

EXILE AND HOME: TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES OF KASHMIRIS IN “THE DISCONNECTION” AND THE “GENEROUS CHINAR”

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Abstract

The present paper explores the traumatic experiences of Kashmiris in ‘home’ and in ‘exile’ as portrayed in two different narratives bemoaning the same loss, one Muslim narrative living inside the valley, and another the Pundit narrative living outside the valley. Both these stories share the longing for the lost home (Kashmiriyat). This paper analyses the English translations of these two narratives with a view to explore/discover the same thematic contours resonating the shared pain of Kashmiris in and outside Kashmir. Doing so this paper opens up the ways of exploring the emotional and psychological dimensions as usually neglected in historical writings.

Keywords: Exile, Home, Kashmiriyat, Short story, Traumatic experiences.

Of all the literary genres in Kashmir, short story is a less known form of art than other literary genres there. Evidently it caters a lesser attention in English translation. Though there are a lot of short story writers writing in Kashmiri language yet it is only poetry that gets the maximum focus when it comes to translating Kashmiri literature to other languages. We can see a lot of poetic works translated both in English, and in languages other than English yet the scarcity of translated Kashmiri short stories is very much visible in languages, which does not exclude English. This could be because Kashmir has a rich poetic tradition which does not lose the attention of translators to other forms of art like that of short story. However since its turbulent historical phase of 1990’s Kashmiri literature particularly fiction finds a much greater space in English (translation). It so deconstructs and reconstructs the historical constructions by

pointing out the obscurities that have remained unexplored so far. As history is just concerned with events of a specific time-space location, it excludes the emotional side which can be penned down only imaginatively. Short story is the fiction that being imaginative plus historical fits Hayden White's definition of what he calls "the fictions of factual representation". The historical and imaginative aspect of these short stories gets explored/more explored through translation as translation has the exploring tendency which Surjit Mukherjee points out in his essay, "Translation as Discovery". No doubt short story in Kashmir adds a major component to Kashmiri literature, the attention towards translating this literary form in English gives Kashmiri literature a further vigorous diversity.

This paper attempts to look at the homelessness of Kashmiri people vis-a-vis the forced separation of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley. It even meditates on the common linkage of Kashmiriyat and its salient features. At large, the paper would be analysing two primary texts, but mainstream history and alternate historical records would be brought to substantiate the argument.

Rattan Lal Shant's "The Disconnection" is the story of a silent Kashmiri pandit who once lived a life of harmony and peace, is now living a life of an alienated, segregated, isolated, marginalized and emotionally curtailed Kashmiri. The story revolves around Roshanlal, his niece Usha and her husband Ajit. It was the seventh day of mourning when Usha and her husband came to attend the mourning of her grandmother. Everyone in her family had a cold reception towards Usha and stared at her with mocking comments, "just look at her..., it is seven whole days since her grandmother died and she comes now!" Poor girl Usha and her husband embarrassed could not even express their grief. The only reason for Roshanlal's enmity towards Usha was his marriage to Ajit (a non-kashmiri). Roshanlal believed that the alienated Usha might be double alienated from him, and that is exactly what happened. Usha has turned up after six years at her grandmother's death.

Roshanlal, the epitome of silence speaks only grief and sorrow. He addresses the mourners and says that his Ama has asked him to get some snow for her feet, so that she gets peace from the last burning fire. All the gathering around him was taken aback as they heard Roshanlal speaking after a long time. Later they were even pleased with his broken words and they could not believe that Roshanlal had actually spoken at last. After a while silence prevailed again. In his entire life, Roshanlal had left no wish of his mother unfulfilled. However, Ama's death has plunged the whole community living in Dalkiwallah camp into grief and despair but the anguish that was hovering on Roshanlal was a great blow on them. When the story further grows, Roshanlal gets drenched into despair and despondence, he reminds the readers of Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* where Bishen Singh is left despondent and desolate.

The story ends with the reconciliation of Usha, Roshanlal, and Ajit substantially but the shadow of alienation, segregation and rupture continues on Roshanlal who keeps "gazing through the dry, the desert shrubs, the blazing sun and sky, trying to locate something..." He is caught in the clamour of grief and time wherefrom it is impossible to pull him out.

Once we look at the story of the Mushtaq Ahmad Mushtaq's "The Generous Chinar", we get a different narrative dealing with the same situations but metaphorically. This story apparently carries the pain of exodus and separation, from a new perspective. Mushtaq Ahmad Mushtaq, speaks about the grim reality of state politics filled with greed and foul.

Kashmir, since times immemorial has to deal with natural as well as political upheavals like invasions, attacks, floods, famines, raids, epidemics, and so on¹. With the rise of political conflict since 1947, almost all people of all ages and of all religious categories in the valley have suffered, and it holds true about Kashmiri Pandits as well. The long conflict and its adverse effects on Kashmiri masses as whole have raised a consciousness among people. They scrutinize their shared brutalities and pen those down in their all encapsulating fictional renderings (stories) which surprisingly come out to be more real than the historical writing itself as these do not exclude the psychological dimension. The turbulent historical shift in Kashmir marks a visible change in the way of Kashmiri short story writers. Contemporary writers in their writings try to capture the present grim realities of Kashmir. Neeraj Matoo has compiled and translated *Kath-Stories from Kashmir* into English in a chronological order that cover the time period from 1940's to present decade. In the introduction he writes:

Reading these stories chronologically is like reading history of Kashmiri society as it evolved during these years. They are a record of the people's concerns, ranging from simple desires and confident hope for a better life to deeper anxieties, fears and growing frustrations at unkept promises and unfulfilled expectations. In fact, the seeds of the discontent that has grown into the insurgency of the past couple of decades in Kashmir can all be found in the content of some of these short stories. (p7)

Thus, when we read the collection of these stories chronologically they portray the changing concerns, values and conditions of Kashmiri society from social and cultural backdrops to the vibrant and turbulent situations.

Short stories always tend to provide tight-netted world and are concise in relating the experiences from everyday life. The two Short stories "The Disconnection" and "The Generous Chinar" reflect the lives of divaricated and disconnected communities, one living outside valley and one inside. On one hand Rattan Lal Shant's "The Disconnection" projects the real narrative voice of exodus people living in exile away from their homeland. While on the other hand Mushtaq Ahmad Mushtaq's "The Generous Chinar" provides an illuminating facet of people living in Kashmir bemoaning the separation of their brothers and sisters with whom they used to live a prosperous life of peace and harmony under Chinar shade. Mushtaq Ahmad uses the metaphor of Chinar tree for peaceful and harmonious life that Kashmiri people used to live once upon a time. The story of *The Generous Chinar* presents the history of Kashmiri people in a nuanced and metaphoric way. The story reflect a hanging image of Kashmir which was once called as Paradise, now after the turmoil and turbulence, we can not see even the shadows of paradise anywhere. The Chinar tree that symbolically represents Paradise has lost its spring forever and the shades of peace and harmony are long gone. The narrator of the story is wailing alone in his slumber at the loss of his Paradise and his waiting for this paradise to be regained.

The narrative voice of Rattan Lal Shant's "The Disconnection" shows the desire to go back to same old Kashmir. The main character of the story Roshanlal is indebted in his past memories of his homeland. His Ama's last words were desirous and demanding, when she asks for snow and a bathe in the wholly spring of Kashmir. "We would be in Mattan and I would bathe in the holy spring there". Though these words sounded like chant to Roshalal as he knew that such desires are desires only but in his heart he felt them deep within. From the very beginning of the story, Roshanlal seems to be a man born out of heaven and sent to hell. He feels he is living a life in an asylum among his own community wandering like a soulless body.

¹¹ The 2014 flood was one such devastating natural calamity which has very much affected the people in Kashmir.

The two poignant and heartfelt stories share the contempt and chaotic experiences of both the Kashmiri pandits and Kashmiri natives, who do not favour the permanent state of denial rather they claim to rejoice and rejoin again under one shade. These stories are real narratives of every Kashmiri who has been traumatized on either way. In fact, there are many untold stories and unheard narratives from the Kashmiri pandits, who have suffered the pain for more than two decades in this bloody conflict. These traumas have led many writers to express their grievances and sorrows through their literary genius. Rahul Pandita the author of *Our Moon has Blood Clots* delineates the detailed history of Kashmiri pundits and gives an episode right after the exodus of his community. Later in the book, he writes that state politics tried to channelize his anger towards Kashmiri Muslims. His book has somehow delineated the hidden mystery behind the veil of power and politics that have drawn a line between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits. The narrative voice is also heard in Chandrakanta's Hindi evocative story of Kashmir untouched by violence and conflict. This book is an epitome on Kashmir, which makes the readers to feel the sense of oneness and belonging. Chandrakanta's *Ailan Gali* is translated into English language by Manisha Chaudhry under the title "A Street In Srinagar", which later brings fore many new perspectives.

Coming back to the two stories, though the narratives differ but the stories resonate the same thematic contours. Both writers comprehend the pastness of their past, which is quite unimaginable for them to forget. Mushtaq Ahmad's *The Generous Chinar* ends with a note of despair and dissonance, when the *Malang* appears in the story who threw a burning glare at the Chinar tree and it came crashing down. The sudden appearance of the *Malang* is the ill faced state that put an attempt to divide even the shade of the Chinar tree. 'The *Malang* roared with laughter and disappeared while chanting at the top of his fearful voice, "Nothing but fire, no cool shade anywhere, just fountains of blood everywhere!" The sudden appearance and disappearance is an indirect mocking of the state that has alienated, segregated and isolated the Kashmiri people from one another. The mystery remains unfolded and leave the readers open ended. Similarly, Rattan Lal Shant's "The Disconnection" ends with a note of hopelessness and with desperate pain within Roshanlal's heart. The story evokes the sense of homelessness of all the people like Roshanlal, living in exile. The characters in the story arrive at the point where they cannot run away from the harsh realities of time. With the death of Ama, all their hopes have vanquished and disappeared. For Roshanlal Ama's death is like snow melting for forever, he feels as if there will be no fall of snow again. At some basic level Ama's death was their disconnection with their past. Geographically they have been dislocated and disconnected from their past, but psychologically none of them is free from the struggle of pastness and history. That struggle is quite evident in Roshanlal, who finds himself in the dry stream, the blazing sun and sky.

The urgency to unfold the mysteries behind these people who live a life of homelessness and exile should be carried out with much more narratives. Thus by looking at two different narratives, this paper attempts to bring fore the sense of belonging of both communities living separately. Moreover, the narratives formulated an idea that neither the group among two is to be blamed, rather it is the destructive politics of state that is responsible for the exodus of Kashmiri migrants. The two short stories writers have directly or indirectly captured the traumatic consequences of conflict in Kashmir. The imposed and forced exodus of Kashmiri pundits from their homeland (Kashmir) and their ceaseless separation from their past memories remains a black spot on the hailed democracy of India. These disconnected people from the valley are trying to discover their lost identities. The deep wounds of Kashmiri people, whose past and history is being stolen from them, are very well reflective in such stories. These stories raise in

reader's minds questions like how can a Kashmiri person live outside Kashmir? Why? How long? Kashmir's history is shaped with multiple influences of multiple rulers, but Kashmiriyat has been always there with its long rooted tradition of syncretism, the same was also well nourished by Mughal ruler Akbar. The conflict was never between Hindus and Muslims, it is simply a classified myth by the political games of the state that has lead masses to these notions. In the last two decades these political games have tagged this separation with the falsely constructed idea of religious animosity between Kashmiri pundits and Kashmiri Muslims. This is simply an attempt to provoke a hatred of Kashmiri Pandits towards the Kashmiri Muslims. Today, we have many narratives bemoaning the loss of communal harmony between Kashmiri people, who once lived a life untouched by any conflict. To conclude, Kashmir used to have a harmonious cultural co-existence with no religious biases known as Kashmiriyat, the longing of which has very well been captured in the select stories.

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