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## From Lived Space to Liminal Space: A reading of Freny Manecksha's *Behold I Shine: Narratives of Kashmir's Women and Children.*

Shamla K. M.

Associate Professor Department of English University of Calicut

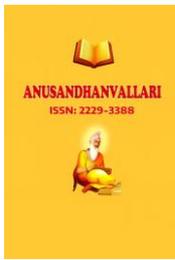
The paper is an attempt to read the non-fictional work by the Indian Journalist, Freny Manecksha titled, *Behold I Shine: Narratives of Kashmir's Women and Children* to surface how the army occupation in Kashmir led to drastic transformation of its people's engagement with the space they inhabit leading to liminality. Thinkers in Spatial studies have analysed urban space beyond its materiality by relating the human experience with geographical aspect, thereby revealing urban space as the vibrant venue for various human activities. Thinkers like Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja have led studies from a spatial perspective counter to historical and temporal ones. Such studies have resulted in novel approaches to the space we inhabit and interact. Concepts like 'heterotopia', liminality, lived space and third space have elevated space from narrow understanding of it as stagnant and mere backdrop for various historical events and turned it to be regarded as an active agent in determining the very nature of human actions enacted upon it. The concept of 'lived space' as envisaged by Henri Lefebvre in his work, *The Production of Space* stands for the symbolic use of physical space where as 'liminality' as envisaged by Arnold Van Gennep refers to the space in the threshold or in transition. The present paper tries to look at the relationship between the people of Kashmir and their long disputed land which turned them alienated in terms of regional and cultural aspects. When the state of Kashmir got divided as Pakistan occupied Kashmir and Kashmir under Indian administration, the physical borders and lines of control created deeper wounds in the lives and culture of the people of Kashmir. Freny Manecksha's *Behold I Shine: Narratives of Kashmir's Women and Children* is taken as the representative work to analyse how the people of Kashmir get accustomed to the changed spatial arrangement of the places they live in which have turned their lives uncertain and in transition.

**Keyword:** Lived space, Liminality, Freny Manecksha, Henri Lefebvre and Arnold Van Gennep.

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Space that we inhabit perhaps becomes a decisive element in our very existence thereby turning it larger than what meets the eyes. Gaston Bachelard in his *The Poetics of Space* studies intimate spaces like home, wardrobes, chests and closets surfacing the aesthetic realm of space as it gets entangled in the emotional lives of its inhabitants. Philosophers like Michel Foucault and Homi K Bhaba who are mostly known for their historically oriented thoughts, have often revealed their spatial orientation in their concepts like 'heterotopia', 'panopticon and 'third space'. In fact Foucault regarded the beginning of the twentieth century as the era of what he called 'spatial turn' (3) in human thought. Edward Soja in his *Postmodern Geographies* criticises the critical social theory which failed to critique historicism which resulted in the negation of spatiality(3). Soja under the influence of Henri Lefebvre developed the concept of spatial triad in which his notion of third space seems to be crucial as it can be studied in relation with the concepts like Foucault's notion of heterotopias, Lefebvre's notion of lived space and third space of Soja as all these concepts include the space in-between the physical and mental or symbolic spaces. While Lefebvre and Soja studied space in the context of cities, Bhaba did from a postcolonial perspective and Foucault in the larger context of power and its spatial arrangements. The present paper is an attempt to study how the spatiality of Kashmir has played a crucial role in the lives of its inhabitants with reference to the text by Freny Manecksha titled, *Behold I Shine, Narratives of Kashmir's Women and Children*. The text is analysed through a spatial lens with the help of the spatial concepts developed by such theorists like Lefebvre and Gennep.

Manecksha before she begins her narration of the story of Kashmir from the perspectives of women and



children, she regards it rudimentary to make her readers aware of the history of Kashmir which she briefly presents in the preface. History testifies the fact that Dogras who ruled Kashmir for almost a century were not hereditary rulers of Kashmir but on the contrary, Kashmir along with Jammu and Ladakh were bestowed upon them by the British as part of the treaty of Amritsar in 1846. Hence a section of Kashmiri population, precisely, the Kashmiri Muslims, were resentful towards the Dogra rule because of its anti Muslim policies. It was during the Indian freedom struggle that Kashmiri people led by Sheikh Abdullah demanded for the sovereign power of Kashmir but was never granted to them even after India won independence. Though the conflicts of interests between the people of Kashmir and the Indian government continued, the direct confrontation began with the failure of the 1987 general election of Kashmir. When the people of Kashmir realized that candidates whom they believed would truly represent their interests would not be allowed to win and a few of them got arrested when the counting was going on, they lost faith in the election and their hope for a self reliant Kashmir was lost. Hence many disillusioned youths started crossing the borders to become militants by getting training from the Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The resultant insurgencies led to the Indian army camping in Kashmir which culminated in the army occupation of Kashmir by 1990s which resulted in drastic transformation in the public as well as in private or domestic spaces.

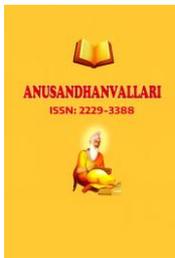
The intrusion of the army into the everyday lives of the Kashmiri people is presented at the very beginning of the text when she recounts her experience of meeting soldiers at every nook and corner of the village much to the discomfort of the women there. The presence of the soldiers within the social space where the everyday lives are enacted turns this space of intimacy to a non- place, a term developed by Mac Auge. “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.” (77-78). The episode with which Maneeksha begins her narrative of Kashmir’s Women and Children, thus, sets the tone for the entire text, precisely, how the lived space in various public and social spaces within Kashmir got deteriorated to non- places where strangers in uniforms roam around. The sense of space undergoes drastic change in this context of military occupation as is found when Maneeksha recounts the words of a woman who expresses her concern in the change in the landscape:

A woman, whom I had met in my early days in the Valley, told me with regret, ‘These symbols of occupation are now so entrenched in our psyche that we unconsciously use them as markers for directions. If I have to guide a stranger, I no longer refer to tree lined avenues or ancient houses as signposts. I say, turn left at the CRPF camp, go towards the checkpoint, and turn right near the bunker. (33)

As Henri Lefebvre has envisaged in his work *The Production of Space*, ‘Lived Space’ refers to subjective and collectively experienced space of an individual or community “shaped by personal emotions and images”. (40). Lefebvre explained the concept of lived space as part of his concept of ‘spatial triad’ in which the first and second are conceived and perceived spaces. The third space namely representational space where the physical space attains symbolic significance as it represents human emotions and experience. His concept of how human interactions play a vital role in the spatial arrangements and space as not something that is there as a stagnant entity but on the contrary it is produced through human actions, are reinforced in his theory of spatial triad. In Kashmir with the military occupation it is this sense of lived space or the space as represented in the everyday lives of the Kashmiri people associated with their experiences and emotions gets nullified and a transformation in their sense of space leads to the emergence of an altogether different understanding space in the context of the military occupation.

When one looks into the lived space of the people of Kashmir, it is an idyllic picture from the past or more precisely the period before the military occupation that emerges into view as evident in the narratives which Maneeksha gather in her book.

It was senior psychiatrist, Dr Arshad Hussain at the mental health hospital in Rainawari who first spoke of the loss of traditional spaces. He explained how the very area around us was once a large badamwari— stretching



across a thousand 'kanals'. It was a space where families would flock after the end of a harsh winter: or where they would have picnics with, white sheets spread out to hold nun-chai; 4 or where jugglers and magicians and vendors selling water chestnuts would gather. Today, this erstwhile badamwari has given way to concrete colonies. Others have been taken over by the army. (32)

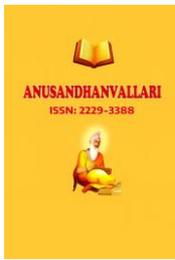
With the coming in of the army in large numbers and camping in every street and village in Kashmir, such idyllic traditional spaces which marked the lived space of the Kashmiri people drastically turned into army camps and interrogation centres where Kashmiri youths who were suspected as militants were taken forcibly and many of them never returned home from those centres."This is the agony of Kashmir. A land where so many deaths will remain unknown, unknowable "(BIS 50). Such spatial transformations affected the social life of the people as even the communication with the neighbors were under surveillance because of the military gaze around. They had to end socializing in the public space in order to escape the threatening presence of the soldiers. Instead a new form of window communication developed as Manecksha gathers from her women narrators which would enable them to talk with their neighbors without risking their lives in the open space.

Hence the military occupation led to a transformation in the personal and social lives of the people of Kashmir and this transformed condition may be related to the stage of 'threshold' that Gennep terms as 'liminality' in his work, *Rites of Passage*. As an anthropologist, Gennep looks at the transformational stages in the lives of people both at individual as well as collective level. He calls the second stage during a transformative period in an individual's or community's existence as 'liminality' as this stage is marked by the confusion between and transition from one stage to another. While the first stage marks peace and continuity of practices of the past, the third or final results in the development of a new identity or culture. It is the second stage or liminal period that is marked by uncertainty of existence. This concept about crisis in an individual or community's existence seems to be a significant lens to analyze the predicament of the people of Kashmir after the military occupation which transformed their identity and led their existence into a threshold between life and death.

With the army occupation, large number of Kashmiri young men who were suspected as militants were arrested and sent to interrogation centres established at various places in Kashmir. The absence of men in the families led to another revolutionary rearrangement of the gender roles in the public and domestic spaces. Women who were never used to go to even markets and other public spaces like butcher shops which were conventionally regarded as men's area, with the men disappearing from the families, they were forcibly brought into such hitherto men's area. This transformation in the mobility of women marks a transition or liminality in their ways of life which Manecksha regards as 'double edged'(49). When women got an entry to various public spaces, this very mobility was taken advantage of by authorities who turned those woman who approached them to know about their missing husband or sons were turned into informers thereby leaving their lives at risk as their lives will be under militants' threat as those women are supposed to inform about the militants to the army.(49).

Many people who were taken to the interrogation centres never returned home. They were either reported as missing or got killed in encounters. Deaths became so common in encounters many of which later found to be fake encounters. People in Kashmir are more alive after their death and while alive they live a life of death. Those who are dead in such encounters or in direct attacks were regarded as shahids or martyrs as the people of Kashmir regarded those struggles as paths to 'azadi' or freedom. In the early 1990s women were in the forefront of the struggles of freedom and they went into streets in protest when a death occurred.

Traditionally, battlefield martyrs are viewed as shahid and pure, and during burial rites their bodies do not need to undergo the ritual of a purifying bath; they are laid to rest in bloodstained clothes as a sign of their martyrdom. But in the context of the Kashmir struggle, shahid comes with another connotation; civilians and even children who get killed in the course of the struggle are viewed as martyrs, even though they may not have been fighters, because they have borne 'witness to a start of violence or the dissolution of a state of justice [...] It is the dead body itself that testifies to the state of improper order by which such a death occurred.



(BIS 48)

The funerals are conducted as a procession when the whole community will move into the streets and it is death that turns one more alive as a martyr inspiring the living to continue in their struggle for justice. This situation creates a liminal space where the dead and the living move beyond their boundaries to reach out to each other. Manecksha narrates the experience of a woman who was proud to be the mother of a martyr who got killed while he fought as a militant for 'azadi'. This was not an exceptional case but Manecksha observes that it was the attitude of many women in the early 1990s in Kashmir at a time when they still hoped for self reliance and freedom. Hence deaths were commemorated with mass funerals in public places which brought the whole community together and instilled in them the responsibility to carry forward the cause for which those young men turned martyrs.

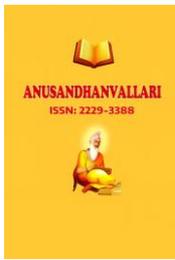
Funerals are considered private affairs, but in the case of martyrs, they become public and political—so much so that the procession of the JKLF militant commander Ashfaq Majeed is still remembered as one of the largest gatherings. More recently, an estimated two lakh attended Burhan Wani's funeral, and funeral prayers were said at least fifteen times. Women play a prominent role at such funerals, chanting and composing special songs of praise (wahnawan) and recalling the sacrifices of their 'shahids', while scattering almonds and rose petals on the body. Over the years, there have been some voices of dissent, questioning whether such sacrifice has yielded anything at all. The cynicism is countered with the argument that justice takes precedence over all things; that the fight against zulm is an end in itself, irrespective of whether the gains are tangible. (BIS 48)

Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Nights* too presents the social and cultural situations which were prevalent in Kashmir in the 1990s. When the election of 1987 failed to convince the people of Kashmir in establishing a democratic government based on justice, many youngsters started to cross the borders to reach the Pakistan occupied Kashmir and got training in militancy. This paved the way for army occupation in Kashmir which led to interrogations, search for the militants inside the houses and arrests even in the midnights. Notions like privacy, security and intimate moments associated with home got sudden transformation into insecurity, violence and shelter for militants which turned the space of home into an unusual combinations of the social and the private spaces coming together in a space of transition or uncertainty. Peer presents the dichotomy between the period before the insurgencies and the period after. Kashmir before the 1990s in Peer's words was rich with the cultural nuance as evident in his description of his own childhood marked with the presence of traditional ways amidst the natural settings which were typically Kashmiri. "Spring was the season of green mountains and meadows, blushing snow and an expanse of yellow mustard flowers in the fields around our village." (10). But this idyllic settings reflecting the peaceful mindsets of the inhabitants too gave way to violent shift in the post 1990s both in the landscape and the mindsets of the people thereby leading to loss of lived space leaving the people in a state of transition between the past and the present.

Yasan Malik, who led the militants of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, had been one of those arrested and tortured by polling agents, The bottled up resentment against Indian rule and the treatment of Kashmiris erupted like a volcano. The young guerrillas challenging India were seen as heroes-most of them had received training between early 1988 and late 1989...In the next two months, the Indian government responded ruthlessly. Hundred were killed and arrested after Indian troops opened fire on pro independence Kashmiri protesters. It was January 1990.

(Peer 14)

Both Manecksha and Peer have presented Kashmir before the insurgencies as rich with traditional life where lived space staged the harmonious existence of the Kashmiri people in communion with nature and its flora and fauna. Manecksha revealed it through the words of the women of Kashmir while Peer through his own life. Though the narrative agents differ, both have surfaced the transformation of Kashmir during the insurgencies depicting the changes as spatial too. Manecksha observes that the military occupation has affected the ecology too. "...it



marshals evidence to prove that the catastrophic floods of September 2014 were not ‘natural’ but a product of militarized governance in highly environmentally sensitive zones. It seems, nature too is in revolt.” (39)

As Manecksha progresses with the retellings of the experiences of women of Kashmir, the bleak and bizarre picture of the military occupation of Kashmir is unraveled before the readers. Brutality and violence of human rights seem to be rampant in the name of encounters which are later proven to be fake, under the pretext of search for the militants hiding, houses are razed, women are raped and many other forms of violence are unleashed. The intrusion of soldiers into the private and intimate space like homes is loathed by women who hate to get the particulars of their private and intimate lives exposed in front of the strangers like the soldiers. The sanctity of home is lost when the warmth of intimate space is destroyed by the cold indifference of raids done by armed forces even in the middle of the night.

Shazia has written powerfully about this invasion of privacy when troops ransacked private spaces so that ‘cupboards and chests would lie open like fresh wounds, bleeding secrets of the family.’ Her aunt, used to cringe when troops would deliberately scatter ‘intimate objects’ like sanitary pads, tweezers and cosmetics. Once a village elder was called by the soldiers to read aloud the stashed-away love letters of a young girl. (BIS 52)

The disappearance of young men as a result of them being forcefully taken away to interrogation camps notorious for torture, have resulted in the emergence of a peculiar identity for women called half widows. They were the wives of those men who were missing from the interrogation camps. Since their deaths were not confirmed, these women were not considered as widows.

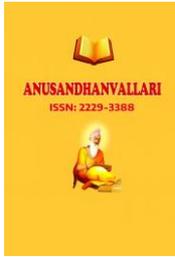
Their identity and existence hence were in a limbo between life and death. Manecksha visited many such women who had to survive the rest of their lives as half widows and found them living an insecure and vulnerable life struggling to bring up their children.

The loss of lived space is further reinforced with the narratives of those who had to endure a claustrophobic childhood in the past 1990s. Most of the children were denied the lush village green or the outdoor gardens where their parents spent their childhood. The military occupation had transformed the very landscape of Kashmir with the presence of barricades, electric wires, mines and other hazards because of which the children in the insurgent period had to remain indoors. This affected their psyche and their world views too. Manecksha refers to a cartoonist who illustrated this predicament faced by the children in a picture which she describes in her narration. The transition from the pre-1990s to post-1990s was a painful process as evident in the case of the children who had to endure the consequences of having spent a childhood filled with threat and precarity.

Malik Sajad, a promising cartoonist, depicts this in one of his early drawings—a house door, slightly ajar, and the hand of young boy stretching out into the world, reaching for a cricket ball nestled between the boots of a soldier. Elsewhere, he depicts a band of brothers playing indoor cricket, and calculating runs by flipping the pages of a book. (BIS 64)

Manecksha has included the narratives of women from Gujjar, a village in southern Kashmir where semi-nomadic pastoral communities live. It is a remote area from the centres of the cities and the people there are most vulnerable of the lot as it is evident in the narrative by a Gujjar woman named Pakeeza who was raped and was subject to various forms of inhuman treatments. They are vulnerable lot among Kashmiris as they are regarded as loyal to India and hence are suspected by other Kashmiri people as informants. As Manecksha testifies to the fact that they are much afflicted rather than benefited from the military occupation as they were denied access to the high meadows because of the occupation.

The narratives of Kashmir’s women and children conclude by referring to some attempts towards resistance to such injustice meted out to Kashmiri people. Organizations like APDP (Association of Parents of Disappeared persons) AFKP (Association of Families of Kashmiri Prisoners) are a few ones about which Manecksha elaborates towards the end of the narrative. These organizations are led by people who are victims of the atrocities. Mothers and wives of the missing people have joined hands to form these organizations and they have proven a solace to



many who are struggling to get any information regarding their loved ones who went missing. Another form of resistance to the liminal existence may be seen in the practice of visiting the shrines of saints which provides special room for women to pray and to rest.

Manecksha recounts towards the end of her narrative, her experience of visiting a shrine along with her friend, Mahum. She presents what Mahum thinks about shrines. “Shrines are radical spaces where women can experience spirituality, chat with a friend or even have something to eat afterwards,’ she explained.” (BIS 110).

The shrines of Saints or Durgas may be regarded as the abodes of peace for many women who find this space as one where they can be of their own. It is a space outside the claustrophobic atmosphere of their homes which have lost its privacy and intimacy as homes may be intruded by an army personnel at any time. These shrines may be regarded as the new forms of lived space which got evolved in times of crisis of liminality and transition.

“What makes shrines more accommodating spaces for women as compared to the predominantly male-dominated mosques? Is it because shrines are rooted in Sufi mysticism which, by its very nature, puts emphasis on private and personal experiences, rather than literary and institutional certification?”(BIS 111)

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