



Conflict of Kashmir: Perspectives from two Novels: Mirza Waheed's *the Collaborator* and Paro Anands's *No Guns at my Sons Funeral*

MOHD NAGEEN RATHER
Lecturer English, (Contract)
Govt. Higher Secondary School
Hawal Pulwama.Pin.192301
Kashmir (J&K) Srinagar.

Abstract:

Kashmir is traditionally a soft retreat from the harsh weathers of the other places of the world. People visit Kashmir to spend their holidays and go hunting, skiing, play golf or just wander about the hills and mountains of the Kashmir vale. In Kashmir they sip the 'heavenly' water, feel fresh, "enjoy the air they breathe" (Wordsworth altered) and find love they have not known. Kashmir has been sung as the Paradise On Earth and this complement is proved as valid because people who visit are quite reluctant to leave despite the onset of violence and chaos around them. History is witness that the people of (J&K) suffered long under different rulers, including the Sikhs, Afghans and the Hindu Maharajas. They cried for independence in Kashmir amid the chaos of Partition and the claims and counter claims from India and Pakistan.

The theme of many contemporary fictional and other narratives has been the old age conflict of Kashmir. Kashmir's writers too have begun to reflect on the conflict, in which they have been engulfed since long, in a variety of literary narratives like poetry, novels, and shorts stories. Written in Kashmiri, Urdu, and English, these literary narratives struggle to give expression to the individual and mass suffering caused by the conflict which is so festering.

This paper attempts to analyse the two novels in English by a novelist writing in English from (J&K) and the other by Paro Anand a non Kashmiri. Both of the novels deal with the conflict of Kashmir. They present the traumas of the conflict in Kashmir in two different perspectives. This paper also deliberates on how their narratives are engaged with the tumult and violence prevalent in Kashmir and how differently they represented the conflict which ruined the lives of people of the state.

Keywords: *Kashmir, Conflict, Heavenly, Violence, Contemporary, Trauma, Narratives, Perspectives, Ruined, Partition.*

Introduction

In 1947 India became free of British control and Partition of India took place, leading to the creation of two nation states of India and Pakistan. Immediately after Pakistan emerged as a separate country, the dispute over Kashmir began. Both countries laid a claim on this territory. In circumstances which followed, tension ensued between the two newly independent countries. When the tension erupted, some irregular forces, from tribal areas of the newly formed Pakistan, sought to liberate Kashmir from the Indian control. However, each blamed (India and Pakistan) the other for provocation and escalation and thus causing the internationalization of the dispute. The dispute reached to the United Nations where it remains unresolved for the last more than sixty years, while the conflict has consumed thousands of lives in Kashmir, not to mention the casualties. Since then Kashmir remained a bone of

contention between the two countries while as Kashmiri people are divided in their opinion. Some want complete freedom from both the dominions and some want to mingle with Pakistan.

The complex dispute assumed alarming proportions killing numberless human lives from both India and Pakistan but sufferings of people of Kashmir and killings of innocent youth, kids, elderly and women outnumber both the countries. The nature of dispute, causes and repercussions of conflict is viewed by different writers differently at its different stages painting the picture of pain with words both objectively and subjectively. The two novels of Mirza Waheed and Paro Anand are worth the discussion as they present the two different perspectives of the conflict-state.

Discussion

It is found that in the conflict' narratives trauma is not located at specific historical moments that are seen as representing "historical wounds" for particular communities, but rather it unfolds in the aftermath of the events, and is traumatic precisely in its inability to be captured and recorded. The narratives are thus replete with the impossibility of writing trauma and thereby of possessing it, and ultimately, of the impossibility of accessing the traumatized self itself.' (Chitrlekha Zutshi)

The novels *The Collaborator* (2011) by Mirza Waheed and *No Guns at my Son's Funeral* (2005) by Anand Paro have been published after 2000; both of the novels are heavily influenced by the historic events following the start of armed militancy against the Indian state. While Waheed is clearly critical of postcolonial India for the intense militarization it has perpetrated on people, Pakistan, as well, is not spared. The unknown narrator roots himself in Kashmir, away from the masochistic nationalistic posturing of India and Pakistan. Anand Paro, on the other hand, has produced an extended propaganda piece bolstering the Indian standpoint. The official line of India has been that the armed fighters in Kashmir are "misguided" "indoctrinated" youth, who are otherwise quite innocent to carry arms against India.

In the literary history of Kashmir 2011 is an important milestone. In this year, 'The Collaborator' by Mirza Waheed, first major novel in English by a native telling Kashmir story with all its pain caused ripples in the world of literature. In fact, so far it is first debut novel by a Kashmiri novelist that got ravishing reviews world over. The action of the novel starts around 1990 when the indigenous armed movement began against Indian rule in Kashmir. Mirza Waheed, the first Kashmir novelist, writing in English, expresses the native desire and the pain of living in a conflict, where fear haunts the best happiness and where life is determined by curfews and assassinations, and disappeared people and mass graves.

Mirza puts the situation of the land like this:

"There were people dying everywhere getting massacred in every town and village, there were people being picked up and thrown into dark jails in unknown parts, there were dungeons in the city where hundreds of young men were kept in heavy chains and from where many never emerged alive, there were thousands who had disappeared leaving behind women with photographs and perennial waiting, there were multitudes of dead bodies on the roads, in hospital beds, in fresh martyrs' graveyards and scattered casually on the snow of mindless borders." (The Collaborator)

The book is set in the Kashmir in the obscure village called 'Nowgam,' located close to the Pakistan border. Indian soldiers appear as if from nowhere to hunt for militants on the run. It is the story of four adolescent boys, who once used to spend their afternoons playing cricket and singing Bollywood songs, and have now crossed the border into Pakistan to fight against the Indian army. One friend is left behind, the son of the town headman, who is forced by an Indian army captain to count the corpses that are produced everyday due to the conflict. *The Collaborator* (2011) is the story of 19 years old eponymous narrator from village Nowgam is working with an Indian army officer, Captain Kadian. His job is to collect the Identity Cards from the corpses of militants who died fighting against the Indian army. His four childhood friends Hussain, Gul, Ashfaq and Mohammed have all crossed the border to Pakistan for

arms training and “*army had started capturing and killing hundreds of boys attempting to cross over to Azad Kashmir. They saw, they shot. They saw more, they shot more*” (117)(The Collaborator)

As violence rages on between “terrorists” and Indian army, almost his entire village is depopulated as people run away for safety. He also contemplates crossing the border for arms training but his father, the village Headman, rescues him from taking a step which could have led to his death.

In Waheed’s novel the protagonist narrator a Kashmiri Gujjar (pastoralist) man from a border village Nowgam on the Indian side is forced to work for the Indian army counting bodies of militants and collecting their identification cards. The unnamed young man’s inability to escape this life of collaboration with the occupiers and join his friends on the other side of the border as a freedom fighter leaves him suspended in an incomprehensible and isolated space. How is he, and countless other young people literally caught between India and Pakistan—between counting bodies on one side and attaining martyrdom on the other—to come of age?

The narrator of Waheed’s novel vehemently rejects the Indian and Pakistani nationalist discourses on Kashmir as it brings out the diffuseness of trauma for those whose lives are destroyed by these nationalist narratives. As the protagonist silently screams at the end of the novel, “*to hell with the Indians...to hell with the Pakistanis, to hell with the Line of Control...to hell with jihad, and to hell with, to burning, smouldering hell with everything!*”(The Collaborator)

There is immense respect for the grace and fortitude of the people of Kashmir created through this book, and sympathy for the atrocities they face in the name of terrorism. Waheed’s novel has been touted as ‘a tale that is almost too close to reality.’ (Javid Iqbal Bhat)

Paro Anand, is one of India's top writers for children and young adults. She works with and writes extensively about young people in difficult circumstances. She runs 'Literature in Action', a program using literature as a constructive creative outlet. As a renowned performance story teller and resource person, she has performed extensively in India and abroad including, with Zulu, Eskimo and Swiss story tellers. Her novel *No Guns at My Son's Funeral*(2005)was on the IBBY Honour List 2006 and has been translated into German and Spanish.Paro Anand’s novel *No Guns at my Son's Funeral (2005)*is a story set in Baramulla, a town in northern Kashmir valley when militancy was at its peak . The story revolves around Aftab. The novel reveals the double self of the protagonist Aftab. During day time he is close to his family, and as night descends he slips out with the “terrorists”, chief Akram. The latter is shrewd enough to indoctrinate him into fighting against the Indian army, creates communal feelings in him against the Hindus, draws him away from his family members, and eventually leading to his violent death.

Aftab lives with his father (a school teacher), mother, elder sister – Shazia, and younger brother. He is a member of a secret group comprising Akram (a firangi, probably Afghan and the leader of the group), Feroze (another firangi), Javed (Kashmiri) and Imran (another Kashmiri). They consider themselves to be freedom fighters, though others call them as atankvadis (terrorists). They meet secretly, undergo physical training and plan strategies for disruptive activities. The firangis lure the young boys to become atankvadis, and the young girls to become their brides. Major Ramneeq, the commanding officer of the Indian army stationed in the town, is tipped off about the group and Aftab’s possible link with it. From then on he keeps Aftab under surveillance. What follows is a series of incidents – a bomb set off in the cantonment area, the army homing in on the terrorists, capture of Feroze, the fleeing of Akram with the army on his heels, finally culminating in a suicide bomb blast in a public market place set off by Aftab.

Paro’s novel enlightens the miseries of Kashmir, India. While most of the country gets disturbed on hearing the sound of just one bullet, Kashmiri people cannot differentiate the sound of gunshots from that of construction.The story’s main focus is how Aftab juggles his family life and his life as a budding

terrorist trying to prove himself worthy and desperate to win admiration from his boss Akram whom he hero-worships and is willing to die for him. But the novel while telling the story, also portrays the problems of each and every person living in Kashmir - where every second person's death is a murder

The authors points out how innocent children are misled during the conflict and made to believe in the concept of holy war against the infidels. Aftab's Ammi and Abbu, worried that he might be associated with such a group, don't approve of his secret disappearances. In a verbal encounter between Aftab and his mother, the latter becomes the author's, or say the Indian official spokesperson, in which the Kashmiris are not just naively depoliticised but also infantilized:

And what exactly do you know about Delhi and the people there? Who has been filling your head with all this? And is your head so empty that you're willing to fill it with any garbage that comes your way? Do you know why our Kashmir has come to such a state? It is because of people who have come from across the borders. Who have no Iman of their own. No religion, no roots. They come here and sever the roots. Our roots, our children's roots. ...Don't get mixed up with these dangerous people... (18)
(No Guns at My Son's Funeral)

None of the two writers could hold a cultural distance from the events, there is somewhat of a subjective tone in the narration of both of them. Since Mirza Waheed was born and brought up in Kashmir. He saw the violence first hand, was an eye witness to many violent incidents which took place right next to his neighbourhood. Hence, his narration is authentic in terms of the lived conflict. Until his novel was published, the novelists were either Europeans, mostly British, or Indian, who brought their own cultural baggage while narrating on Kashmir. Therefore, it won't be wrong to argue that in a postcolonial world, with two warring nation states, Mirza Waheed represents the inner voice, with all the quagmire of miseries and suffering imprinted on the lives of people trapped in festering conflict.

Like Shakeel , the son of Kausar Jan is attracted by Rehmatullah Peer in Danesh Rana's novel *Red Maize*(2015), and pick gun'Aftab the protagonist in Paro Anand's novel is shown as being misled by Akram's magnetism and euphoria of freedom, Akram being a hard-core Islamist, who has nothing but pure hatred for anything except Islam and Muslims. Aftab is shown separated from his family, and the reason for that is Akram. Aftab is a thoroughly ahistoricised, depoliticised automata, a robot, who is merely pushed around by Akram, ideologically and otherwise, and finally prepared to fight against India. Aftab represents those who like to pick guns without realizing what they are really fighting for. Akram like Rehmatullah Peer ideologically tempts Aftab by his impressive oratory skills and religiosity playing with people's minds and emotions, promising them jannah as a gift of their martyrdom.

Aftab becomes a pawn in the hands of Akram.Paro Anand has presented the sufferings looking just at the one of the forces operating in the conflict. Paro has perhaps failed in depicting the trauma and pain of people .She has not presented the other shades of the miseries and atrocities inflicted upon the people. Had Paro written the novel after reading Waheed's novel, but Waheed wrote his novel after some five or six years later, she would have been able to nail her narrative abit more deep down the ground ,remains just a hypothetical scholarly question. However, her perspective adds to the various angles of looking at the suffering which the people have been going through since 1947.Paro during her project at District Barmulla collected the material of her novel and was much moved by the complexities of conflict especially on children.Paro Said

"It was a touching experience to hear the Kashmiri Muslim and Pundit children tell their stories to each other... each, thinking the other to be the lucky one. The one that hadn't suffered the sharp sword of violence. In the realization, they did actually come to see that it wasn't Muslim against Hindu, Kashmir against Pundit, but violence against innocence" (Quoted from Tehelka.com).

Interestingly, one trope is present in both the novels from the novel *The Rage of the Vulture* by Alan Moorehead to that of Paro Anand and Mirza Waheed is related to the "invaders" or "Kabailis" as they have been memorized in local parlance. Moorehead demonises these irregular fighters. One of the

critical reasons for the demonization is their attack on a Franciscan Christian mission in Baramulla, in which the inmates were mistreated. Both Paro Anand and Waheed do not depart from that tradition of writing about them. They've been painted as rapists, looters and merciless murderers. However, What was perpetrated by those "invaders" has faded into insignificance by the depiction of violent and aggressive militarisation of Kashmir in Mirza Waheed's narrative. "There are a thousand quiet heartbreaks, amid the loud ones that we hear about."

This truthfulness of sufferings of militancy being suffered by Kashmiris shown by Waheed is admitted by S. Tharoor like this:

'Of course Kashmiris have suffered terribly in the militancy' (Review: The Collaborator magazine Outlook 7 March 2011) Shashi Tharoor.

Apart from being considerate toward them, Waheed is sympathetic to the views, lives and perceptions of Kashmiris. *The Collaborator* gives the reader an intimate view of Kashmir's age-old struggle for justice, suffering humanly the inhuman treatment. The conflict does not obliterate the present but future of the people. Though there are people who vouch for Pakistan and believe Kashmir belongs to Pakistan due to geographical and cultural proximity, but there are also those who are fighting for the independence of Kashmir, favouring equal distance from the two new dominions. This tone of those who sought independence from both the countries is carried forward in *The Collaborator*, where the eponymous narrator is distancing himself from the claims of India and Pakistan, with even more zest, following the brutalization of the society by unprecedented militarization from the Indian state. The protagonist screams silently:

"to hell with the Indians...to hell with the Pakistanis, to hell with the Line of Control..."

(The Collaborator)

On the other hand, Paro Anand's novel is overrunning the orientation of popular consciousness by pitching forward an Indian claim on Kashmir. Paro Anand's novel hosts an Indian desire to control Kashmir, despite all the odds; it celebrates the culture of tolerance, freedom and tourism in Kashmir before the freedom seeking "terrorists" destroyed everything. (J A Bhat)

Paro's novel ends with Aftab's mother and Angad's (Aftab's Sikh friend) mother mourning their sons' deaths. "No guns at my son's funeral" laments Aftab's mother, when the local youth turn up with guns to pay homage. Her statement which is also the title of the novel shows that Kashmiri mothers don't like euphoria of *Azadi* but are engulfed with dysphoria as they have realized that their sons are led to death by people like Akram.

Both the novels give a child's-eye view of exactly how complicated loyalties can get in this tinderbox situation when everyone provides a skewed version of events, depending on whose side they are on. Take Kashmir, for instance, the military has state sanction to do exactly what the militants are vilified for. Meanwhile, common people are caught up in the mess and swept along, forced to take sides whether or not they want to. And children, impressionable and keen to take their place in the order of things are among the most innocent targets.

Both the novels are replete with complexities of conflict. The common connection between the two novels is first of all, both of the novels revolve around the conflict status and nature of the disputed territory of Kashmir, and violence is at the heart of this dispute. *The Collaborator* and *No Guns at My Son's Funeral*, both, deal with the armed insurgency. So both the novels are the replete with depiction of the dispute and the subsequent violence, in which ordinary lives and families, largely unaware of the political games going on the higher level, are made to suffer the most shocking traumas - loss of life and loss of dignity and identity. Both the novels represent the torn voice, with all the quagmire of miseries and suffering imprinted on the lives of people caught in one of the oldest conflicts of the world.

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