

EXPLORING PSYCHIC AND BODILY TRAUMA IN KASHMIRI ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE: AN ANALYSIS OF SIDDHARTHA GIGOO'S *THE GARDEN OF SOLITUDE* AND NAYEEMA MAHJOOR'S *LOST IN TERROR*

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ABSTRACT

Cursed by the long years of armed militancy and the counter insurgency measures taken to ensure India's national security, Kashmir has almost turned to a dystopian land. Writers have responded to this aspect of the history of this region by producing works that record and commemorate particular events and experiences which changed the lives of people altogether. Of particular significance in these works is the documentation of the impact of the violence on the everyday lives of people, many of whom though unaware of or unrelated to the main issues being debated, are affected beyond measure by the turn of the events. Invoking the memories of the turbulent period of history which damaged their lives irreparably, the writers from Kashmir have created of a significant corpus of literature that represents the damages done to the body and psyche of the people living there. This paper endeavours to foreground the exploration of trauma in Kashmiri Anglophone literature through a reading of Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* (2011) and Nayeema Mahjoor's *Lost in Terror* (2016). It seeks to see how literature performs the task of portraying the unspeakable and unrepresentable to the readers by blending history, fiction and memory together.

Keywords: Kashmir, Insurgency, Trauma, Memory

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature holds a mirror to human life encompassing every aspect of it. It reflects the socio-political, psychological, philosophical realities of life which may not have been addressed or paid heed to so far. It is a tool that negotiates with the raw human experiences at a micro and intangible level. It is believed that literature can act or perform the role of representing the unrepresented and unspeakable to the readers. Reading literature thus enables us to know the nuances of the realities of a society and the experiences of the people living in it. Different theorists have commented on recording and bearing witness to apparently 'unrepresentable' events in literature. The phenomenon of the trauma of long drawn insurgency, forced migration, displacement is such a phenomenon sought to be studied here in brief against a backdrop of the tumultuous socio-political history of Kashmir through its representation in selected novels by Kashmiri writers.

This brief study covers two novels by two Kashmiri writers namely *The Garden of Solitude* (2011) by Siddhartha Gigoo and *Lost in Terror* (2016) by Nayeema Mahjoor.

The dispute between the two neighbouring countries India and Pakistan over the territory of Kashmir is a long drawn one. Kashmir has experienced considerable unrest and turmoil ever since India achieved independence, and especially since the militant demonstrations of anti-Indian sentiment and Kashmiri freedom movement of 1989. Kashmir and Hyderabad were two major princely states among many others who wanted to remain independent after India achieved independence in 1947. Kashmir was then under the rule of a Hindu ruler Maharaja Hari Singh. It became a part of India in 1948 when it was attacked by Pakistan and the then ruler Maharaja Hari Singh had to ask for India's help. India extended help but only after Hari Singh agreed to sign the instrument of accession and become a part of India. However, it remained a disputed territory as both India and Pakistan claim their rights over it and since the later part of 1980s armed rebellion against Indian nation state and exodus of the Hindu Kashmiris led to massive militarization of the region. Amidst this tumultuous socio-political scenario it was the common people who had to face irreparable loss and trauma and its presence is prominent in the works created by the writers belonging to the region. As Anne Whitehead remarks, "The desire among various cultural groups to represent or make visible specific historical instances of trauma has given rise to numerous important works of contemporary fiction" (Whitehead 2004). Kashmiri Anglophone literature written in the aftermath of armed conflict in Kashmir valley has also evolved as a significant corpus. There are mainly two strands to be seen while looking at the emerging Anglophone literature from Kashmir, specifically the fictional ones, one strand depicting the plight of the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community and the other dealing with the agony and suffering faced by the Kashmiri Muslims. Both the communities suffered immensely due to militancy and separatist ideology. Given the turbulent socio-political history of the region this body of literature serves as a medium to articulate personal and collective experiences.

The novels depicting the horrific experience of violence in Kashmir create a language of trauma that explains not only an individual writer's or a single character's experience but also a collective lamentation over the loss of several years of life. Consequently, the characters in the novels are depicted as traumatized and depressed as their lives turn upside down in a shocking manner. 'Trauma', originally derived from the Ancient Greek word for 'wound' that refers to a physical injury later came to signify "a wound inflicted not upon the body, but upon the mind" by devastating, painful events. The study of trauma or traumatic experience is guided by the psychological concepts foregrounded by Sigmund Freud. Written with Josef Breuer, Freud's initial theories in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) focused on trauma and repression which later became the conceptual framework for literary trauma critics. In this work, Freud stressed that it is repetitive behaviours or processes of remembering that force the mind to experience psychological pain or confront the incident. In Freudian terms, "trauma," is a wound inflicted upon the mind that leaves a permanent impression on the lives of the traumatized individuals (Caruth 1996). Cathy Caruth, another leading figure of trauma theory, defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of a sudden or catastrophic event in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 1996) in her influential work on trauma titled *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). This implies that the event which causes trauma does not affect the individual immediately. Instead, the effects are manifested later after the horrifying incident is long over. Thus, the response to trauma is often delayed and manifested through incidents like the survivor's repetitive hallucinations and nightmares. Roger Luckhurst in "Mixing Memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Psychology and Trauma Theory" describes trauma as "Something that enters the psyche that is so unprecedented or overwhelming that it cannot be processed or assimilated by usual mental processes. We have, as it were nowhere to put it, and so it falls out of our conscious memory, yet is still present in our mind like an intruder or a ghost" (Luckhurst 2006). Kai T. Erikson defines trauma in his study, "Notes on Trauma and Community" as "a blow to the tissues of the body—or more frequently now, to the tissues of the mind—that results in injury or some other disturbance. Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind has set up as a line of defense (Erikson 1995). He also defines collective trauma as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality." (Erikson 1995) Trauma as a theory combines various fields of study including medicine, psychology and literature. When it comes to the representation of trauma in literature there are different views, some advocating the efficacy of literature to represent trauma and some having the view that trauma cannot be represented in totality. However, the evolving genre of "trauma fiction" tries to bridge the differences of views regarding the representation of trauma. Anne Whitehead argues that there is a mutual relationship between fiction and trauma and "each speaks to and address the other." (Whitehead 2004) Ann Kaplan in *Trauma Culture* (2005) opines that

when trauma victims express the stories of traumatic events it may result in their 'working through' and also that appeal our sympathy for the victims.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of Kashmiri Anglophone literature is rooted on the region's history of political unrest and violence. Basharat Peer's memoir *Curfewed Night* (2008) offers a poignant account of growing up in conflict-ridden Kashmir. His narrative sheds light on the Kashmiri perspective, challenging dominant narratives and highlighting the human cost of conflict on individual lives. Another significant contributions to this discourse are Mirza Waheed's novel *The Collaborator* (2011) and *The Book Of Gold Leaves* (2014) which explore the psychological trauma and moral dilemmas. *Shadows Beyond the Ghost Town* (2014) written by Shafi Ahmed is a book where he talks about the life of a boy who returned from across the border. This is a story of betrayal and exploitation. *Half Mother* (2014) by Shahnaaz Bashir is a journey of Kashmiri mother named Haleena who is a half mother because her son disappeared and her troubles and the pitiable condition is delineated in this book very brilliantly. Farah Bashir's *Rumours of Spring* (2021) records her experience as a woman placed amid tumultuous Kashmir that often challenge her existence within the complexities of multi-layered dominations. Furthermore, Rahul Pandita's memoir *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* (2013) portrays how the community of the Kashmiri Pandits had been terrorized and victimized during the uprisings. Some nonfiction works like *A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exile and Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits* (2015), an edited by book Siddharth Gigoo and Varad Sharma is a collection of several articles by some learned activists. This book basically talks about exile or exodus of Kashmiri Pandits and the loss of their homeland. *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir* (2011) is an edited book by Sanjay Kak. This again is a collection of several articles which cover the helplessness and pain of Kashmiri people caught in the crossfire. Another anthology *From Home to House: Writings of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile* (2015) comprising of short stories, essays and writings edited by Arvind Gigoo, Shaleen Singh and Adarsh Ajit vividly brings out the Kashmiri Pandits' nostalgia for Kashmir, their sense of betrayal, their attempts to pick up the pieces and carve a new life for themselves.

3. EXPLORING TRAUMA AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS

Meenakshi Bharat in her book *Troubled Testimonies* (2016) opines that "...through art, we come to the inherent paradox of our times: these mean times are yet historical in a pointed sense, demanding witness however distressing the process may be. Writing about terror and riots, and giving them creative shape...has become an integral part of historiography." (Bharat 2016) Novelists dexterously portray how the onslaught of terror has ravaged the health and psyche of people. The "troubled testimonies" present a late recount of not only how the lives of people changed because of the horrendous political turmoil but also how it created an everlasting impact on their lives. These narratives deal with a kind of "double telling" where the story "oscillates between a 'crisis of death' and the correlative 'crisis of life': between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth 1996). Siddhartha Gigoo's novel, *The Garden of Solitude*, published in 2011 realistically depicts the historical episode of the forced mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in the terrible years of the late 1990s. Through the protagonist Sridar, who is Gigoo's own reflection, the writer invokes his troubled memory of exile to depict the painful event of migration that rendered them homeless, impoverished and psychologically and physically vulnerable. Sridar represents every Kashmiri Pandit who suffered and survived amidst the dreadful atmosphere of fear, insecurity, communal divide and hatred. Gigoo narrates the psychologically disturbing nature of the mass protests, communal hatred, and religious bigotry that started with the onset of militancy in Kashmir. It was inexpressibly traumatic for the Pandits who were economically developed and socially respected community in Kashmir to feel insecure, vulnerable and helpless in their own land. Panicked and apprehensive, "Pandits kept the windows of their houses permanently shut. They were scared to venture out on the roads. The Pandit women stopped putting tilaks on their foreheads to mask their identity...They abandoned their traditional greeting, Namaskar" (Gigoo 2011). The meaning of homeland changed for the Muslim community too. The heavy presence of military, frequent crackdowns, search operations and curfew made them feel like living in a place which does not belong to them. The narrator of the novel *Lost in Terror* (2016) which is set against the same background, reflects, "And the presence of unknown faces at every turn made us think again: *Is this the same place we have been living in?*" (Mahjoor 2016) Gigoo expresses the shock his community received when they were asked to leave their own homes empty handed. Uprooted and reduced to the status of Internally Displaced Persons, the Pandits were, "speechless as though they had lost voices". (Gigoo 2011). Gigoo beautifully points to what psychologically occupies the mind of every

Pandit after migration: "The past was too beautiful to be left behind. The past evoked a longing to be re-lived. The past aspired to race past the present and the future. The present was just a crippled memory, a child's play, a bubble." (Gigoo 2011).

The mental instability and trauma caused by the turbulent socio-political situation disturbed the relationships people shared with each other. Lasa in his letter to Sridar writes that he experiences a strange physical detachment among the members of almost every family: "I met husbands who had lost the love for their wives, and wives who no longer felt the need to hold their husband's hands. Some couples have not shared an intimate moment ever since they left their homes. Living in the tents has turned them into cold humans. They have forgotten to love, to caress, and to touch. They no longer feel the warmth. They don't wake up to the warm embraces. They live lives devoid of passion, of desire, of craving. They go to bed tired, and wake up exhausted." (Gigoo 2011) Similarly, the marital life of the narrator of the other novel *Lost in Terror* changes colour as the land goes through violence and terror. The narrator describes how the volatile situation made people cruel and arrogant. Asad, the husband of the narrator is described as "Asad did not become gunman. But he was close...consequently, he jeopardized his own relationships, home and future." (Mahjoor 2016)

Caught in the maelstrom of death and destruction not a single family could live in peace and escape misery. Sridar's grandfather Mahanandju redeems himself of the harsh reality by living in his happy past memories among the weeping willows, dancing saffron buds, the lush green rice fields and the singing hoopoes. Physically displaced, Mahanandju's heart yearned for home, as he says, "I am a man without a reflection. . . Each day brought new problems and difficulties. The calendar on the wall lost its meaning. The dates seemed meaningless. It was difficult for Mahanandju to tell the past from the present. He longed to live life backwards. With each passing day and night, he grew fond of his loneliness." (Gigoo 2011). In much the same way, the killing of Shaista, a young girl by the militants disturbed the narrator of the other novel in a way that she could not wipe away her memories no matter what she did, her mental condition is described as "I was frightened. The storm within me was robbing me of my sleep and peace of mind." The inability to speak about trauma and the resultant silence was exhibited in many characters of both the novels. Shaista's mother went numb after she witnessed her daughter's mutilated body "she seemed to have lost her words, her appetite and herself." (Mahjoor 2016) The narrator's sister in law who was otherwise a happy girl went silent after a surrendered militant started forcing her for marriage. The situation became so precarious and strange that people started celebrating other people's death, the whole family felt a sense of relief when the surrendered militant was killed, "The Ikhwani death had been dreadful, but more dreadful was the fact that my family was celebrating his death by drinking Kehwa. I could never have imagined that Kashmir would turn into such a dreadful place." (Mahjoor 2016) The inability to speak of trauma and the resultant silence was exhibited in many people. While some of them showed belated reaction, some withdrew themselves into silence about the situation. Every person had to fight their battle with pain and trauma while many lost themselves in the process. Fareeda, the daughter of Maulavi sahib went insane after witnessing her husband being dragged and killed in front of her own eyes. The Auntyji, a woman full of life and laughter turned into a wreck and finally died after she lost her only son at the hands of the military, "she had confined herself to her house. Neither was she an entertainer nor an agony aunt any more...pain and agony had become her domain and she let nobody share it." (Mahjoor 2016) The narrator's sister Sadia loses her mind longing for her disappeared son. Although she always tried to remain hopeful "from the last three years, she had hardly slept. She would wake up in the middle of the night, crying and screaming. Almost every night, she had terrifying nightmares. Hassan took her to a psychiatrist for treatment. The drugs had little impact on her mind. Her situation became worse and the psychiatrist left her on her own." (Mahjoor 2016)

The effect of trauma was not just psychological; it made people vulnerable to various health issues and broke them both mentally and physically. Gigoo narrates how unable to reason with their realities, the elder generation lost themselves to despair, dementia and other psychological disorders while becoming frail and weak. Sridar's grandfather Mahanandju is seen engulfed by idleness and a vacuum of the soul. Sleep fled him and he started having delusions. A fragmented memory and amnesia overpowered all his vitality. Old age and exile killed Kashmiri Pandits slowly. Their condition was akin to what Lasa describes to Qazi, "A strange madness has engulfed us". Mahanandju's character is a representative of the elder generation of Pandits who unlike young people had no hope in the future and hence, turned out to be the worst casualties of conflict. After migration, Mahanandju's health begins to deteriorate. Under the weight of the memories of past and longing to return to their home, his body begins to decay. His life gradually becomes more miserable as Lasa says, "He has lost his memory partially. He takes dreams and illusions for real and he confuses reality with dreams...Mahanandju lost his appetite completely. He ate only a few morsels. Between morsels, he stopped and

gazed at the wall. He forgot to complete his sentences. His skin started to decay. He lost the ability to recognise people and things. His eyes became grey." (Gigoo 2011)

Sridar's friend Pamposh's reflection on his condition voices the collective anguish, hardships and disillusionment of the whole Pandit community, "All around the camp, there is stench of human excrement and waste...The water in the water tanker smells foul, and the children lie whole day in their own vomit...I am a mute spectator to the horrors of life inside my tent. The air inside is squalid" (Gigoo 2011). He, further, laments upon the pitiable conditions faced by his mother and sister reflecting on how they line up for hours in the morning to use the filthy makeshift toilet awaiting for their turn while the loitering men watch the women wait to relieve themselves. The narrator's father in the novel *Lost in Terror* is another example of how trauma crippled the people both mentally and physically. Her father was caught up in a cross-firing after a grenade blast when he was at his friend's milk shop. Although he luckily escaped the situation his friend died and he had never been same after this incident. The narrator describes, "Even weeks after the deadly blast, Baba was shaking at the mere mention of the death of his friend. He became timid and weak. Most of the time, he locked himself in and stared at the ceiling. Sometimes, he locked himself in and read the Quran for hours. I would take him tea from time to time, but he would not open the door; he did not bother even to take his medicine." (Mahjoor 218) The prolonged period of terror and violence made people lose the ability to cope up. The narrator describes, "I was also going through some bodily changes. My body would become hot with perspiration and start itching. I felt dizzy and nauseous...I was in pain, mentally and physically." (Mahjoor 2016)

4. CONCLUSION

American historian and trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra talks about two approaches to historiography; one is the documentary research model which involves collecting evidence and making truth claims based on that. LaCapra opines that, as opposed to the documentary method, "narratives in fiction may also involve truth claims on a structural or general level by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible 'feel' for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods". (LaCapra 2001) In other words, fictional narratives provides evaluative response to the socio- political turbulences and offer a view of the raw human experiences making creative use of individuals and collective memories. This paper has attempted to depict the crisis of Kashmir and the resultant trauma and sufferings from the perspective of the common people belonging to both the communities. Like the writing on Holocaust and Partition, the Kashmiri English writing takes into account the trauma, mental wreck and physical damage caused by the armed insurgency. The writers from the region translate their pain and transcribe their traumatic memory to arrive at some sort of understanding of their own agonies. The aesthetic responses reflecting the conflict in Kashmir represent a confluence of trauma and terror very intricately. They capture artistically the dark and the depressing environment of Kashmir and its effect on the lives of people. The stories are, on the whole, stories of dispossession, forced migration, isolation, destruction of family relationships, loneliness and unforgettable violence to the body and mind regardless of gender, community or age. The narratives while capturing the bodily and psychic impact of trauma, ultimately lead to the construction of cultural or collective trauma, which mainly aims at emotional catharsis.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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