

Tracing the Muffled Screams from a Lost Paradise: Exploring the Experimental Narrative Strategies and Human Rights Concerns in the 21st-century Kashmiri Literature

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on six contemporary Kashmiri writers— Salman Rushdie, Basharat Peer, Shahnaz Basheer, Mirza Waheed, Siddharth Gigoo and Rahul Pandita —who share common concerns regarding the horrifying human rights violations in the Kashmir valley during the recent decades of the postcolonial era. In the light of the fundamental tenets of literary journalism, the article contextualises and elucidates how these Kashmiri writers have deftly employed the narrative styles and discourse strategies generally associated with literary journalism in their works, published under the categories of memoir and fiction, for exposing and resisting abuses of the human rights of helpless common Kashmiris. Highlighting the analogies between the published reports by human rights organisations and the literary narratives by Kashmiri writers, this article argues that the Kashmiri literature of the 21st-century is a recorded testimony of the atrocities suffered by Kashmiri masses in the postcolonial era that gives voice to their popular sentiments and collective predicaments with the intent of reinforcing the human rights claims of the subdued Kashmiri people.

Keywords: Kashmir issue, Terrorism, Atrocities, Common folk, Literary Journalism, Human Rights.

INTRODUCTION

Kashmir, renowned for its heavenly natural beauty, has been a disputed territory and a conflict zone between Indian and Pakistani Governments ever since 1947. At the time of partition, the hereditary ruler of the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir Maharaja Hari Singh, chose neither to join India nor consented to join Pakistan. But in October 1947, when frontier tribesmen supported by the Pakistan Army invaded Kashmir, putting in peril the sovereignty of Kashmir's princely monarch, he hastily signed the instrument of accession with India that eventually led to the intervention of Indian Defense Forces in this region. Later, insurgency and militancy erupted in the Kashmir valley around 1989 and culminated in the exodus of the majority of Hindu families from the valley. The ensuing counter-terrorism by the Indian Armed Forces involved arbitrary excesses as per reports from numerous human rights organisations. Helplessly sandwiched between the terrorist groups and the

military, the common folk of Kashmir have incessantly been at the receiving end in every way. The perceptions, concerns and predicaments of ordinary Kashmiri people hardly find any place in the official discourses or government-sponsored narratives that find it convenient to undermine or disregard the sentiments of commoners. For several decades, the voices of the ordinary people of Kashmir (including both its Hindu and Muslim populace) have been kept muffled by the iron-fists of authoritarian armed forces as well as terrorist organisations (active in this region) with equal ferocity. Under such repressive circumstances, Kashmiri literature has become a viable medium for articulating the real public opinions and expressing the muffled concerns of the Kashmiri natives.

Young Kashmiri writers like Basharat Peer, Shahnaz Basheer, Mirza Waheed, Siddharth Gigoo and Rahul Pandita have been successful in faithfully documenting the horrifying human rights violations inflicted for decades upon thousands of Kashmiris, by experimenting with narrative styles ascribed to “literary journalism”, a mode of writing that combines journalistic reportage with fiction writer’s stylistic strategies. In his critical essay Josh Roiland (2015:71) specifically defines literary journalism as a “form of nonfiction writing that adheres to all of the reportorial and truth-telling covenants of conventional journalism, while employing rhetorical and storytelling techniques more commonly associated with fiction”. At separate dimensions, purely journalistic accounts and literary discourses wield different impacts on readers or audience. A piece of news merely informs while literary pieces focus primarily on aesthetics and rhetoric, but the hybridisation of the two forms — journalistic and literary— dishes out narratives grounded in real incidents that inform and simultaneously emote. Norman Sims (1984:4) postulates in this regard “Literary journalists bring themselves into their stories to greater or lesser degrees and confess to human failings and emotions. Through their eyes, we watch ordinary people in crucial contexts”. The potential of 21st-century Kashmiri literature to champion the fundamental human rights of Kashmiri natives can thus be attributed substantially to the very reason that the newly emerging Kashmiri authors have modeled their discourses on the narrative formulae of borrowing techniques from literary journalism, for recounting real incidents in the narrative form instead of giving it the shape of a fact-filled text. A mere fact-filled text simply informs, while a narrative discourse puts an incident into perspective enabling a reader of vicarious experiences, generating cognitive empathy in the psyche of readers towards the circumstances or characters that the narrative focuses upon.

Booker-winning author Sir Salman Rushdie, who himself is of Kashmiri descent, can be considered a forerunner of this innovative form of Kashmiri writings, for the reason that his hefty novel *Shalimar the Clown* (Rushdie, 2005) delineates the verifiable real-world incidents associated with Kashmir, in a journalistic vein. The trend of formulating a hybridised narrative structure inclusive of both fictional and journalistic writing styles — that Rushdie set forth with this book — further evolved with the literary ventures of budding Kashmiri writers, in the more recent times. Although published under the category of fiction, Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* is replete with numerous journalistic accounts of real-world atrocities that have taken place in Kashmir after the termination of British control. The forced migration of Kashmiri Hindu-Pandits from the valley due to the onslaught of terrorists has been narrated by Rushdie in a typical documentary vein, but with a blend of thought-provoking authorial commentary that evokes sympathy and pity. Narrative voice plays a vital role in this process of telling. When an author speaks directly to his readers through an authorial aside, as in the case of Rushdie here, he/she not just offers a piece of information about a

narrative incident but also hints at interpreting those narrative incidents with subjectivity, in sync with the authorial point of view. This is something media reports avoid usually, particularly the newspapers; while literary journalism tends to remain profoundly under the impact of “the personality of the writer, the individual and intimate voice of a whole, candid person” (Kramer, 1995:26).

The plot of *Shalimar the Clown* evinces pronounced authorial engagement with the fictional story that is liberally interspersed with authorial asides through which Rushdie keeps directly addressing the readers throughout the book. Rushdie’s repeated use of the term ‘why’ in the given passage from *Shalimar the Clown* is a narrative contrivance to raise pertinent questions in a subtle manner, at the inefficiency as well as apathy of the administrative authorities in handling the situations that resulted in the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from their native land. Rushdie (2005: 369) writes:

Three hundred and fifty thousand Pandits, almost the entire Pandit population of Kashmir, fled from their homes and headed south to the refugee camps where they would rot, like bitter fallen apples, like the unloved, undead dead they had become. Why was that thousands of the displaced died because of inadequate food and shelter why was that maybe five thousand deaths because of intense heat and humidity because of snake bites and gastroenteritis and dengue fever and stress diabetes and kidney ailments and tuberculosis and psychoneurosis and there was not a single health survey conducted by the government, why was that the Pandits of Kashmir were left to rot in their slum camps, why was that why was that why was that why was that why was that.

John S. Bak (2017: 221) states that “this type of indirect journalism/reportage is potentially more effective as a socio-political weapon than the adoption of more traditional journalistic techniques since it is precisely its literary quality that helps to deliver the truth while contributing a certain amount of beauty to the piece”. The aforementioned passage from *Shalimar the Clown* exemplifies how a narrative assumes new dimensions and much forceful appeal when a real incident is reported by utilising the rhetorical devices conventionally used in creative writing forms like fiction.

Rushdie adopts an even-handed approach in revealing how the ordinary citizens of Kashmir have been caught up in the pressures from both military and militants. *Shalimar the Clown* realistically postulates the unfortunate scenario of ruthless torture of helpless Kashmiris by either of the two. Through the depiction of a fictional Army General named Hammirdev Kachhwaha, who believes that “every Muslim in Kashmir should be considered a militant and bullet is the only solution”(Rushdie, 2005:363), the reader obtains an accurately painted pen-portrait of those biased officials who have been arbitrarily ill-treating the Kashmiri Muslims behind the facade of counter-terrorism activities. The most profoundly outrageous and meticulously conceived scenes of this literary work are those that depict the humiliation, murder, rape and destruction of a fictitious village named Pachigam at the hands of army men. Charged with the accusation of harboring extremists, this village is doomed to suffer destruction and bear the full brunt of the shameless inhuman acts of the Indian Armed Forces. The author-narrator questions the justification of such methods of counter-terrorism executed by the armed forces, deployed by the Indian government for protecting and safeguarding the natives of the valley. John Hartsock (2000:242) points out that “different critical perspectives result in different interpretations of reality” and that “the literary

journalist personalizes his writing”. As a conventional piece of news, the following passage from *Shalimar the Clown*, would have merely been reported with a tone of disinterested apathy as just another unfortunate incident, but by adhering to a peculiar questionnaire style, Rushdie (2005:384-5) vehemently highlights the unjust, inhumane nature of such acts and implicitly denounces the lack of accountability on part of the government that allows such gruesome misuse of power by armed forces, thereby manifesting his personal empathy towards the victims:

Who lit that fire? Who burned that orchard? Who shot those brothers who laughed their whole lives long? Who killed the sarpanch? Who broke his hands? Who broke his arms? Who broke his ancient neck? Who shackled those men? Who made those men disappear? Who shot those boys? Who shot those girls? Who smashed that house? Who killed that youth? Who clubbed that grandmother? Who knifed that aunt? Who broke that old man’s nose? Who broke that young girl’s heart? Who killed that lover? Who shot his fiancée?

Zeroing in on this discursive strategy adopted by Rushdie, it seems evident that his narrative resonates in essence, with the spirit of literary journalism despite technically being classified as fiction. It fictionally replicates numerous factual incidents from real-world in such a subjectively immersed manner that it evolves into a narrative capable of evoking humanitarian concerns. The fictional passage from *Shalimar the Clown* is analogous to actual incidents of rapes committed allegedly by army units, the details of which have been notified in the report published by a reputed non-governmental organization, Human Rights Watch (1993: 91-2) which candidly asserts: “Reports of rape by Indian security forces in Kashmir emerged soon after the government’s crackdown began in January 1990. Despite evidence that army and paramilitary forces were engaging in widespread rape, few of the incidents were ever investigated by the authorities”. This report mentions categorically an incident of gross violations of human rights:

On the night of October 10, 1992, an army unit of the 22nd Grenadiers entered the village of Chak Saidapora, about four kilometers south of the town of Shopian, district Pulwama, on a search operation for suspected militants. During the operation, at least six and probably nine women, including an eleven-year-old girl and a 60-year-old woman, were gang-raped by several of the army soldiers. (1993, 98)

It is evident that the fictional incident narrated in *Shalimar the Clown* by Rushdie, is in fact grounded in a real-world occurrence. While *Shalimar the Clown* does not fall squarely in the category of literary journalism and is technically classified in the genre of fiction, its narrative manifests commonalities both of discourse pattern and fundamental intent with works of literary journalism. Salman Rushdie resorts to the narrative technique of commingling reportage, literary journalism and fictitious yarns in *Shalimar the Clown*, lending it a flair of journalistic authenticity saturated with subtle aesthetic appeal that evokes sympathy towards the ordinary rustic populace of Kashmir. Literary journalism techniques of writing thus provide tools to resist atrocities through exposition, as is done by Rushdie.

Another writer who made a significant contribution to 21st-century Kashmiri literature is Basharat Peer(2008), whose book *Curfewed Night* is a memoir that bears testimony to the author's

vicissitudes of growing up in a conflict-ridden Kashmir through the politically volatile phase extending from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. Born and raised in the Kashmir valley, Basharat Peer not only had first-hand experiences of gruesome terrorist activities and the grotesque behaviour of security forces towards ordinary civilians of Kashmir, but he could also comprehend the psychological consequences of these haunting memories upon Kashmiri-youth, for he was an insider and himself a victim of the events taking place in the Kashmir valley. Revealing the lived experiences of his fellow-men with a sense of solidarity, Basharat Peer incorporates the details gathered during interviews with teenage Kashmiri boys, like Shafi, Ansar, Hussein, etc, who were tortured during interrogation by security forces in 'Papa 2', an infamous interrogation camp of Srinagar (Kashmir). Thread-bare accounts of the tortures they were subjected to are narrated by Basharat Peer like a genuine and faithful journalist who has a penchant for safeguarding the human rights of common folk:

The floor was bare. Smears of blood blemished the whitewashed walls. ...They made you sit on a chair, tied you with ropes. One soldier held your neck, two others pulled your legs in different directions, and three more rolled a heavy concrete roller over your legs. They asked questions and if you didn't answer, they burnt you with cigarettes. ... But the worst was when they inserted the copper wire into the penis and gave electric shocks. It destroyed many lives. Many could not marry after that.(Peer 2008, 143)

The Report of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which on record claims that "there have been persistent claims of torture by security forces in Kashmir, especially during the 1990s and early 2000s" (2019, 28), bears authentic testimony to the narrative of Basharat Peer. *Curfewed Night* also calls the attention of readers to the plight of those widows whose husbands were arrested and then never released and mothers whose sons were picked and beaten to death. Peer has very sensitively portrayed the heart-wrenching misery of a helpless mother whose son is used by the army as a human bomb:

In the courtyard of the building next to it, she saw the arrested boys...."I saw Bilal from a distance but Shafi was missing... I ran towards Bilal, grabbed him by an arm and began walking away with him." Bilal hugged her and said that the soldiers had sent Shafi inside the militant's house with a mine in his hands. . . . She shouted at the soldier and grabbed Bilal's hand. He said, Let me go, mother. They must have already killed Shafi, let me die too... She held Bilal in her arms and they cried for Shafi. (Peer 2008, 168-9)

The predicament of a couple named Rashid and Mubeena of Chawalgam village whose marriage procession was attacked by paramilitary forces is also narrated in *Curfewed Night* with the precision of reportage:

Rashid saw two of them grab his brother by the neck and drag him to the roadside, where they began beating him. Rashid was yet to realize what had happened to his cousin when he was hit in the back; doctors later found five bullets there. Three bullets hit Mubeena in her shoulder, back, and hip. . . . Mubeena stood along with her bridesmaid and others by the roadside. She was bleeding, when a group of soldiers dragged her and the chambermaid to the mustard fields beside the road. An

unknown number of BSF men raped the two injured women. “I could not even remember how many they were. I lost my senses,” Mubeena said. (Peer, 2008, 153-4)

Such descriptions narrated in *Curfewed Night* evince striking similarities with the published findings of Human Rights Watch (1993:95), which claim that "The security forces have committed rape as a form of retaliation against civilians, most of whom are believed to be sympathetic to the militants. Such reprisals have occurred frequently after militant attacks on security patrols". Such resemblance between the narratives by Basharat Peer and published reports by Human Rights Watch indicates the authenticity of Kashmiri literature as testimonial narrative, a characteristic feature associated with literary journalism. Literary journalism has been called “creative nonfiction” by Lee Gutkind (2012) As Gutkind (2012: 23) elucidates, “the word ‘creative’ refers to the use of literary craft, the technique fiction writers, playwrights and poets employ to present nonfiction — factually accurate prose about real people and events in a compelling, vivid, dramatic manner”. Basharat Peer (2008) does the same in his memoir, creating a book that not just serves as a repository of his personal memories but rather evolves into a testimonio, bearing witness to the shared lived experiences of Kashmiri youngsters like him.

Shahnaz Bashir (2014) and Mirza Waheed (2011) also deserve to be counted among the most promising budding Kashmiri writers of the 21st-century. Although published as Fiction, *The Half Mother* and *The Collaborator* are profoundly grounded in the real world, offering an insight into the troubled psyche of the victims of atrocities. These novels defy the dividing lines between imaginary and real to present stories grounded in the real world, attempting to tackle the question of human rights violations in Kashmir through a creative lens. Bashir (2014) evokes concerns towards recurring cases of enforced disappearances in the Kashmir valley in his novel *The Half Mother*. This book realistically depicts the plight and trauma borne by the thousands of helpless grieving mothers, whose children disappeared in the ongoing conflict and have not been located to date. Bashir's fiction is set in the 1990s, an era marked by a series of human rights crimes including the incarceration of young civilian men under the slightest pretext or suspicion of supporting separatist designs. Bashir's novel *The Half Mother* depicts the nuances of military arbitrariness towards helpless rustic women of Kashmir who are cursed to live as half wives or half mothers after the extrajudicial arrests and forced disappearances of their husbands or sons. These mothers suffer from the dilemma of being unclear if the missing male members of their families are still alive or have died, for no clarity is offered by the administrative authorities who arrest these men.

Centering on a fictional character Haleema, whose only son Imran is picked up by the troops, the book details realistically how during the 1990s, young Kashmiri boys were arrested by security forces but never released. Haleema's fictional story reverberates beyond her individual story and evolves as a testimonial narrative of all those Kashmiri mothers' traumatic experiences whose children have disappeared after being detained in the name of interrogation by military officials. *The Half Mother* is thus a novelistic adaptation of real-life events.

While it is incumbent upon journalists, in general, to report incidents with an objective disinterested stance, Tom Wolfe (1972: 7) observes that literary journalists “write journalism that would read like a novel”. They base their narratives on verifiable facts gathered through extensive research but their

reporting has “an aesthetic dimension” (Wolfe, 1972:8) which enables such writers to move their readers emotionally along with delivering a piece of information from an authorial perspective. The fictional works of Shahnaz Bashir and Mirza Waheed successfully depict not only these unfortunate facts but also assign their narratives with the capability of stimulating readers’ emotions.

Waheed (2011) sets his novel *The Collaborator* in the Kashmiri village of Nowgam, near the Line of Control (LOC). The narrative becomes a microcosm of the lives of village folks forced to bear the brunt of cross-border tensions. Set at the early peak of the separatist movement in 1993, the story is narrated through an unnamed 17-year-old adolescent boy from Nowgam, whose four friends Hussain, Asfaq, Gul and Mohammad, one by one, quietly cross the LOC (Line of Control) to be part of terrorist organisations. Consequently, the family members of disappeared boys (suspected to have joined the terrorists) are tortured by the Indian Army. Though constructed fictionally, passages as the one cited here manifest the inhumane torture of rustic Kashmiri boys during military interrogation:

He was made to pee on an electric heater while they threw ice-cold water over him; they pierced a red-hot knitting needle through his penis and then gave him electric shocks; they stuffed a bamboo cane with hot chili powder and thrust it up to his anus and then broke the cane; they made him drink their collective urine after keeping him thirsty for days; they ran a cricket roller over his feet and knees... no, they let loose their big dogs on him and that was the point when he broke, for he had always been scared of dogs”. (Waheed 2011, 186)

Such fictional episodes tread the bridge between fictional narratives and reliable journalistic reporting, for they inform the readers about verifiable real-world facts through thinly veiled fictitious plots, settings and characters; thereby appealing to the moral conscience of readers and evoking empathy towards those unfortunate Kashmiris whose lived experiences these novels portray. While pure journalistic narratives could have simply informed with disinterested objectivity and pure imaginative fiction could have seemed non-reliable, literary journalism techniques make the stories grounded firmly in real-world scenarios and intensify their ability to emote, immerse and connect with the readers in ways that conventional journalism can never do. The ‘personal engagement’ of the authors with all those real-world people and real-life circumstances that they attempt at portraying through these fictionally crafted stories stands out as the core factor for the credibility of these two novels.

Being natives of Kashmir, all these authors (with the exception of Salman Rushdie) have experienced first-hand the consequences of terrorism and counter-terrorism activities and have hence been intensely engaged with the stories they tell through their books. All through these narratives of violence and human sufferings, there run subtle undertones of inherent appeals for making justice accessible to these multitudes of men and women who have suffered incessantly for years. Nearly all the horrifying incidents portrayed or narrated by these writers are based on journalistic research and news-gathering, but it is to the credit of rhetorical devices and literary aesthetics that journalistic accounts get transformed into trauma-memoirs possessing stupendous evocative intensity, inviting ethical response from a global readership. In this context, Pramod K. Nayar (2016: 11) has argued that “human rights campaigns also require that stories — especially of

rights being denied — be told.” Nayar (2016:12) seems to create a theoretical premise for the whistle-blower role of these books in exposing the appalling reality of human rights violations in Kashmir, as “the idea of human dignity can only be highlighted implicitly, by pointing to inverse images of corporeal unmaking and abuse.”

The cruel irony of the Kashmir situation is that it has two different versions, which give the semblance of being dichotomous stances or perceptions, but intrinsically testify to the same tragic reality. One version is by Muslim Kashmiri writers, focusing primarily on atrocities claimed to have been committed by Armed forces from the standpoint of the majority Muslim community of Kashmir, while the other version is presented by Kashmiri Pandit writers, belonging to the minority Hindu community.

The Kashmiri Pandits have been the primary targets of separatist terrorist activities and were forced to leave their native land around 1989-90 in large numbers. Siddhartha Gigoo (2011) and Rahul Pandita (2013) have effectively used their books to reveal the trauma of being targeted by terrorists and the ensuing exodus that nearly devastated the Pandit community of Kashmir. In *The Garden of Solitude*, Gigoo (2011) realistically documents the nuanced details of communal radicalisation of Kashmir, eruption of insurgency leading to gruesome terrorist attacks on the Kashmiri-Pandit community, their forced exodus from the Kashmir valley and the traumatic impacts of such catastrophe. The first part of the narrative is set in the 1980s when “children had complete freedom to play in the saffron fields and the orchards” (Gigoo, 2011:11). But everything around him started changing dramatically when the age-old culture of mutual tolerance and harmonious synchronisation between Hindu and Muslim communities of Kashmir, commonly referred to as Kashmiriyat, started getting replaced by a new kind of radical militant ideology that Gigoo (2011: 36) portrays in this passage:

The names of towns and streets were changed to reinforce a new cultural identity. Green was decreed to be the colour for all signboards of the shops and commercial establishments. The time in all the watches and clocks was turned backward by half an hour. Pamphleteering became an obsession. New militant organizations put posters all over the city announcing their mission. The posters carried warnings against those suspected to be harmful to their cause and the movement.

The militants’ targeting of Indian government officials, particularly those belonging to the Pandit community is vividly portrayed in this novel. Through the character of Justice Wangnoo, the novel fictionally recreates the real-world murder of Neel Kanth Ganjoo, the judge who had sentenced a terrorist named Maqbool Bhatt to death. The narrative structure of this novel is formulated by interspersing authorial reflections with fictional plot, a strategy that manifests the author’s personal engagement with the story he tells in his novel. Gigoo reflects at length on the hopelessness and distress of migrating Pandits towards the end of the first part of the novel: “Each truck carried a home, and homelessness. Each truck trudged on inexorably; with terror-stricken faces looking pitifully all around” (Gigoo,2011: 66).The second part of this novel takes us to the chaotic and morbid setting of the migrant camps in Jammu. The novel speaks candidly of the hopelessness, distress and agony of existential and identity crisis faced by Kashmiri Pandits in the aftermath of the exodus from the valley. Pamposh, a reticent migrant boy who lives in one of the migrant camps,

represents the predicament of young Pandits living in the refugee camps. Pamposh's poignant speech sums up the post-migration pathetic condition of Pandits in the migrant camps (Gigoo, 2011:97-8):

I lead the life of a centipede, I crawl. All around the camp, there is the stench of human excrement and waste. People wake up in the morning, hungry and muddled. The awakenings are pallid. The water in the water tanker smells foul, and children lie the whole day in their own vomit...At night we live from one insect bite to another. Centipedes, millipedes and spiders are our companions. It is interesting to note that the numerous accounts of helplessness, alienation and frustration that Gigoo presents by means of fictionally constructed characters, microcosmically depict the real-Life predicaments of Kashmiri minority community, whose agonised sentiments found expression through this novel.

Another writer from Kashmir who belongs to the Pandit (Hindu) community and has had first-hand experience of the brutalities leading to the forced exodus is Rahul Pandita. He was fourteen years old in 1990 when he was forced to leave his home in Srinagar along with his family. His trauma memoir, *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* (2013) is the recorded version of the Kashmir saga, narrated from the perspective of the minority Hindu community in a Muslim majority state. It delineates an eye-witness account of the horrific night of 19 January 1990, when anti-India and pro-Pakistan slogans were broadcasted all across the valley through loudspeakers from the mosques. Narrating this nightmare, Pandita (2013: 67) writes: "One night in January, the Pandits heard the slogans broadcast through loudspeakers from the mosques.... O informers, agents and kafirs, leave this land. Leave Kashmir, leave Kashmir." Another slogan that blared from the mosques was, even more intimidating (Pandita, 2013:68): "Assi gacchi panu'nuy Pakistan, baatav rostuy, batenein saan. We'll turn Kashmir into Pakistan, without the Pandit men, but with their women." Such venomous slogans were bare threats for the Kashmiri Pandits. Within weeks, the situation further worsened as militant organisations like the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) circulated hit-lists across the valley. Pandita (2013) details, with absolute accuracy, several such incidents that coerced the remaining Pandits to abandon their ancestral homeland, making them refugees in their own country. Pandita (2013:93) writes:

At the main gate, painted in blue, Father saw a piece of paper that had been stuck onto it. It was a hit list. Written in Urdu, with JKLF across the top, it warned the Pandits to leave the valley immediately. A list of about ten people followed—the list of people whom the JKLF said would be killed. I read some of the names. Some of them were of our neighbours.

This memoir delineates with preciseness, how the human rights of Kashmiri Pandits were being routinely assaulted during 1989-90. Ironically, the administrative authorities behaved as mere on-lookers, while militant-sectarian organisations wreaked havoc for months upon these helpless Kashmiri Pandits, a demographic minority community in a Muslim-majority province. Pandita (2013: 116) chronicles with preciseness, some of the cold-blooded murders of innocent Hindu Kashmiris:

One of them pierces Raina's skull with an iron rod. Then they drag him out, strip him, and nail him to a tree. ... By October, a few other Pandits have been killed. Retired judge Neelkanth Ganjoo is waylaid by three men on Hari Singh Street, in the heart of Srinagar, and shot at close range. His body remains there untouched for fifteen minutes. Later, the police arrive and take his body away.

Such spine-chilling passages record real-world incidents of most gruesome nature and offer vicarious experiences to the inside story of Kashmir from an insider's perspective of a Kashmiri Hindu. Due to this flair of journalistic accuracy, such discourses and narratives published in the form of memoir or fiction can be taken equally seriously as reliable media reports and the findings of Human Rights Agencies.

Conclusions:

Creating awareness and resisting atrocities are among the multiple functions that story-telling is capable of performing, particularly when the stories are real and well-told. In present times, the majority of writers from Kashmir have a common single-minded humanitarian agenda of producing such literature that exposes to resist, hence they are inclined most often to dwell heavily on real-world tragic incidents and the ensuing traumatic impact upon ordinary commoners. The writings by all these authors from Kashmir manifest innovative experimentations with methods of narration that transcend conventional classifications between fiction, memoir and literary journalism. By amalgamating narrative techniques ascribed to literary journalism with fiction and memoir, the Kashmiri writers discussed here have contributed to the evolution of an innovative style of narration that offers researched reportage saturated with the literary aesthetics of well-told stories. Although in a conventional sense, *Shalimar the Clown*, *The Half Mother*, *The Collaborator* and *The Garden of Solitude* are categorized as fiction; while *Curfewed Night* and *Our Moon has Blood Clots* are classified as memoirs, these works by Kashmiri writers evince much extensive scope beyond the conventional genre- classifications assigned to them. The cruel reality is that these 21st-century books by Kashmiri writers are chronicles of their muffled screams, for all posterity, but because all communities got victimised in this process, the hurt and damage are going to remain long-lasting.

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