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Absence, Loss and Memory
Representation of Trauma in ContemporaryLiterature of Kashmir

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Abstract

Devastating wars, horrific conflicts and environmental calamities arenothing new and so is the human suffering. Consequently, and naturally, the representations of human sufferings have been an engagement with literature and other forms of art since the antiquity. However, the word 'trauma' is comparatively a new term and gained impetus particularly after the second world war. The word ‘trauma’ was used in the physical sense earlier also but the extension in its connotation from physical to the psychological came only after the advent of industrialization in the late nineteenth century Europe. Furthermore, both the World Wars escalated the neurological and psychic disorders and hence accelerated the studies focused on traumatised soldiers cementing an invariable connection between trauma and warfare. Thus it may be said that the nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe was swept by a swingeing wave in the neurological and psychical studies. During this time the leading psychologist Freud turned to history and literature to describe the traumatic experience in his important works *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (published posthumously in 1939).Later the influential workof Cathy Caruth laid strong foundations of Literary Trauma theory formallywith a close study of Freud in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), where she drew upon the intersections between literature and psychological theory. Simultaneously, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Geoffrey Hartman and Dominick LaCapra, further extended the literary trauma theory as a mode of cultural engagement and since the 1990s theory has grown significantly. However, as Stef Craps contends in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (2015) that along with its immense popularity the theory has been conspicuously Eurocentric and “if the trauma theory is to redeem its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement, the sufferings of those belonging to non-Western or minority cultures must be given due recognition” (46).

In an attempt to further the cross cultural perspective on trauma theory, this paper shall look through and beyond the western theoretical framework into the individual and collective

trauma in the fiction writings from Kashmir. It will observe the response and representation oftrauma in Kashmir's diverse cultural and social scenario through its fiction writings.The motive of this paper is to address a cultural inquiry into trauma through literature and thus also extend the engagement with the pluralisation and diversification of literary trauma studies.Through the close reading of two selected works of fiction from Kashmir namely, Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* (2011), which deals with poignant tale of Kashmiri Pandit family's exodusfrom Kashmir and Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* (2011) which paintsa grim tale of a teenager growing up in Kashmir, the individual narratives will be closely and comparatively studied to bring out the representation of psychological renderings of individual and collective trauma in the paper.

Key Words: Literary Trauma Theory, Individual and Collective trauma, Contemporary English fiction writings of Kashmir.

The word 'Trauma' has a very broad and wide scope of discourse and it has been studied, narrated, analyzed and discoursed upon from various arenas, angles and the areas of expertise like historical, political, psychological, sociological and more. My paper here studies representation of trauma on the canvas of literature. Since the paper deals with contemporary literature of Kashmir, to study the effects of trauma, it becomes altogether more important to mention that Kashmir has been studied and discoursed upon richly and mostly from religious, political and historical perspectives. This paper is basically concerned with the theoretical underpinning of Literary Trauma Theory and with the help of two Indian fiction writings from Kashmir, it tries to understand how literary representations depict the trauma of people of two diverse communities belonging to the same geographical area. Through the reading of Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator*and Siddharth Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude,* an attempt to further the cross-cultural perspective on trauma theory has been also been envisaged.

Though brutal conflicts, tragic wars and environmental cataclysms are nothing new and consequently the human suffering in its real and imaginary forms has found expression in literature vastly since the antiquity. However quite strangely, 'trauma' is comparatively a new term in the literary circles. As mentioned by Lucy Bond and Stef craps in their book *Trauma* (2020), the word 'trauma', meaning 'wound' in Greek, was first used in English in 1693 in the second edition of *Blanchard's Physical Dictionary*, where it was defined only in the physical sense as a 'wound from an external cause'. The word 'trauma' was used in the same physical sense for the next two and a half centuries. The extension in its connotation

from physical to the psychological only came after the advent of industrialization in the late nineteenth century Europe. Massive fatalities in railway accidents, exposure to unimaginable dangers in factories and huge scale of environmental destructions led to the wounds which were not only physical but also strikingly psychological in nature. Roger Luckhurst aptly remarks in *The Trauma Question* that "the shocks of modern life" multiplied and quantified manifold in the nineteenth century (19). The meteoric rise in the cases of mental diseases such as hysteria, neurosis and other psychic disorders in the victims led to a sharp surge in clinical and psychological studies which concentrated on the scars that were invisible. Furthermore both the World Wars escalated the neurological and psychic disorders and hence accelerated the studies focused on traumatised soldiers cementing an invariable connection between trauma and warfare. The nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe was thus swept by a swaggering wave in the neurological and psychical studies.

During this time along with the other psychologists, Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud laid a firm foundation of psychoanalytical studies. Freud's *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (Published posthumously in 1939) linked the study of trauma with literature and history. As Cathy Caruth claims in her pioneering work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) that, "If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet (3)". She also insists on the ethical responsibility and highlights the importance of "the new mode of reading and listening that both the language of trauma, and silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demands (9-10)" in the critical cultural investigation.

The highly influential works of Cathy Caruth along with Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Geoffrey Hartman and Dominick LaCapra laid the tenable foundation of trauma theory as the mode of cultural engagement especially when deconstruction and post-structuralism were under the scanner for being too indifferent to the miseries of the real world and overly "fixated on language". As Lucy Bond and Stef Craps acknowledge in their work *Trauma* (2020) that the trauma theory came as, "an attempt to reclaim an ethical space for deconstruction by stressing its usefulness as a critical tool for interrogating the relationship between referentiality and historical violence (8)". The theory has grown significantly since early 1990's and there are "various signs of renewal and continuing relevance" (104) to it.

But along with its immense popularity the theory has also accused of being conspicuously Eurocentric, as Stef Craps contends in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (2015) that the theory defeats its purpose by being only "devoted to events that took place in Europe or the United States, most prominently the holocaust and more recently, 9/11" (45) and "if the trauma theory is to redeem its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement, the sufferings of those belonging to non-Western or minority cultures must be given due recognition" (46). This necessitates the study of events that have shaped and changed the cultural and literary response to trauma in the non-western literatures.

This is quite an established fact that the aftermath of trauma is silence but most interestingly, in an attempt to represent it, various art forms emerge in the aftermath of it. Representation of trauma takes a form of collective remembrance and identity as well. Memory of the traumatic experience then also serves as the centre point of thinking where the intersection of the individual and collective axis of social life occurs. Literature when represents the trauma of people, then its structure, style and narratives portray the response to trauma in an identical and parallel way. Literature and narratives many a times blur the boundaries between events and representation, hence it is important to observe the literary response to trauma like other art forms.

Also it is the aftermath of trauma in which,not the moment of trauma,where the various complexities of expressing and non-expressingcome into play. Literature of trauma is written to retell this experience. The moment of event when leaves the existence in limbo the process of meaning making starts. In this process of meaning making or coming in the terms with the new stark reality that the intense and often endless engagement with trauma starts. Literature from Kashmir can be seen as a dialogue between trauma and its response in the collective consciousness of the place. The bewilderment and psychological vacuum are central to the literature from Kashmir, especially contemporary trauma literature written in English. The (un)speakability and silence of trauma have been mirrored extensively by the Kashmiri writers of all times, butthe whole literary fabric is punctuated by absence, loss and memory in the current literature. Contemporary writers from Kashmir namely Mirza Waheed, Shafi Ahamad, Siddhartha Gigoo, Basharat Peer, Rahul Pandita, NayeemaMahjoor and Shahnaz Bashir have written trauma of Kashmir in their own individual ways, yet a poignant strain of grief overrides the literary canvas of Kashmir, which depicts more than a pathology over all other aspects. As Caruth also asserts,

> trauma is much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us

> of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, can't be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language (4)

The pathogenic memories of loss keep haunting life of the victims in most of the literary works. For instance in Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother*(2014) the memories keep coming back in the repetitive manner and make healing and carrying out life normally a difficult task for the protagonist Haleema whose only son disappears and the wait for her son is eternal for there is no closure to her wounds. Similarly *The Book of Gold Leaves* (2016), captures the experience of life amidst crossfire and crackdowns. *Our Moon has Blood Clots* (2017),written by Rahul Pandita is again a woeful tale of mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland because of terrorism and militancy in nineties. The events of unprecedented horror are woven so intricately that one can observe that their 'moon' really had 'blood clots'. *The Half Widow* (2012), written by Shafi Ahmed tells the pain ridden story of a womanwho lost her husband to the conflict. Thisnovelalso highlights the pain of every woman who has become 'half widow' because of insurgency and violence. Thus it can be stated that contemporary literature of Kashmir stands on the threshold of pain and portrayal and demands an engagement with its trauma and representation.

The first selected author, Siddhartha Gigoo is a Commonwealth Prize-winning author from Kashmiri Pandit family.In his novel *The Garden of Solitude* (2011) he maps the trauma of a Kashmiri Pandit family driven away from their home due to the intense armed conflict in Kashmir of nineties. The protagonist of the novel, Sridar, a teenaged Pandit boy is immensely affected by this sudden exodus and finds it difficult to come in terms with his lost neighbourhood and home. His family like other Pandit families leaves Kashmir, their home, which is not just a place for them but their complete being and identity. During this whole painful process of uprootment and fear, the heartbroken Sridar observes the change in relationship of Pandit and Muslim families. He becomes witness to suspicion, betrayal, divide, mistrust that rips apart the close bonds of two communities living in harmony for the centuries. Longing for lost roots, lost home, lost landscape, lost friends, lost belongingness creates a huge vacuum in his life and in this turmoil he finds only solace in writing. The novel through the narrative of Sridar represents the torment and agony that the Kashmiri Pandit community had to go through in the camps in Jammu, Delhi and other places of India.

On the other hand the second selected novel, Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* (2011), through the story of unnamed protagonist, a teenaged Muslim boy living in a deserted village near the Line Of Control, tells a dark tale of trauma and grief. This novel is a psychological

representation of acute agony, torment and pain. As the title suggests, the protagonist is employed by an army captain, Kadian, to collect the ID cards from the dead bodies of youth/ militants killed in the conflict. Protagonist, a teenaged Muslim boy, in a way becomes an unwilling collaborator in the whole process. His visits to the corpuses make him acutely hysterical and depressed over the period of time. Throughout the narrative he is into hallucinations, nightmares and dreams, which make his life miserable and unbearable. Whenever he visits the death valley of corpuses, a fear looms large on his mind as he apprehends to encounter bodies of his disappeared childhood friends whom he loved so much. Mirza Waheed draws a sombre picture of the horrific life of the protagonist, his mother and lives of his friends before they disappear through the nightmares and flashbacks.

In reading of both of these novels, the response and representation of grief is that of unending and excruciating pain. The trauma of loss is a persistent theme in both the novels, and both depict the horrific affect of trauma on the people of Kashmir alike irrespective of their caste, creed or religion. Scene of nineties Kashmir forms the back drop of both the works, when militancy was at its peak and armed insurgency rocked the valley, it is the same time when Pandit exodus happened in Kashmir and multitude of Muslim youth disappeared from the valley. The stress of belonging and not belonging, the loss of long cherished ties, the beauty and the culture of vale, all fell into a dungeon of hopelessness and grief as portrayed in the story of both the writings. The reading of the texts brought some important metaphors to the fore that were repetitive and recurrent. These conspicuous metaphors and representation of the trauma in the narratives of Kashmir was read on several plains with respect to the landscape of the region and the mindscape of the people of Kashmir, both Pandits and Muslims. Though their were other communities which were affected too, however the scope of this paper narrows down on the two.

It is a well-known fact that the landscape and geography of Kashmir has always not only attracted the world from outside but has also nurtured the Kashmiri people residing inside. In reading of both the works as representative of the trauma of the valley these two are important features i.e. the landscape and the geography, whether we talk about Siddhartha Gigoo's*The Garden of Solitude* or Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* and emerge as a conspicuous metaphor. When we read the texts we come across intense psychic responses of the individuals to the changing landscape and notice how trauma of an individual trickles down to the community and how the disruptions in place reach an individual. These narratives work through the trauma of changed scenario of landscape by articulating and negotiating its elements through the mental processes. The geographical landscape and the

landscape of memory then often remain in a conflict with each other throughout the narratives. The present and past interplay in the mind of an individual in the most disrupted ways. In such disruptions and disorientation, the words give voice to silence. Following lines describe the changing landscape from *The Collaborator* where presence of army creates an unease and looming stress:

> Valleys are beautiful. No one bothered us then, probably no one even noticed. It was like our own private patch; during summer vacations we would play cricket and fool around all day in this secluded playground of ours. You could see army pickets on either side of the valley even then, far off, like outline sketches on a school drawing, but that was all you could see. (12)

Similarly in *The Garden of Solitude*, the encroachment of space is the first ever breech in the simple and normal life of Kashmiri Pandit people as well as we can read in the lines below:

> The army convoys and the fearful armoured vehicles marched the roads of the city at all times. The faces of soldiers betrayed anger and hate. Their eyes constantly surveyed the narrow lanes, from where they feared grenades would be hurled upon them. The rocket launcher became a toy every teenager aspired to possess. (54)

The landscape was now invaded and so was the psyche. Not only the beautiful landscape acquired a ghostly appearance but the windows were also closed. The persistent theme of the closed windows and dark curtains in the selected narratives is also very conspicuous. In the novel *The Garden of Solitude*, the Pandit families start keeping their windows always closed. The outside was in no more in cohesion with the inward. The closed windows separated the vengeful eyesof outside world from the inside fear which was constant on everybody's mind in confinement. Protagonist, Sridar was not allowed to meet his friends outside the house and as we read below the closed windows became the common sight as depicted in *The Garden of Solitude*.

> Sridar kept indoors and spent most of the time in his room, dusting his books and trying to fill the pages of his diary. His mother kept the windows of their house shut for most parts of the day. " (71)

> The 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. The men grew beards. They did not speak to one another on the streets. They abandoned their traditional greeting 'Namaskar'." (75)

Similarly, Captain Kadian who employed Muslim teenager boy to collect ID cards from decaying and decomposed corpuses was also living in his own isolationas we read in*The Collaborator*:

> The office is a large, minimally decorated wood cabin with a big rusted iron bukhari in the middle that often doubles up as a cooker. There is a long window at the back but it's always covered with thick curtains, military blankets perhaps, so you can't see what's behind the office. (12)

The unease to open up, the change in landscape and mindscape of people runs parallel in both the narratives, this creates psychological disorientation in the characters. Both the protagonists are unable to speak out their trauma in words but through nightmares, hysteria and self-talking. The dreams and nightmares turn into hallucinations and life for characters is in shackles. As we read below one such episode from a Pandit neighbour of Sridar:

> Lasa, last night I dreamt that I was dead, killed by a bullet while walking on the bridge. I saw my own dead body floating in the river. I saw my mother petrified at the ghastly sight. She kept telling herself that she would not cry and mourn,' the neighbour narrated. (87)

Like death dreams, corpses and dead bodies are in *The Collaborator* are the central to the theme that depict something dead inside an individual that is constantly decaying. In the lines below the protagonist is victim of the dilemma of allegiance, he is so caught up in the moment of trauma that his escape seems impossible:

> Ugly grins, unbelievable, almost inhuman, postures and a grotesque intermingling of broken limbs make me dig my teeth deep, and hard, into my clenched fists. What an elaborate litter! There are bare wounds, holes dark and visceral, and limbless, armless, even headless, torsos. A low moan struggles, screeches inside... I find the ID card in his back pocket and in some kind of limp involuntary motion throw it into the nylon army

> rucksack the Captain gave me last week. It's not easy, collecting identity cards and whatever else you can find on dead bodies. Bodies after bodies – some huddled together, others forlorn and lonesome . . . For God knows how long I just cannot remove my eyes from this landscape, heaps of them, big and small, body parts, belongings littered amidst the rubble of legs and arms ... Macabre, horrid ghouls on either side of the brook watch me from their melancholic black-hole eye sockets. (14)

Thus, we observe thatmetaphors in the narratives of Kashmiri trauma are very conspicuous, persistent and repetitive. Silence is runs throughout the novels, especially in women, as we read in *The Collaborator* also. The silence leads from beyond repair damage for the protagonist's mother as we read below:

> Ma, I avoid her as much as I can, her silence helps, although how long can one avoid one's mother" (17)
>
> She became a hermit, silent for ages and only answers in hmm, Haan, no or yes that too only when I ask her something...
>
> Do I see a glint of sadness in her eye, when she watches me watching her? is she wandering how I am still here, IF I am really still here? (48)

The existence altogether become meaningless and full of void for women in both the novels, they are portrayed as silent victims and sufferers who are at the neither side of the whole discourse but unfortunately at the center of the pain. Thus these metaphor are seen as a way to convey the unspeakable and inexpressible, as Cathy Caruth says that it is a description of an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which response of the event occurs is often delayed and it is uncontrolled and repetitive with appearance of hallucinations, fragmented memories, one can infer that both the novels are examples of sustained amnesia, recurring dreams, return of suppressed memories which forman important part of the narrative.As La Capra also observes that,

> The radically disorienting experience of trauma often involves a dissociation between cognition and affect. In brief, in traumatic experience one typically can represent numbly or with aloofness what one cannot feel, and one feels overwhelmingly what one is unable to represent (77).

The narrative of both the works are infinitely abysmal. The remembrance of things is not and never of a beautiful vale but is always that of self-negation, and conflictual remembrance, where the desire not to confront, not to talk and fear of witnessing the self-over-rules. Hence, the rigorous and topographical investigation gives the view of impossibility of

comprehension among the victims, which is quite like a blow on the head and is indeed inconceivable and non-transmittable. Therefore, in such readings entering into a meaningful intellectual and emotional dialogue with the contents is the foremost need. Also one has to come out of self-satisfied contemplation while reading such texts. It is importantto underline that as "the field is becoming limited to a selection of texts" that may "represent narrow rang of traumatic events, histories and cultural forms" (Bennet 10), one needs to study the trauma of the selected people as widely as possible so as to not miss the nuances of the traumatic aftermath and also minimize the risk of over generalizations.

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