

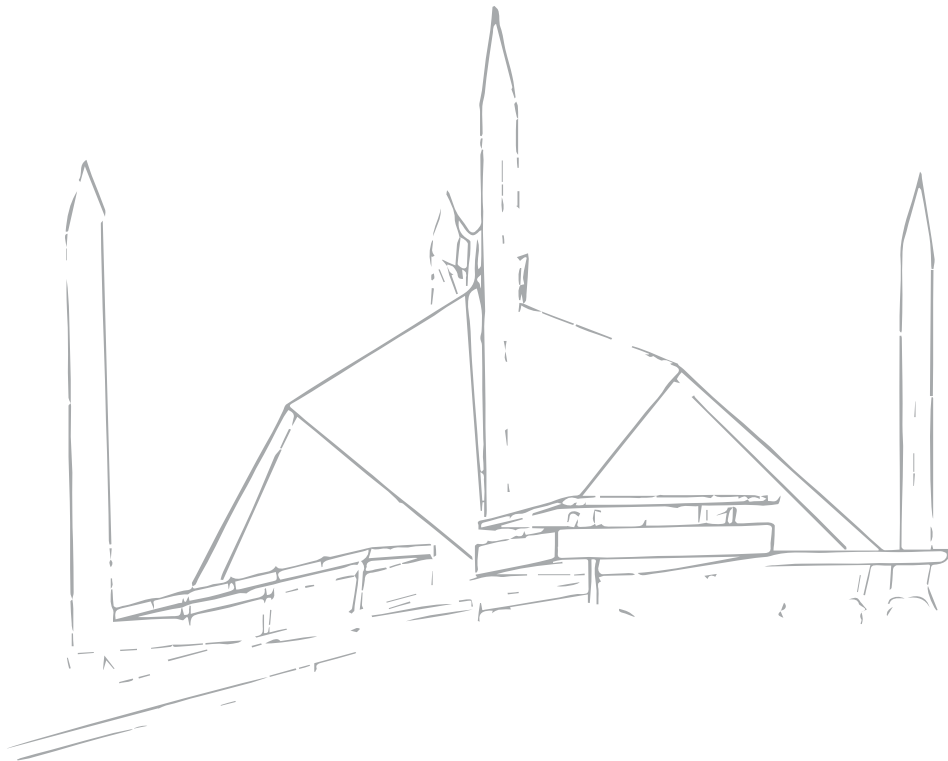


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Book Review

Shifa Haq. *In Search of Return: Mourning the Disappearances in Kashmir.* London, Lexington Books, 2021. ISBN: 9781498582483.

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The phenomenon of enforced disappearances emerged in Kashmir after 1989, after the outbreak of armed conflict. Armed Rebels, their sympathizers, political activists and large number of innocent persons have become the victims of ED. Multiple problems are faced by the victims of ED, they suffer from physiological and psychological disorders, from constant agony, trans-generational trauma to post traumatic stress disorders. The disappearances have economical dimensions too for example with the case of half widows as they get deserted from their in-laws along with their children. They become burden on their parents and this economic dependence affects the future of their children. The grief of victim's family, how they choose to mourn over it. The historical context of disappearances in Kashmir perspective, different cases of disappearances and how their memories are preserved through art. All these aspects have been discussed in this book in five chapters.

Chapter 1 deals with the manner of mourning in psychoanalysis, what a successful mourning is and what is its failure and the role of language in understanding the complexity of mourning. The author talks about how dreams can occur after going through a trauma and what they may mean. According to the author, the knowledge of loss remains a difficult object to repress for a mourner hence we sometimes see the objects in a dream which is a method of opening doors to memories. In some, grief may take melancholic roots, in some others, a profound mourning, likes of which may or may not be healed by time. In mourning, the world without the object is left empty, in melancholia, the ego itself is made empty. The mourner enters a relationship of anxiety, loss and control with these objects, the new object world protected and guarded throughout one's life. The author discusses what a successful mourning is. That is when we relive our memories and ties with the lost object in order to

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decathlete from the object that exists no longer. It is suggested that the dead be put to death again. The pain of loss can be turned round upon the subject's own self, showing how the need to punish turns into self-torture and self-punishment. The survivor may not remember anything of the traumatic event or the disturbing effect but may act out the disturbed inner state in displaced situations. Author says that massive trauma overwhelms the ego's capacity to bear the excitations caused by the painful event. As the trauma seeps into community life or its social fabric, waves of shock are felt by members.

In Chapter 2 the historical context of disappearance has been discussed along with its effects on the body politic with special reference to Kashmir. Author emphasize on how disappearances in Kashmir were part of the larger policy of repression used by the Indian state including other means such as extra-judicial killings, custodial torture, rape, forced labour. In June 2003, the Jammu and Kashmir Government announced that 3,931 persons had disappeared since 1990, however the figure given by APDP was of more than 8,000. Author criticizes the impunity acts like AFSPA which gives the armed forces power to arrest any person without a warrant under a cognizable offence or a suspicion. The enforcement of the AFSPA has unleashed horrific human rights violations and it contradicts with the constitution of India itself. Torture was relegated to new locations, such as prisons and detention camps, where punishments are carried outside public witnessing and the body as the major target of penal subjugation is disappeared. In disappearance, the body once snatched from communal life is isolated from history without its claims on life and death.

Chapter 3 focuses on the voices of mourners in the context of disappearance in Kashmir. The stories of the slow ingestion of loss through mourning privately and publically. The author put light of on the harsh reality that the effects of militarization in Kashmir have been mostly borne by women and children. She talks about the struggle of Parveena Ahangar, whose 16 year old son got missing in 1990. Parveena Ahangar and other families of the disappeared came together to form the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP). APDP has become a collective expression of mourning and appeal for reparative justice. In Kashmir militarization makes itself legible as a state of terror. This chapter is a passage into the inner world of mourners left by the

trauma of disappearance and their path between memories and haunt for the truth. The traumatization of the community at large, affects immediate members and bystanders. Through public mourning, the mothers of the disappeared give form to the pain of disappearance by rendering it immediate and alive to the children who never saw their fathers, members of the families who do not weep, and the members of the Kashmiri community who did not witness disappearance but can imaginatively connect to the pain of the mourners. The writer narrates the story of Rasool Ahmed whose 13 year old son got disappeared in 1993. The dehumanization caused by and deceit in the official denial of the traumatic event that he experienced through the judicial process. The writer also talks about the story of Sameena and her daughter Amna who went through a trauma of her father's disappearance. According to Sameena meaning of disappearance as loss is to first lose one's mind, to tip over the edge of cohesion or sanity. Another story the writer describes is of Aasa's whose son Ajeet got disappeared in 1999. As a Kashmiri Sikh woman she would blame the Muslim Kashmiri's for her son's disappearance. Aasa had accepted her son's disappearance as her destiny believing what has happened has happened and that she would sit there silently.

Chapter 4 imitates on the evolving meaning of disappearance in Kashmiri perception. The chapter focuses on the work of artists and poet-writers as they describe disappearance through their imagination and address the dilemma of disappearance in the cultural fabric of Kashmir. The author talks about Nilima Sheikh's work, 'Each Night Put Kashmir in your Dreams', her empathic inwardness to dream the aspects of traumatic moments in Kashmiri history. Through the use of photographs, souvenirs and art, people listen to and produce private variations in mourning stories to preserve and attribute meaning to the individual struggles and collective survival. The Survivor art attempts to give artists and the community a chance to imagine the events in an aesthetic cultural history as well as moral imagination. The focus of survivor art revolves around bodily damage, the breakdown of cities and structures, philosophical perils and the insufficiency of traditional symbols. Such an impulse is illustrated in the works of Kashmiri artists and poets as they bear witness to collective trauma. Masood Hussain, a Kashmiri artist, expresses the encounters in artistic expression as a graphic designer and works in advertising and watercolor

paintings. Some of his famous works have been discussed like 'Those Who Disappeared' (2004) and 'Look behind the Canvas' (2011). Along with paintings poems invoke a close proximity with the actual event. In the context of disappearances in Kashmir, the Kashmiri poet, Naseem Shafaie, demonstrates the witnessing most notably in two collections of poems, *Open Windows* (1999) and *Neither Shadow nor Reflection* (2017) from which the trauma of disappearances can be imagined. In the emerging cinematic representation the demonstration of trauma's can be seen in films such as *Hamid* directed by Aijaz Khan (2018), *No Fathers in Kashmir* directed by Ashvin Kumar (2019) and *The Dear Disappeared* (2018) by the Kashmiri documentary film maker Iffat Fatima.

Chapter 5 traces the emerging meaning of mourning, its shape and outlines, to offer a possible reworking of existing perspectives. The chapter seeks to reclaim what mourning does to politics and how can psychoanalysis contribute to imagining collective suffering. Through their mourning, mourners of the disappeared in Kashmir give us an idea about their sufferings that we may learn to recover the disappeared as a percolating shape in the individual and the collective memory. In ambiguous loss such as a disappearance, the work of mourning involves the search for the lost object inside as well as the search for the one lost in the outside. Mourning in the case of disappearances is a response to the context of militarization, the mourners are also victims of massive trauma and state repression. The traumatic loss due to disappearance and the widespread exposure to violence have a deep impact on the survivors. Mourning in Kashmir implied 'tackling violence, terror and death through methods of somatic, sensory, affective, semiotic, symbolic, phenomenological, linguistic, performative and social historical constructions. In Kashmir the mourners' grief is a counter-resistance to the wounds afflicted on the ones dominated and forced to purge memory or to commit to forgetting. The mourners who take on the complex work of waiting for the return of the disappeared turn forgetting into a taboo, the mourners reclaim their attachment with the missing as a form of political protest. While state repression makes the body a hostage, it is one's ties with 'the missing' that cannot be erased. The mothers and wives, fathers and children, by incorporating the lost object, prevent the decay of the lives of the missing individual by preserving them in the inner crypts of their personal and collective memory. At the community level too, the

memory of the disappeared, is kept alive through fantasies, fears and concern about the past and the future. Like martyrs who sacrificed for the community, the disappeared persons and their family are imagined as permanently imperiled. The practice of disappearances in Kashmir will have continuing impact on the generations to come.

This book is rich in content. The title reflects the whole idea of the book. It scrutinizes how societal remembrances and mourning is voiced. Authors referencing to poems and paintings linked to disappearances illustrate that there are creative ways of remembering losses and horrors which makes the book even more interesting to read. The author managed to refer different psychoanalysts with their thoughts and theories about the subject and it is hoped that the readers will gain knowledge about the long-lasting effects of disappearances and other traumas in Kashmir, which will go along with the generations to come.
