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Book's Title: **The Half Mother (2014).**

Writer: **Shahnaz Bashir.**

Publisher: **Hachette Book Publication India Pvt. Ltd.**

Publication Year: **2014.**

Number of Pages: **182.**

Binding: **Paperback.**

Price: **Rs. 295.**

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*“People are born with certain responsibilities and writing is one of them”* says Shahnaz Bashir, author of *The Half Mother* in an YouTube video uploaded by Hachette India. *The Half Mother* besides being the author's debut novel could also be counted as a genuine piece of resistance literature that is poignantly crafted to make the world recognize the Kashmir's profoundly tragic human stories. Kashmir and its people share a history immensely reflective of oppression particularly the era that heralds the turmoil of 1989-90s. Ongoing conflict that has taken a massive toll on the lives of this forlorn land rendering thousands of youth missing and dead, with countless children orphaned and many half-widows has inspired resistance literature by a number of eminent local writers. *The Half Mother* is one such latest bold attempt. It is a kind of a tribute for all those mothers of Kashmir whose sons and loved ones were whisked away by the forces. In Kashmir there are around 10,000 such missing souls. With this theme in the backdrop there is much to admire and value about this heart wrenching narrative. The story is well crafted in evocative tale of emotions. The succinct inclusion of Kashmiri words and phrases makes an add-on to the emotional touch of the story and sets it well into the cultural context. Sentences like: *“Kuni kanh chhu na Khuadaaya”*, *“Gaed ha kaertham patro!”* make the readers empathize with not only the ill-fated mother –Haleema but also with all those mothers whose sons have been missing since 1990s. Haleema in that sense sets out to be a universal mother who represents all those devastated and robbed mothers of the conflict.

*The Half Mother* revolves around its central protagonist, Haleema, a resident of Natipora, whose only son Imran goes disappearing in the custody, during the unrest of 1990s, and is followed by her struggle to seek, from pillar to post, the whereabouts of her son. The unbearable loss of her son sets forth a train of events giving birth to a dejected and deserted “half mother” whose new journey turns out to be both tragic and harsh. The worst part of her new life is the uncertainty of the status of her son: whether he is dead or alive. The entire novel of 182 pages runs into three parts.

Book 1 introduces us to the miserable plight of Haleema, whose son Imran has already been whisked by the soldiers. We find her physically and psychologically drained seeking whereabouts of her son. She helplessly says to herself while thinking of her son:

“Where have you disappeared? Where do I look for you now? ... Where have you been? I have been looking for you everywhere...” (p. 4).

The other details are a delve into her childhood, family and personal life. Few readers might feel some exaggerated details as in the description of the kitchen garden, houses etc. while at other places no wait and pause in terms of the development of various stages in Imran’s character is reflected.

Book 2 is the delineating account of Haleema’s desperate and fruitless search for her disappearing son. In this process she runs from pillar to post trying to seek even a smallest scrap of information concerning her son. Haleema also meets a BBC journalist namely Izhar who is kind enough to help her. It’s with his help that an Urdu newspaper ‘*Waadi ki Aawaaz*’ publishes about the enforced disappearance of Imran. Haleema’s predicament makes her to battle and search different police-stations, army camps, media, press, but gets no clue. She visits hospitals, torture cells and even knocks the doors of ministers but all of no avail:

“Her search for Imran had become her habit, a habit she couldn’t do without. Jails and courts became routine affairs, like going to school. Six days a week she locked the wooden gate at dawn and went to the court. ... She now knew almost ever lawyer, judge, judicial clerk, police officer and journalist in Kashmir” (p. 127).

Shahnaz Bashir has succeeded in touching the hearts of his readers narrating fearful tales in passages that describe the pathetic conditions of the boys during and after torture. Their horrific conditions haunt the readers. Haleema's futile search for Imran yields her only disappointment, yet a "battered hope" fails to die:

"This longing is a pain. An eternal torture. It has not abated for a second" (p. 151).

Book 3 is the culminating part of both Haleema's quest and the novel. Haleema dies with the hope of her sons return. The novel has an open ending for readers to assume positive or negative regarding Imran's coming. *The Half Mother* is an account about the enforced disappearances in Kashmir and the plight of all those mothers who are endlessly craving for their sons' return. Noted writer, Mirza Waheed, says about the novel "*With delicately drawn characters, Shahnaz Bashir tells the heartbreaking story of one woman's battle for life, dignity and justice*".

The novel is distinct in the sense that it focuses purely on pain and doesn't indulge in side talk about why and how of conflict. This will contribute to its endurance in literary imagination. It assumes truly tragic dimensions. Pain that is Kashmir is conveyed movingly. The novelist is a Kashmiri who has both lived and mostly worked in Kashmir and this adds to its value as a narration of local truth. The novel sustains an intense reading experience. Kashmir is Haleema in search of lost soul or identity.