

Chapter III

Mirror of the Political and Personal Trauma

Kashmir is the paradise on earth, enveloped in the dense green peaked mountains. Mughal rulers, who ruled over India in 1586, were bewitched by the beauty of it, that they called it *jannat*—paradise. Kashmir was ruled by Buddhists, Sultans, Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs and the Dogras. They blessed Kashmir with different cultures and religions. The Kashmiri people are so accommodative that they accept the every changing trend of the changing rule whole heartedly. The Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are the main ways and teaching which made a solid impact on the lives of Kashmiri people. This is the reason that Kashmir has been labeled as the pot which harbours the multiple communities in harmony for centuries. The people of Kashmir called the Valley as ‘Pirwaer’ and ‘Rishwaer’, the aboard of Sufis and Rishis.

The State of Jammu and Kashmir consisted of five regions: the Valley of Kashmir, Jammu Province, the district of Poonch, Ladakh and Baltistan, and the Gilgit region. It was the largest and the fourth most populous of the 565 princely states in British India. In the mid nineteenth century the incorporation of these different regions came under a single administration. In 1947 the total population of the state was near about 4 million, which was a combination 77% Muslim, 20% Hindu, 1.5% Sikh, and 1% Buddhist. It makes it very clear that all the communities of the concerned state were

living in a relative harmony. The spirit of communal harmony and tolerance in the valley is known as Kashmiriyat, which gave the Kashmiri identity a unique quality.

Ahmed Shah Abdali ruled over Kashmir after the decline of Mughal's, but the rule of Ahmad Shah was too brutal to resist. With the decline of Mughal power in India, Kashmir was conquered by an Afghan ruler, Therefore, when the Sikhs ousted the Afghans from Kashmir in 1819; the Kashmiris welcomed them with open arms. The fate of Kashmiris was written by a black pen because the Sikhs soon turned out to be even greater tyrants. They were also religious fanatics who sought revenge upon the Kashmiri Muslims who formed a majority of the population.

The Sikhs were helped by Raja Gulab Singh, who was a member of a Hindu Dogra family, in their various military expeditions to Kashmir. The said Dogra family ruled one principality in the southeast area of Jammu. For the help and guidance provided by the Raja Gulab Singh to the Sikh rulers, they reward him control of the whole Jammu Province. In 1839, he extended his control over Ladakh and Baltistan by seizing these areas from Tibet. In 1844, the British waged war against the Sikhs with the help of Gulab Singh here again he was rewarded for the help and guidance, the British relieved the Sikhs of their hold over Kashmir and transferred the territory to Gulab Singh for a sum of Rs. 7.5 million, which is known to us as Treaty of Amritsar. The Gulab Singh's purchase of Kashmir thus placed a Muslim majority state under the political control of a Hindu dynasty. In the words of Christopher Thomas, "the people never asked for it, never wanted it and never loved it" (Thomas, 17). The was the period of pain and suffering which was yet to unknown to Kashmiri Muslims. The sick rule did to Kashmir what was beyond their imagination. Preferential treatment towards the Hindus developed the

feelings of displeasure among the Kashmiri Muslims, who had no say in the administration, which was conducted by the Kashmiri Pandits. The pandits fared well and held many responsible posts in government and administration. The majority of Muslims population led a life of poverty, subjugation and exploitation. They were generally not permitted to become officers in the state's military, which was led by Sikhs and Hindu "martial" castes such as Dogras and Rajputs, and were virtually unrepresented in the state's civil administration:

The poverty of muslim masses is appalling. Dressed in rags and barefoot, a muslim peasant presents the appearance of a starving beggar...most are landless labourers, working as serfs for absentee landlords...almost the whole brunt of official corruption has been borne by the muslim masses..rural indebtedness is staggering. (Bose 42)

Quit Kashmir Movement:

The 'Quit Kashmir' movement was launched by National Conference in May-June 1946. The Movement was a struggle against the Dogra unkind rule, which had denied the basic rights of the majority Muslims. Sheikh Abdullah explained that National Conference had accepted the principle of autonomy not only in respect of creed, but also within the framework of culture. This was the phase of political awakening and an assertion of political and cultural identity among the people of Kashmir. The Quit Kashmir movement was similar based on Quit India Movement against the British unkind rule. Sheikh Abdullah was supported by the two legends of India, Nehru and Gandhi. While explaining the demand of autonomy, he said: "The time has come to tear up the treaty of Amritsar and Quit Kashmir. Sovereignty is not the birthright of Maharaja

Hari Singh. 'Quit Kashmir' is not a question of revolt. It is a matter of right". (M.J. Akbar 227-28).

III Fated Partition:

After the independence, Jammu and Kashmir was given an option like other princely states of choosing to accede to either India or Pakistan. Dr Susmit Kumar in his article, "History of the Kashmir Conflict" says:

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was one of these princely states. Had it been part of British India, it would have gone to Pakistan, since Muslims constituted about 77 percent of the state's population. After the lapse of the paramountcy in August 1947, the maharaja of J&K, Hari Singh, was uninterested in joining either country. ("History of the Kashmir Conflict")

After independence about 5,000 tribesmen led by Pakistani Army regulars and captured large parts of it. This tragic incident has been clearly shown by Salman Rushdie in his novel *Shalimar the Clown*:

...the single word kabailis was heard over and over again. It was a new word, with which few people in the Shalimar Bagh were familiar, but it terrified them anyway. "An army of kabailis from Pakistan has crossed the border, looting, raping, burning, killing," the rumors said, "and it is nearing the outskirts of the city". Then the darkest rumour of all came in and sat down in the maharaja's chair. "The maharaja has run away," it said, contempt and terror mingling in its voice "because he heard about the crucified man....who had deliberately set the invaders in the wrong direction. (32)

Kabailis were the tribesmen from Pakistan who invaded the valley in late October 1947, and who did indeed reach the outskirts of Srinagar. And the crucified man is a clear reference to Maqbool Sherwani, the subject of Mulakh Raj Anand's *Death of a Hero*, who was shot by the tribesmen in Baramullah. The tribesmen stopped to loot, rape women, kill the inhabitants, burn houses, and abduct young women to take back to Pakistan. At this crucial juncture the maharaja made a desperate appeal to India to come to his rescue, but India took the stand that it was not in a position to send troops to rescue him. On October 26, the intruders massacred about 11,000 of 14,000 residents of Baramullah and destroyed the Mohra power station that supplied electricity to Srinagar. When everything was slipped from the hands of Maharaja Hari Singh, he signed the Instrument of Accession without knowing the wish of Jammu and Kashmir people.

The UNCIP passed a resolution On August 13, 1948 asking Pakistan to withdraw its troops and tribesmen from Jammu and Kashmir after that the India will and once Pakistan withdraws them, the administration by the local authorities needs to be restored, India will lessen its troops to the barest minimum and then a plebiscite will be held according to the wishes of the people of the state. But it remained only in white papers. Not a single promise has been fulfilled by the both of these countries. Now Kashmir has become the hot seat of war and bloodshed.

The present condition of the state is too sick because the three countries, India, Pakistan and China, have taken control over the different parts of the state. India, Pakistan, and China control 45 percent, 35 percent and 20 percent, respectively, of the original Jammu & Kashmir territory. China covered about 35,000 square kilometers in Aksai Chin in the 1962 war with India and another 5,000 square kilometers in Balistan let

go by Pakistan under an accord signed in March 1963. Indian occupied Kashmir consists of three regions, Kashmir Valley, Jammu, and Ladakh, which varies in all spheres of life from each other. The Kashmir valley is the only one region which is under a great threat from the both India and Pakistan. All uncertainty dwells in the beautiful valley of Kashmir and the two other regions are without any kind of uncertainty. The Indian-controlled Kashmir Valley (IKV), Jammu, and Ladakh have Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist, respectively, majorities. Pakistan-Administered Kashmir (PAK) has a Muslim majority. The bone of contention is just IKV, a 100-mile-long valley, which is about 9 percent of the original J&K territory. India and Pakistan have fought three wars—in 1947-48, 1965, and 1971—and two out of these were over Kashmir. In addition to this, India and Pakistan are fighting a hidden war in Kashmir since 1989, which has paralyzed the Kashmiris.

Sandwiched Souls:

Kashmir was known for the sharps minds and bowl of fertile brains but not that intelligentsia is on its verge. Due to the ongoing unrests all has been flown away from the land. The land of great saints, scholars, writers and intellectual has now become a bone of contention for three nuclear countries, India (Indian administrated Kashmir – Kashmir), Pakistan (Azad Kashmir), and China (Aksai Chin). From its partition in 1947, it has remained one of the hottest war zones and most contested land masses of South Asia. The shattering events have destroyed the peace not only of Kashmir but also of South Asia. The conflict in Kashmir has become a great blockade for the education system of that very land, which have produced great thinkers and educationists.

The problems must be addressed to bring peace to South Asia. This demands for urgent efforts so that they regain the lost excellence. Proper use of logical capability can help in the construction of new solutions for human wishes, especially in a war torn Kashmir. The intellectual sector of Kashmir is suffering because access to information is closed due to political fragmentation and other causes. Strikes, curfews, protests, and other actions have hindered education. The money that could have been spent on research and development and towards the betterment of education has gone to corrupt government officials. "Kashmiris have been denied an accountable government, which has affected the educational arena greatly"(Bose 40). Increased funding to the armed forces has disadvantaged the educational sector. What should have been spent on R&D is spent on warfare.

It has been estimated by the Indian Officials that from 1989 to 2002, between 40,000 civilians, guerrilla fighters, and Indian security personnel died in the valley on this bone of contention. The Hurriyat Conference, a coalition of pro-independence, have claimed that 80,000 civilians, guerrilla fighters, and Indian security personnel died in violence that gradually spread beyond the Kashmir Valley to affect most of Jammu, IJK's other populous region. According to Indian counterinsurgency sources, in this period, more than 4,600 security personnel were killed, along with about 13,500 civilians (the vast majority Muslims) and 15,937 militants including about 3,000 from outside the Jammu and Kashmir, mostly Pakistanis and some Afghans. The period witnessed 55,538 incidents of violence and Indian forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations captured around 43,000 firearms, 160,000 explosive devices, and over 7 million rounds of assorted ammunition. This most recent period of the Kashmiri struggle to find its own place in the

world turned militant in 1989, when thousands of Kashmiri Muslims, trained by Pakistan, crossed the border for arms training in Pakistan to fight against the brutal rule of India. This phase also signaled the wretched failure of many decades-long Indian attempts at emotionally integrating Kashmir with India. The armed struggle of 90's fought for freedom from being misrepresented, and with the aspirations of a future outside Indian rule but it proved brutal for India as well for Kashmir. It gave the same thing to the families of the both sides for which war and bloodshed is known for. Lakhs of widows, half widows, orphans from the both sides are still living with the wounds which have been given by this uprising.

The heavy cost of two decades of this war, and the post 9/11 global war on terror have forced Kashmiris to re-assess their strategy to avoid being branded as terrorists. The armed revolt has for the most part today replaced into mass anti-India street protests in the form of stone pelting which, since 2008, challenges Indian rule in ways that are more tolerable globally. But, like the harsh military response to armed militancy and the resultant militarised scenario, the government's response to street protests has been brutal. Government forces killed many unarmed protesters during the mass rally. In 2010, during anti-India stone throwing street protests against Indian rule, 120 innocent boys have been brutally killed by the Indian forces. Angry Kashmiri people responded by memorializing their loss, struggle and sacrifice - forcing New Delhi to change its approach, if only superficially. Kashmiris wants an end to the Indian forced rule and to those draconian laws like Public Safety Act (PSA) and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which has given only unidentified graves to Kashmir:

Army has ordered Court Martial of six soldiers, including two officers, involved in the killing of three youth of Nadihal Baramulla in a fake encounter at LoC at Machil in Kupwara district of north Kashmir on April 30 in 2010. The action comes after three years of investigations (*The Greater Kashmir*).

Under the PSA, described by Amnesty International as a “lawless law”, a political rebel can be jailed for up to two years without formal charges or a trial. Hundreds of protesters arrested on charges of throwing stones at government forces have also been slapped with PSA charges. Armed forces' personnel accused of grave human rights violations such as custodial killings of civilians and rape cannot be tried in civilian courts unless specifically permitted by New Delhi. Human rights defenders and police themselves have established hundreds of such cases *prima facie* against army and paramilitary forces' personnel, but not a single trial has been possible since 1990 - for want of the compulsory sanction from New Delhi:

Human rights abuses in Jammu and Kashmir, a disputed territory administered by India, are an ongoing issue. The abuses range from mass killings, forced disappearances, torture, rape and sexual abuse to political repression and suppression of freedom of speech. The Indian central reserve police force, border security personnel and various militant groups have been accused and held accountable for committing severe human rights abuses against Kashmiri civilians (*The Rediff News*).

The land of beauty has now become the land of unknown graves, rape, mass killings, disappearances, fake encounters, suicide and what not. According to a report,

17,000 people, mostly women, have committed suicide during the last 20 years in the Valley. According to a study by the Medecins Sans Frontieres:

Women in Kashmir have suffered enormously since the separatist struggle became violent in 1989– 90. Like the women in other conflict zones, they have been raped, tortured, maimed and killed. A few of them were even jailed for years together. Kashmiri women are among the worst sufferers of sexual violence in the world. ‘Sexual violence has been routinely perpetrated on Kashmiri women, with 11.6% of respondents saying they were victims of sexual abuse (*The Kashmir Dispatch*).

The women are now experiencing extra hardships due to the stress and after-effects, of war and infertility as well as stress due to cultural pressure. The Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Science, based in Srinagar, conducted a study finding that of 112 young and adolescent women who suffered from polycystic ovarian syndrome — a condition that can cause infertility along with a host of other reproductive symptoms — roughly 65 to 70 per cent of them suffered from psychiatric illnesses such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. A study by Kashmir University’s Department of Sociology in 2002 revealed 90% of the estimated 10,000 Kashmiri war widows didn’t remarry despite provision of remarriage in Islam. Surveys have shown that more Kashmiri women commit suicide than men, says a prominent sociologist Dr Bashir Ahmed Dabla: “Throughout the world, it’s found that suicide rates are highest among men and more intense in urban areas, but in the Valley the reverse is true”(South Asia News). Women in Kashmir suffer silently, more than 60% of the patients visiting Kashmir's lone psychiatry hospital in Srinagar for treatment, with most of them suffering

from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Statistics, even as remarkable as these, cannot adequately portray the trauma and tragedy that have overwhelmed Kashmir, once a prime tourist destination.

Wounds in the Words:

History, they say, always repeats itself.

In my homeland, helplessness repeats itself.

Our pangs never settle into grief,

or mourning or bereavement.

A fresh shot of agony injected shamelessly

to scour our wounds.(Alvi *Biting the dust*)

From the ancient times Kashmir remained the hot seat of learning and writing. The land has produced great writers and intellectuals who wrote according to the situation of that very age. The contemporary writers flashed on the literary screen with the themes which were haunting them. The writers contributed a good literature of protest which is actually their protest in letters. These books were authored mostly by the persons living either outside J&K or some foreign writers. There were a few Kashmir authors who wrote copiously on the Kashmir subject.

The life of Kashmiris which is under daily cordon is powerfully expressed in the tortured works of a new generation of Kashmir's writers, like Basharat Peer, Mirza Waheed, Shafi Ahmad, Shahnaz Bashir, Towfeeq Wani, Nitasha Kaul, Shabnum Qayoom, Bashir Athar and many more. All these writers write about the trauma and sufferings of Kashmiri people whether it is Kashmiri Muslim or Kashmiri exodus pandit. But it not first time that Kashmiri writers are writing against the brutality of India.

Kashmir was always under a brutal rule of many brutal kings and Rajas and the same has been depicted by the ancient literature by the ancient writers of the valley. So we can say that the literature of resistance is quite old as the Kashmir conflict is.

When we talk about the tortured writings of new generation, many names flashed in our mind like Basharat Peer's novel *Curfewed Night*. The prose of the novel lyrical and stirring, subject matter most heartbreaking. He clearly shows that how beautiful the Kashmir was and how it bleeds now. The bleeding beauty is at the verge of its destruction because of a human being. In the novel he portrays it that whatever bad and ruthlessness is going on in the streets of Kashmir is the doings of a man. The novel is an amazing account that does a great deal to bring the Kashmir conflict out of the kingdom of political rhetoric between India and Pakistan and into the lives of Kashmiris. Peer was only 13 in 1990 when Indian troops fired on pro-independence Kashmiris and, as he says it "the war of my adolescence started"(Peer 34). It is a war that hasn't yet ended, though it has changed shape considerably in the last 20 years.

Peer writes of how all the embarrassments and failures of adolescence fall away when you join in a procession and feel yourself part of something larger; how the militants who crossed into the Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir for rebel training would return as heroes; how "like almost every boy, I wanted to join them. Fighting and dying for freedom was as desired as the first kiss on adolescent lips"(Peer 43). In the Kashmir valley, even the life of a student was at stake. "The fighting had changed the meaning of distance"(Peer 83). The six-mile ride from his school to home carried with it the possibility of being caught in gunfire or encountering a land mine. Military checkpoints were everywhere, and disgrace and maltreatment from the Indian security

forces towards the Kashmiri residents was part of daily life. Many parents sent their sons away to finish their education far away from the valley. He also gives space to the Kashmiri Pandits who were forced to leave the valley when the war began. The heart of the book is a demand for justice for the Kashmiri people, whose sufferings at the hands of the Indian security forces has been beyond compute. At the end of *Curfewed Night* Peer crosses the “line of control” (the Indo-Pak ceasefire line which functions as a de facto border separating one part of Kashmir from the other). He writes:

The line of control did not run through 576 kilometers of militarized mountains . . . It ran through everything a Kashmiri, an Indian and a Pakistani said, wrote, and did. . . It ran through the reels of Bollywood coming to life in dark theatres, it ran through conversations in coffee shops and on television screens showing cricket matches, it ran through families and dinner talk, it ran through whispers of lovers. And it ran through our grief, our anger, our tears, and our silence.” (Peer 101).

The Collaborator is the debut novel by Mirza Waheed. The unnamed protagonist of Mirza Waheed's destructive debut novel grows up in the forgotten last village before the border. The narrator of the novel is 19 years old boy. He is employed by a captain in the Indian army. His work is to go down into a valley near the village and collect the ID cards and weapons of the corpses. The corpses are those of Kashmiri militants or freedom fighters, depending on which side of history you're on, who crossed the Line of Control into Pakistan for training and were gunned down by the Indian army while crossing back. Their ID cards can be used for PR purposes when the Indian army issues press releases about the militants it has killed; the corpses themselves are just dead meat, left to rot. The

early description of the protagonist's visits to the valley of corpses is written in the most haunting prose:

By the way, did I mention there's a profusion of tiny yellow flowers growing among the grasses here? . . . You can see bright yellow outlines of human forms enclosing darkness inside. It makes me cry . . . In some cases the outline has started to become fuzzy now, with the tiny plants encroaching into the space of the ever shrinking human remains. I don't know the name of the flowers. Some kind of wild daisies, perhaps
(Waheed 14)

Picking through corpses among the flowers would be enough to drive anyone to madness and tears but in the case of the 19-year-old there is a possibility he faces each time he goes into the valley that makes the situation even more horrific. The novel is divided into three sections. The first moves between the present and the past, weaving together the story of the narrator, whose family is the only ones to have stayed in the village while everyone else has fled, with the early days of Kashmiri resistance; his friends went to train in Pakistan and left him behind. The second section charts the consequences of his friends' departure amid the increasing brutality of the Indian crackdown in Kashmir; and the final part returns us to the story of the Collaborator and his relationship with the Indian captain who employs him. According to the writer of the novel Mirza Waheed:

When you grow up, as I did, seeing bullet-ridden bodies around you and having to behave as though there is nothing abnormal about it then silence helps. I left Kashmir at the age of 18 and it has taken me 20 years to break

my silence. It is only now, with the benefit of distance, that I think I am prepared to tell what it was like growing up in Kashmir at the time. (*Writing about Kashmir is not easy*)

The people of Kashmir are caught in between the cross fire. The brunt is on the memory of the local population who reside in the atmosphere of fear in their day today lives. A free for all starts which results in large scale violence, killings, abductions and all that. Many arrested or abducted are subjected to enforced disappearance. There are many whose sons, brothers, husbands and dear ones never returned which has caused a scar on their mental health which is unrepairable. The women whose husbands are subjected to enforced disappearance are not able to cope up with the new development as they can't comprehend whether their loved ones are dead or alive. The impact of such incidents is so strong that it can be noticed in mundane lives. A new word is coined for such women, whose husbands do not return neither any information about their death or life is passed on, are known as half widows because of the uncertainty of the information. The struggle for whereabouts of these missing persons continues. The wait does not end, neither any news comes from their near and dears.

A novel *The Half Widow* by Shafi Ahmad is a novel which acutely depicts the plight of Kashmiris. It portrays the actual image of traumatic wives who are suffering due to the conflict on Kashmir between India and Pakistan. The common masses are innocent but they are trapped in turmoil of fundamentalism and political games. The novel portrays struggle of a widow, Salma, of frontier Kupwara whose husband, Aslam, gets disappeared once upon a time in Kashmir. She goes from pillar to post in search of her

husband but finds no clue at the end of the tunnel and finally she has to live by compromise.

The novel *The Graveyard*, by a 17 years old writer Tawfeeq Wani, is about the lives of youngsters in Kashmir during the uprisings of 2008 and 2012. It depicts the effects of conflict on the emotions and relations of people. The author has used a character named 'Sahil' whose father is missing, considered dead. It is a story which highlights the complexities of life in Kashmir and the difficulties one faces here. Sahil has been described as a boy who is in quest to find the purpose of his life. The plot is dragged along Sahil's quest for his purpose of life.

Nitasha Kaul, through her first novel *Residue*, portrays a story of Leon Ali, who is a young Kashmiri Muslim man who is marked by his identity that which he seeks to give up. He is in a furious world raven by prejudices and boundaries. Leon dreams to achieve many things in his life, but with not much hard work. He always aspires for freedom, and this aspiration for freedom, to determine one's self, is a microcosmic reflection of the suffocation of Kashmiris. Like any Kashmiris, Leon always feels the incompleteness of his historical and personal identity which is marked by loss and longing. He is a character who suffers from identity crisis due to political turmoil. People often underestimate the effect of generationally inherited collective social trauma - what does it mean for young Kashmiris today to inherit separatism, to inherit nostalgia?

These are the inheritances we have for a generation that has seen indifference, atrocity and distanced stance of the world. But the irony is that there are no answers to many of those losses and the missing that Kashmiris face today, most of the mysteries are unsolved. Leon tries, again and again to escape – somewhere, where he won't be faced

with the weight of his history. But, of course, he cannot run away from his own roots which are inbuilt in his mental memory. From being a Kashmiri in India, he becomes a Muslim in Britain, or a foreigner in Germany, unsure of his own identity. His journey and that of his fellow-traveler Keya Raina, raises wider questions about our identity as individuals, recognition in societies, freedom and equality as ideals, and the necessity of living in a long tailed present.

There are many other great writers who are writing or who have written on the same theme of conflict and its ill effects on Kashmiris. The place has not only taken by the novelists but it has been occupied also by the poets, dramatists and short story writers. *Ye kis ka lahoo hai kon mara* by Shabnam Qayoom, *Band Makanas Manz* (*Enclosed House*) by Syed Qayoob Dilkash, *Pagah Shoori Dunyah* (*Tomorrow the World shall Cry*) by Nissar Naseem, *Panun Dood Panen Dugg* (*Our illness our Pain*) by Dr Rafeeq Masood, *Ye Dood kar bali* (*When Shall this Wound Heal*) by Majeed Majazi, *Lafz Lafz Nowah* (*Every word does Mourn*) by Farooq Nazki and *Kani shahar* (*Stony City*) by Bashir Athar, are the different literary genres which deals with the Kashmir conflict. These writings throw the light on the suffered psychology of Kashmiris. Bashir Manzar, Kashmiri poet, writes about the fear that grips a society in the throes of protracted warfare:

Break the pen, spill the ink, burn the paper

Lock your lips, be silent, shhh . . .

Say “I saw nothing” even if you did

Or else have your eyes gouged out

Keep humming eulogies, be silent

It is the season of burying the truth.(*Poetry in Commotion*)

‘Mother I Will Make You Cry Today’ is a heartrending poem by Dr Syeeda Hameed, a writer and Member, Planning Commission of India. The poem paints the tragic death scene of a very young boy who fell prey to the bullets of Indian forces.

On June 30th 2010, Asif Rather age nine ran out of his home in Baramulla in Kashmir to look for his older brother. As he left, he told his mother ‘I am going to make you cry today’. Minutes later he fell victim to shooting by the forces. At the time he was 150 meters from his house. – (*The Indian Express*)

The poem reads as:

He stood at the sunlit door

A nine-year old with tousled hair

Asif Rather, student of class four,

Baramulla, 55 kms from Srinagar

‘Where is Touqeer?’

older brother.

‘Nowhere! You come back now

Here’s tea and last night’s bread

My baby, let me comb your hair’

Outside, the sounds Allah o Akbar

Chanting at once, one thousand strong

‘Mother, I’ll get him back’

‘No child, Touqeer is big, he’s with friends

My youngest, you're too small
See here is cream skimmed off the milk
Now come, you make me angry'
The little form at the sunlit door
The little form at the sunlit door
Ran out, unheeding
The face appeared, smiling at the window pane
'Mother, you cant be angry; I'll make you cry today'
And he was gone
Outside the milling crowds of tall and lanky youth
And one lost boy in a forest of long legs
And long sticks cut from poplar trees
Some hands clutch roadside stones
'Touqeer!' he called out
Was that his blue shirt?
But there were hundreds in blue
He felt the tears well up
Quick jammed with grimy fists.
He stood confused, afraid, ashamed
'I should have had the milk and last night's bread
So hungry and so far from Ma..
But Touqeer, where's he?'
And then it burst

The tear gas shell tore his tender flesh
 'Allah' he cried his small hand warding off
 the evil that drew blood.
 The crowd stood still
 A dozen hands reached out
 To hold the falling body
 His bullet broken neck
 Gently rested on still hands
 Of weeping boys
 The tousled head of hair
 Blood drenched, hung in strands
 On a shining forehead
 And twisted in the sinews of my mind
 Are seven words
 (Seven lines of Quran's first Surah)
 'Mother I will make you cry today'
 How many mothers of my Kashmir
 The place where I was born
 Will cry today? (*Kafila*)

There is no denying of the fact that a good number of contemporary writers writing on Kashmir conflict have influenced essentially by Aga Shahid Ali- his themes of trauma and lamentations. Justin Hardy who spends a good time in Kashmir, her novel the *Wonderer House* is set in Kashmir against the background of political unrest. Hardy

says,” Agha Shahid Ali put Kashmir on the world literary map inspiring a whole generation of young Kashmiris”(*Poetry in Commotion*). Agha Shahid Ali was essentially a Kashmiri. Although he lived in a foreign land yet he remained deeply rooted to his homeland. He could never turn a blind eye to the plight of a common man. *The Country without a Post Office* is a true picture of wounds and scars which Kashmiris have been suffering from ages, “His poetry is like canvas on which he draws an imaginary of Kashmir albeit bruised, besieged but its mesmerizing landscape and unique cultural remains an eternal alter ego for him” (*Kashmir Life*).

His speaks of the pain of fleeing a beloved home and of the loss of close family to violence and grief. His poetry does not show only the pain of Kashmiri Muslim community but in his poetry he also mourns the exile of Pandits and many things which they took with themselves. His poem “Farewell” clearly shows such kind of nightmare which kept him haunting all the life. The poem reads as:

At a certain point I lost track of you.
 You needed me. You needed to perfect me:
 In your absence you polished me into the Enemy.
 Your history gets in the way of my memory.
 I am everything you lost. Your perfect enemy.
 Your memory gets in the way of my memory: ...
 There is nothing to forgive. You won't forgive me.
 I hid my pain even from myself; I revealed my pain only to myself.
 There is everything to forgive. You can't forgive me.
 If only somehow you could have been mine,

what would not have been possible in the world? (*The Country Without a Post Office* 8)

In “The Ghat of the Only World”: Agha Shahid Ali in Brooklyn”, a poignant obituary, Amitav Gosh says:

He had a special passion for the food of his region, one variant of it in particular: “Kashmiri food in the Pandit style.” I asked him once why this was so important to him and he explained that it was because of a recurrent dream, in which all the Pandits had vanished from the valley of Kashmir and their food had become extinct. This was a nightmare that haunted him and he returned to it again and again, in his conversation and his poetry. (*The Ghat of the Only World”: Agha Shahid Ali in Brooklyn*)

In *The Country without a Post Office*, Agha Shahid Ali’s sense of loss and longing reaches its climax, where Kashmir remains through and through the folks of his attention. This whole anthology is a replete with the longing and the cries of loss. It brings on forefront the feelings of the people their pain, suffering and anguish. They are still waiting for the day when their pain would come to an end, whatever the people of Kashmir have experienced in the past decades, the bloodshed, losing the dear and losing the peace for which Kashmir was known. In 1990’s for seven months, there was no mail delivered in Kashmir, because of violence. A friend of the poet’s father kept watched the post office from his house, a mountain had piled up unpatched in the post office One day. One day he happened to pick a letter from the pile which had come from Ali’s father. He had mourned the devastation of Kashmir in the letter that has visited on his childhood

home, Kashmir which once called the paradise on earth In the poem “I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight” he writes:

Don't tell my father I have died, ' he says,
 And I follow him through blood on the road
 and hundreds of pairs of shoes the mourners
 left behind, as they ran from the funeral,
 victims of the firing. From windows we hear
 grieving mothers, and snow begins to fall
 on us, like ash. Black on edges of flames,
 it cannot extinguish the neighborhoods,
 the homes set ablaze by midnight soldiers.

Kashmir is burning:

By that dazzling light... (*The country without a Post Office* 11)

A post office usually symbolizes permanence and lends certain meaning to the identity of a person and the absence of a post office, contrary to it, means the displacement of an existence. Therefore the poet yearns for home. Displacement and homelessness throw the poet into the ditch of despair which could clearly be seen in the major poems of *The Country without a Post Office*. Shahid rediscovers his Kashmir connection and presents an unbiased image of the plight of the people of the vale before the world. He exhibits a true image of conflict ridden Kashmir from the days of Haba Khatun to the days of recent violence. He offers a series of speaking sketches of terror and assault. In predominantly elegiac tone, Ali draws parallels between Sarajevo and ancient Greece and offers a series of speaking sketches of terror and torture.

On January 19, 1990, the biggest ever exodus of people happened since the partition of India. The minority Hindus of Kashmir, Kashmiri Pandits, fled the valley leaving behind their homes and homeland to save themselves from persecution at the hands of terrorists. Around three lakh Kashmiri Pandits were displaced due to militancy in Kashmir valley. The killing and forced exile of pundits from the Kashmir valley marks a deep scar on the mind of Aga Shahid Ali. In many of his poems he mourns the loss of this intellectual community. The deep mental wounds are speaking volumes in his poem “I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight”:

We see men removing statues from temples.

We beg them, ‘Who will protect us if you leave?’

They don’t answer, they just disappear

on the road to the plains, clutching the gods. (*The Country without a Post Office* 11)

Towards the end of this poem he sighs, “I’ve tied a knot, with green thread at Shah Hamdan, to be, united only when the atrocities, are stunned by your jeweled return” (*The Country without a Post Office* 12). Shah Hamdan is a shrine in Kashmir where both Hindus and Muslims tie knots with green thread. It is a kind of ritual which is supposed to bring peace and love between the two communities. Though Ali writes about loss yet he does not lose hope. In all his writings, he ends on a positive note. He is hopeful that one day everything will be normal. He was much attached to Kashmir and its people and the painful exile of pundits kept him haunting all his life. The traumatic effect of pundits exile has been clearly shown by his conversation with his close friend Amitav Gosh:

He was lying prone on his back, shielding his eyes with his fingers. Suddenly he broke off and reached for my hand. “I wish all this had not happened,” he said. “This dividing of the country, the divisions between people—Hindu, Muslim, Muslim, Hindu—you can’t imagine how much I hate it. It makes me sick. (*The Ghat of the Only World*: Agha Shahid Ali in Brooklyn)

It is evident that one of the main impulses behind his such kind of poetry is the author’s need to cope with the traumatic past experiences that were fully assimilated and have continued to haunt her ever since. His poetry is crowded with various individual and collective traumatic stories such as in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud explains that, after the period of latency, the traumatized subject starts to repeat compulsively the original traumatic experience (36-38). Dominick LaCapra takes up this idea by formulating various symptoms of this compulsion to repeat or “act out” (LaCapra 22), such as nightmares, a general state of anxiety and unknown fears that can lead to self- mutilation and other forms of self-punishment. During this phase, the subject’s sense of temporality becomes distorted, so that “in acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene” (LaCapra 21).

Aga Shahid Ali’s poetry left a reader singed with its cries, its words of utter desolation, that feeling of absolute hopelessness when life itself resembles a graveyard.

The dead may carry no weapons, but death is the most powerful statement:

Again I’ve returned to this country
 where a minaret has been entombed.
 Someone soaks the wicks of clay lamps

in mustard oil, each night climbs steps
to read messages scratched on planets.

His finger print cancel blank stamps
in that archive for letters with doomed

addresses, each house buried or empty. (*The Country Without a Post Office* 36). Then he goes on to give reason for the emptiness, “Because so many fled, ran away, and became refugees there in the plains, where they must now will a final dewfall to turn the mountains to glass” (*The Country without a post office* 36). The words strike a chord with anybody who has read or heard about the displacement of Kashmiris in their own country, they alternately hurt and assuage. When Mr. Ali became a finalist for the National Book Award, the poet laureate of Maryland, Michael Collier, wrote:

As a Kashmiri, Ali is aware of the historical vicissitudes that breed violence and hatred in people who once lived together peacefully. His poems speak to the enduring qualities of love and friendship. With elegance and wit, they also speak to the difficulty of maintaining such relationships. (*The New York Times*)

In Aga Shahid Ali, poetry becomes a privileged means for telling the truth about trauma and, therefore, for integrating traumatic experience into the self. Or to put it in the words of Wallace Stevens, poetry is “a violence from within that protects us from violence from without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality”. (*The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words*). We can compare him with an American poet Emily Dickenson because while singing Dickenson as a poet of trauma, Albert Gelpi says, “Dickinson’s poetry represents a complex psyche struggling to press her inner

conflicts and contraries to clarity from moment to moment through the creative and reflective act of language” (Gelpi 222) . All this can be seen in the poetry of Aga Shahid Ali. His inner conflicts which find a larger space in his poetry whether it is the conflict of his home land, sudden death of his mother, his hyphenated identity or rootlessness, all of them have caused a deep wound on his mind which compels a reader to locate him on the ruthless shores of trauma.

Aga Shahid Ali’s love for her mother is beyond imagination. Her death was a great shock to Shahid which he mourns in his poem “Lenox Hill” about which the American poet Anthony Hecht once remarked that Shahid deserved to be in the Guinness Book of World Records for having written three canzones—more than any other poet.

...Mother,
 they asked me, *So how’s the writing?* I answered *My mother*
is my poem. What did they expect? For no verse
 sufficed except the promise, fading, of Kashmir
 and the cries that reached you from the cliffs of Kashmir
 (across fifteen centuries) in the hospital. *Kashmir,*
she’s dying! How her breathing drowns out the universe
 as she sleeps in Amherst. (*The Veiled Suite* 248)

The poem reflects the unbearable natures of the event and its witness. In the poem the poet goes beyond the traumatic experience:

For compared to my grief for you, what are those of Kashmir,
 and what (I close the ledger) are the griefs of the universe

when I remember you—beyond all accounting—O my mother? (*The Veiled Suite* 249)

Caruth argues that, “traumatic narratives” is “the oscillation between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the unbearable nature of its survival”(Caruth 7). He was completely traumatized due the sudden death of his mother. As it has been rightly pointed out by Amitav Gosh in his famous obituary, “The Ghat of the Only World”: Agha Shahid Ali in Brooklyn”:

For Shahid, the passage of time produced no cushioning from the shock of the loss of his mother: he re-lived it over and over again until the end. Often he would interrupt himself in mid-conversation: “I can’t believe she’s gone; I still can’t believe it.” The week before his death, on waking one morning, he asked his family where his mother was and whether it was true that she was dead. On being told that she was, he wept as though he were living afresh through the event. (*The Ghat of the Only World*”: *Agha Shahid Ali in Brooklyn*)

Freud influentially argued that there are two major ways in which we deal with loss: mourning and melancholia. Mourning involves a necessary situating trauma in temporal and social context while in melancholy; the lost object possesses the ego completely: “in mourning, it is the world which has become poor and empty, in melancholia, it is the ego itself” (Freud 246). “The process of mourning”, according to Freud, “involves the making of trauma as a thing of the past and beginning to live again without endlessly attaching oneself to the lost object” (Freud 290).

Nostalgia is a weak word in terms of his heart rending poetry. His words are wedded to the grave sufferings of his homeland people or to his own self. *The Half-Inch Himalayas* and *The Country Without a Post office* are directly linked to the politically volatile nature of his native Kashmir. Through these poems, Shahid gives a scathing yet beautiful account of the trauma/nightmare of the 90's Kashmir when the blood-dimmed tide of a violent history submerged the paradise into death and destruction. Clair Chambers is too of a similar opinion:

Shahid had a striking and firm commitment to literary aesthetics, and he is often analyzed in relation to form. While this is undoubtedly important, and his efforts to popularize the *ghazal* form in the English language have been particularly effective...Instead, I want to foreground Shahid's political message, which has sometimes been posthumously soft-pedalled by critics.(*The Last Saffron*)

Aga Shahid Ali is not less than Russian/Polish poet Osip Mandelstam who too wrote the literature of protest and conflict. Shahid says: “He reinvents Petersburg (I, Srinagar), an imaginary homeland, filling it, closing it, shutting (myself) in it” (*The Country without a Post Office* 1). He paints the red and bruised image of his homeland in his poetry which clearly shows that the bleeding paradise haunts him too much, “Srinagar was under curfew/The identity pass may or may not have helped in the crackdown. Son after son- never to return from the night of torture-was taken away (*The Country without a Post Office* 2).

As violence and fear dominate life in Kashmir, every writer there tries his pen to locate the trauma ridden souls of Kashmir. People of Kashmir write poetry to express

their pain, show their resentment against the brutal operation, and document the trauma of hidden tragedies. Farooq Nazki has won a Sahitya Academy award (India's top literary prize) for his moving and sad collection of poetry, *Naar Hutun Kazil Wanus (The Forests of Soot are on Fire)* Nazki's poetry is an expression of pain which he feels at the sight of the blood-drenched beauty of Kashmir. He mourns the fear that led to the mass exodus of Kashmiri Hindus, forced to leave their homes as the fundamentalists took over Kashmir's separatist movement, by talking about the tragedy of his childhood Hindu friend and neighbor:

You Know?

Your mother Kamli has run away from Kashmir,

She took along with her silver plate,

that you and I ate from,

the food that she laid,

She fled Kashmir, fearing me,

You Know?(*Poetry in Commotion*)

No Kashmiri writer could close his eyes to the tragedy of Kashmir or its after effects on the psyche of a common Kashmiri. Like many other writers Aga Shahid Ali too draws very vivid and a clear image of his oppressed homeland "Srinagar hunches like a wild cat: lonely sentries, wretched in bunkers at the city's bridges, far from their homes in the plains, licensed to kill". (*The Country without a Post Office* 3). His poems expose the uncertainty and hopelessness of life and the unease in the streets of Kashmir:

I am writing to you from your far-off country. Far even from us who live here. Where you no longer are. Everyone carries his address in his pocket

At least his body will reach home. Rumors break on their way to us in the city. But word still reaches us from border towns: Men are forced to stand barefoot in snow waters all night. The women are alone inside. Soldiers smash radios and televisions. With bare hands they tear our houses to pieces. (*The Country without a Post Office 29*).

Although Ali lived distances away from his homeland yet he remained emotionally attached to it. Even on his death bed he continued giving expression to the trauma of his native land. He has preserved every wounded figure of Kashmir in his poetry of protest. No doubt he was very far away from his Kashmir, but still he succeeds in observing accuracy and exactness of the situation. In “Dear Shahid” he speaks of the ill fate of Kashmiri youngsters which still carries truth in Kashmir:

You must have heard Rizwan was killed. Rizwan: Guardian of the Gates of Paradise. Only eighteen years old. Yesterday at Hideout Café (everyone there asks about you), a doctor- who had just treated a sixteen-year-old boy released from an interrogation center- said: *I want to ask the fortune-tellers: Did anything in his line of Fate reveal that the webs of his hands would be cut with a knife?*(*The Country without a Post Office 29*)

The character Rizwan symbolises the whole young generation of Kashmiri youth who still live the life of pain and agony. The uprising of 2010 was a deadly uncertainty in Kashmir which took more than 110 lives of innocent Kashmiri people. Most of them were below the age of 20 years. The poem “Dear Shahid” is a kind of prophecy, all the victims of the uprising remind us of Rizwan. “On June 11, as Tufail Ahmad Matto headed home from a tutoring center where he was studying for the medical entrance

exam, a tear gas canister fired from close range bashed a hole in his skull. He died almost instantly” (*The New York Times*).

Such horrible images of trauma and pain can be found in the poetry of Shahid on every turn. He has portrays the strife in the poem “I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight” and the surreal meeting with the victim Rizwan makes the reader speechless with emotion:

Don't tell my father I have died, he says,
and I follow him through blood on the road
and hundreds of pairs of shoes the mourners
left behind, as they ran from the funeral,
victims of the firing. From windows we hear
grieving mothers...(*The Country without a Post Office 11*)

The poem “ I see Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight” is a scathing yet tragic enactment of those countless youth who entered the notorious interrogation centre at Gupkar road, never to return again: “From Zero Bridge/a shadow chased by searchlights is running away to find its body”. ...Drippings from a suspended burning tire /are falling on the back of a prisoner/the naked boy screaming, “I know nothing... (*The Country without a Post Office 11*). To quote a well known English Professor from Jamia Milai Islamia University, Nishat Zaidi, would be appropriate. In her insightful research paper, “Center/Margin Dialects and the Poetic Form: The Ghazals of Aga Shahid” she says:

He not only displays a very clear and close understanding of the politics in his homeland Kashmir, but also raises a strong voice of protest against the political repression, the weak political will on the part of the Government

and the plight of innocent people dying in the Valley. (Center/Margin
Dialects and the Poetic Form: The Ghazals of Aga Shahid 57)

He does not only resist against the brutal oppression of authority but also raises a banner of revolt against it. He is such a dreamer who does not lose hope but rather hopes for the return of peace and a beautiful tomorrow for his homeland. He believes that one day truth shall win over the falsehood and his motherland would once more rejoice the peace and prosperity:

We shall meet again, in Srinagar,
By the gates of the Villa of Peace,
Our hands blossoming into fists
Until the soldiers return the keys
and disappear. Again we'll enter our last world, the first that vanished
In our absence from the broken city. (*The Country Without a Post Office*
30)

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