship created by the folktales gives the inspiration to transcend the usual ways. The metaphors of Farhad, the lover, and Shirin, the beloved, for the aspirants of freedom and freedom itself, are some of the strongest metaphors in the history of folktales3. For Farhad, it was a Sisyphean task to dig and mould the mountain. However, he does so in order to be blessed with the love of Shirin. Thus, the memoir suggests, the Farhads of Kashmir, as the text demonstrates, are ready to sacrifice are ready to sacrifice their lives to attain the freedom which was also aspired by their fathers and forefathers.

**Conclusion**

This research opens up novel avenues of seeing Kashmiri literature from multiple perspectives. Drawing on the Lacanian model with symptomatic reading method, this research approaches the text for its hidden meaning. A surface level reading of the ideological and political structures does not expose the inconsistencies of these oppressive structures. Moreover, a solution for traumatic effects on the subjects without grasping the operation of these discourses is a distant dream. Thus, the current study, by utilizing Lacan's discourses, paves way for analysing the oppressive structures of the society.

The Kashmiri subject is entangled within the complex web of contrasting discourses. These discourses leave indelible traces on the minds of these subjects. However, these subjects possess an inherent agency that constantly subverts the oppressor's attempts to disciple them. Peer, in his early life, was vulnerable to the pitfalls of these constructed discourses. Inspired by the armed men with swinging Kalashnikov, Peer was inclined to join the militants. However, after realizing the danger of subscribing to an extremist ideology, he decided to tread on the way his father had followed. This, too, turned out to be the product of master's discourse. Despite the fact Peer was constituted in the discourse of the university, he challenged the state-sponsored narratives and came up with counter-narratives. Thus, these narratives of marginal subjects expose cruel and violent ways of subserviating the peripheral subject. Lacan's triad of human psychic development and four discourses prove to be significant in unearthing the Kashmiri subject's psyche. This Lacanian model reveals that the Kashmiri subject is constantly searching for the lost object. At the same time, this further reveals that the multiple and contrasting discourses attempt to configure him/her in a way that the subject becomes passive. However, Lacan's unique subject has a potential to resist these social and political configurations. Thus, the designs of the masters go awry.

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