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RESEARCH PAPER

A Psychoanalytical Study of Cultural Trauma in Nayeema Mahjoor's *Lost in Terror*

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine how trauma narratives depict the experiences of Kashmiris. To realize this objective, this study conducts a textual analysis of Nayeema Mahjoor's Lost in Terror in the light of Jeffrey Alexander's theory of cultural trauma. The findings show the use of a variety of artistic devices, including vivid imagery, symbolic language, and complex characters which help to understand the traumatic history of Kashmir regarding the political engagements and social responsibilities of a suppressed community. The findings have implications for understanding the enduring impact of cultural trauma in non-Western regions and the role of literature in promoting healing and reconciliation.

Introduction

The Kashmiri literature, for too long, has remained overshadowed and inadequately recognized, relegated to the periphery within the broader South Asian English Writings landscape. The focus on this lack of recognition underscores a critical concern about the pressing need to amplify the Kashmiri literary voice that could pave the way for the acknowledgment and amplification of shared traumatic experiences to compel the global community to recognize and empathize with one of the most enduring human tragedies that has befallen the majority of Indian-occupied Kashmir's inhabitants since the tumultuous events surrounding the partition in 1947. This study addresses this critical gap in the literature by exploring the social construction of cultural trauma within the context of occupied Kashmir. Drawing upon Jeffrey Alexander's comprehensive theoretical framework, this inquiry delves deep into this pivotal subject, unraveling the intricacies of cultural trauma and its relevance to Kashmir.

Through an analysis of Mahjoor's*Lost in Terror* (2016), this study navigates the intricate landscape of Kashmir's narratives, seeking to discern how cultural trauma has taken roots within the collective consciousness of Kashmiris in response to the harrowing experiences they have endured since the late 1980s. The selected literary text stands as poignant symbols of the traumatic events that have left indelible marks on the Kashmiri populace, shaping their individual and collective identities. This study unravels the complex process of establishing effective strategies for addressing the profound social wounds borne by the people of Kashmir.

Literature Review

The recognition of the Kashmiri narratives is a testament to the resilience of the people who have borne the weight of history's tumultuous turns. Through the exploration of cultural trauma, this study sheds light on the harrowing experiences of Kashmiris and advocates for the imperative of acknowledging and addressing the profound social harm

that has befallen Kashmiris. Jeffrey Alexander (2004) argues that traumatic events do not inherently possess predetermined significance instead their traumatic nature is attributed through interpretation and depiction. This process of meaning-making is essential for understanding how traumatic events are constructed and communicated. Ron Eyerman's (2001) assertion that "trauma emerges through history" highlights the importance of historical context in the formation of cultural trauma. According to Ahmad (2011), the traumatic events that have shaped the Kashmiri narrative are rooted in the region's long and complex history, which has been marked by violence, oppression, and conflict.

Alexander (2004) argues that the social construction of cultural trauma is also influenced by the social agents, or carrier groups, who frame collective suffering as trauma claims. Carrier groups in occupied Kashmir face several challenges in articulating their trauma claims. These challenges, according to Chakravarty (2018) include the ongoing Indian occupation, which restricts freedom of expression and the international recognition of the Kashmiri conflict. Bhat (2018) argues that despite these challenges, Kashmiri literary works play a significant role in the social construction of cultural trauma. These works, for Bashir (2022), offer powerful and nuanced portrayals of the traumatic experiences of Kashmiris and they challenge the dominant narratives that have marginalized and silenced Kashmiri voices. He refers to the example of Peer's novel *The Curfewed Night* (2008) which depicts the harrowing experiences of Kashmiris during the 1989 uprising against Indian rule. The novel provides a vivid account of the violence, brutality, and oppression that Kashmiris have endured under Indian occupation.

Chatterji, an anthropologist of Indian origin known for his activism and involvement in the founding of the International People's Court for Human Rights and Justice in Indian-administered Kashmir, discusses the transgressions of the Indian state in the territories it seized in 1947. His book "Militarized Zone" elaborates on the events of that time. The publication "Buried Evidence: Unknown, Unmarked, and Mass Graves in Indian-administered Kashmir" (2009) presents statistical and photographic evidence of "mass burials." The Indian military and paramilitary forces have shown remarkable proficiency in creating a landscape and mass habit, characterized by activities deemed "possible" in the context of burials. The publication, spanning 1989 to 2009, documents over 8,000 forced disappearances and more than 70,000 fatalities, including innocent Kashmiris who lost their lives through illegitimate means such as "sham meetings."

The Kashmiri Muslim community has historically faced marginalization and neglect under the governance of Hindu rulers. As mentioned in an essay by MriduRai, the Dogra rule in 1885, following the death of Ranbir Singh, led to a reinvention of the religio-political landscape of Kashmir as Hindu. In 1931, Walter Lawrence, a prominent civil servant, made a declaration asserting the sanctity of Kashmir as "Holy ground to all Hindus of India," which received widespread acknowledgment. This attribution of a Hindu origin to Kashmir resulted in the marginalization of the Muslim population and a disregard for their cultural traditions, along with a systemic lack of recognition of their dominant religion in the region.

MriduRai explores the stereotype of Muslims as advocates of Islamist ideology in Kashmir. She contends that, apart from minimally influential factions, the Muslim populace in Kashmir consistently seeks political autonomy and lawful governance rather than overtly religious goals. Unfortunately, these demands are consistently disregarded, leaving them in a state of powerlessness and vulnerability.

In her scholarly article "The Indivisible Part: The Folding of Kashmir into the Indian Imagination" (2013), Indian historian MriduRai highlights that a 1991 census revealed that out of a total Kashmiri Pandit population of 140,000, approximately 100,000 individuals departed from the valley after 1989.

In her scholarly article titled "Azadi: The One Thing Kashmiris Want," Arundhati Roy argues that the Indian government, often referred to by academics as the deep state, has made extensive efforts to dismantle, suppress, belittle, undermine, and humiliate the Kashmir region. Despite the use of force, the Kashmiri populace responded through peaceful forms of protest and nonviolent uprisings.

Chatterji's work titled "Buried Evidence: Unknown, Unmarked, and Mass Graves in Indian-administered Kashmir," published in 2009, provides a compelling observation that the Indian state's approach to governance in Indian-administered Kashmir involves the use of discipline and death as techniques for social control, a claim that is justifiable. In her literary work "Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan, and the Unending War" (1996, 2021), Victoria Schofield presents vivid accounts of Indian security forces' perpetration of atrocities and oppression in the Kashmir region. According to her, torture tactics employed during the 1990s to combat insurgency, elicit information, force confessions, and implement punitive measures were often directed toward "militants and suspected militants" (p. 169). In the contested region of Kashmir, the sustained and pervasive military presence, utilization of surveillance tactics, incidents of abduction and rape, detentions and custodial killings, public displays of mass violence, and related brutal punishments all contribute to the creation of a pervasive atmosphere of fear, doubt, and alienation among the innocent inhabitants of the confiscated territories.

Material and Methods

Jeffrey Alexander's (2004) theory of cultural trauma provides a foundational framework for understanding the significance of traumatic events in the narratives of Kashmir. According to him, cultural trauma is a shared understanding of a traumatic event that has had a profound and lasting impact on a community. This shared understanding is constructed through a process of social elaboration, which involves the production of narratives, symbols, and rituals that give meaning to the traumatic experience (Alexander, 2004). He argues that the process of experiencing and declaring trauma as a social reality is not a collective endeavor carried out by oppressed groups, but rather a nuanced task undertaken by specific individuals who serve as conduits for communicating the pain and representing the situation through their physical presence. In line with the conceptual model, these pivotal social actors, often termed "carrier groups" in the framework proposed by Alexander, are integral members of the group affected by the distress. Acting as a unified front in response to widespread traumatic experiences, they become emblematic signs that encapsulate a painful reality. These individuals, owing to their distinctive positions within society, possess the agency to convey their demands or symbolically portray distressing events. Through the process of interpreting events and providing them with meaning in the eyes of the public, these individuals initiate the critical phase of socially constructing cultural trauma.

The depiction of trauma, according to Alexander (2004), through symbols hinges on the careful consideration of four essential representations that facilitate comprehension and the effective development of a coherent narrative:

- The nature of the pain

- The nature of the victim

- The relationship between the trauma victim and the wider audience

- Attribution of responsibility

The construction of cultural trauma, says Alexander (2004), entails a form of social intervention that unfolds when individuals within a collective group experience a horrific

event, profoundly impacting their consciousness and even leading to substantial changes in their identities, including the ultimate price of loss of life. Alexander posits that through the process of constructing social harm, social groups, nations, and civilizations gain critical insights into the sources of human suffering. This empathetic engagement creates an opportunity to prevent further harm and institute reforms within the community to halt the perpetuation of the suffering experienced by Kashmiris.

Text Analysis

Social emergencies have a profound impact, causing turmoil, tension, fear, and uncertainty within societies and posing a significant threat to individual and collective identities, thus straining the bonds that hold societies together. In the context of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, a social crisis, often referred to as culture trauma, has left an indelible mark, disrupting every facet of Kashmiris' lives. These traumatic events have not only scarred their memories but have also cast a shadow over their individual and collective identities.

It is important to note, however, that the mere occurrence of a severe social crisis does not necessarily equate to culture trauma. Culture trauma emerges when a traumatic event shakes the very foundations of a group's identity, setting in discursive processes aimed at explanation and comprehension. These processes, in essence, revolve around the need to understand the events, assign responsibility for the injuries incurred, and devise strategies for rectifying the damage inflicted upon the social fabric. In the quest to attain these primary objectives, various social agents emerge, in competition for recognition and acceptance, to present their unique trauma narratives. This discursive process, characterized by diverse narratives, can evolve into a struggle for meaning. As expounded by Alexander (2004), this form of meaning-making centers around the collective suffering experienced by members of society. It is this collective suffering that initiates a profound trauma process, as outlined in Research Methodology.

Kashmiri Muslims, constituting the majority in the occupied Kashmir region, have faced extensive repression by the Indian state. The Indian state's use of brutal means to suppress Kashmiris is primarily driven by the fear that their allegiance may align with Pakistan, thereby posing a potential threat to regional stability.

Mahjoor's*Lost in Terror* (2016) provides empirical evidence that the Kashmiri population consistently experiences profound hopelessness and despair due to the pervasive control and surveillance enforced by the military. This manifests in the subjugation of citizens, public spaces, residential structures, and even the most vulnerable members of society, including innocent children. During law enforcement operations, involving measures such as curfews, raids, and crackdowns, individuals are compelled to comply with soldiers' instructions, exhibiting passive and cooperative behavior. The presence of army personnel instills apprehension and anxiety, leading individuals to hide within their homes by drawing curtains and extinguishing lights "to avoid potential confrontations" (Mahjoor, 2016).

The impact of the Indian armed forces' actions is felt across the entire Kashmiri community, irrespective of age or gender. However, the Kashmiri Muslim population is particularly affected due to their status as the majority group advocating for independence, with some individuals swayed toward alignment with Pakistan. Mahjoor (2010) notes that security forces employ designations such as "militants," "terrorists," or "Pakistan-trained bastards" to label insurgents who resist crackdowns. Kashmiri individuals have endured heinous acts, with a specific emphasis on religious and racial violence against those who identify as Muslim and express loyalty to Pakistan.

Mahjoor (2016) highlights the dominance of Hindus in the media, hindering the accurate portrayal of the experiences of Muslim men and their struggles in the world. Muslim personnel within this medium are typically underrepresented and often limited to roles as reporters or actors. The passage titled *Lost in Terror* suggests that the "Restricted Zone" can only be accessed by completing a relevant game. Biases exhibited by Hindu colleagues prompted the narrator to excel in the profession, establishing people as highly accomplished individuals. In a rough estimate, over 80% of the personnel employed by the radio station in question are affiliated with the Kashmiri Hindu community. It is also speculated that interpersonal connections may exist between members of this community and Indian military forces.

Following political instability, the state government resigned, leading to direct rule by New Delhi. The newly appointed governor, an advocate of Hindu nationalism, favors appointing individuals from non-Kashmiri backgrounds to key administrative positions while reallocating Muslim personnel to less influential departments (Mahjoor, 2016). In the early 1990s, a significant number of Hindus, including the entire Pandit community, left the valley, as described in Mahjoor's work. The Indian government facilitated this evacuation, with security forces aiding affected individuals in preparing belongings and arranging transportation for their nighttime departure from the valley (Mahjoor, 2016). This points to a deliberate marginalization of the Muslim community, who become the primary focus and principal target of various forms of repression.

The escalation of resistance movements in occupied Kashmir prompted the implementation of policies by Governor Jagmohan, allowing for the relocation of Hindu Pandits. This relocation was allegedly intended to enable them to assert authority over the Muslim population with a resolute approach while advancing objectives related to the occupation of the region (Mahjoor, 2016).

It is imperative to carefully consider the implications and consequences of actions before making decisions. Evaluation of available options, logical reasoning, and critical analysis are essential in choosing the most suitable course of action. Ethical and moral principles must be prioritized when making decisions affecting others. Thoughtful consideration and mindful decision-making are critical elements of effective leadership and responsible citizenship in today's complex world. Some departures were viewed as self-imposed exiles and attributed to political maneuvering by the Indian government. The factors behind the simultaneous mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits are shrouded in controversies. Jagmohan, along with the appointed governor of Kashmir, played a role in displacing non-Kashmiri individuals and orchestrating their exodus. It is purported that this was done to justify the implementation of arbitrary and deadly military measures against individuals perceived as "terrorists" (Mahjoor, 2016).

Lost in Terror (2016) vividly portrays the incursion of Indian security forces into the valley in the late 1980s. It illuminates how their pervasive patrolling of streets and shops significantly disrupted citizens' privacy. Soldiers are ubiquitously present at crossroads, bridges, hotels, schools, and abandoned buildings, creating a sense that an external force has seized control of their lives (Mahjoor, 2016). This constant presence leads to discomfort and apprehension among all Kashmiri citizens, regardless of age or gender, creating an overall climate of unease and agitation. In addition to instances of sexual assault, armed raids, physical torment, and extrajudicial killings, numerous unmarked burial sites in various locations exacerbate the suffering of Kashmir's inhabitants. These burial sites, often referred to as "nameless mass graves" in literature, serve as reminders of a violent history imposed upon innocent civilians. These crimes have incurred severe physical harm.

The commerce and hospitality industries have been severely disrupted, resulting in numerous burned or shuttered establishments. This situation can be attributed to the widespread fervor surrounding the concept of Azaadi, as exemplified by the protagonist of

the novel *Lost in Terror* (2016), whose fixation on this ideal leads to the failure of his own business. The diverse demographics of the Kashmiri population have suffered significant repercussions due to intensified violence, resulting in the shutdown of educational institutions, offices, commercial establishments, and deserted public streets (Mahjoor, 2016). People frequently experience feelings of apprehension and a perceived lack of control, believing that "an unknown entity has assumed complete responsibility for our well-being" (Mahjoor, 2016, p. 27).

The once aesthetically appealing paradise now appears overshadowed by a powerful and imposing military governing system. Individuals of all ages and genders, including men, women, and children, commonly engage in public demonstrations against military aggression. Additionally, a significant gathering, resembling a cavalry, as documented in collectively demands Azadi (Mahjoor, 2016).

The closure of educational institutions, offices, businesses, and the abandonment of streets is documented by Mahjoor (2016). Individuals often experience a sense of vulnerability coupled with powerlessness, believing that "an external force or agency has assumed authority over their lives" (Mahjoor, 2016, p. 27). The once aesthetically alluring landscape of paradise appears to be obscured by the oppressive nature of a commanding and grandiose military regime. People from various demographics, including both male and female adults, elderly individuals, and children, participated in frequent protests against military aggression. Moreover, a substantial number of participants, dressed in attire commonly associated with cavalry, assembled and jointly asserted their claim to Azadi (Mahjoor, 2016).

Subjected to an illegitimate military regime, the recurring and unrelenting cycle of capricious repercussions indiscriminately affects not only a particular age or gender group but the entire populace of Kashmir, with a noticeable impact on the Muslim community in particular. These egregious acts target not just singular individuals or households but the majority of the populace within a country dominated by the Muslim faith. According to Khan Perjamin's research findings, Kashmir boasts the highest concentration of followers of the Islamic faith, comprising approximately 97% of its demographic composition. Muslims have been subjected to targeted acts of violence due to their collective efforts to exercise their right to freedom from the oppressive rule of the Indian government. Prior to the partition of 1947 and the subsequent escalation of armed conflicts, Muslims and other ethnic minorities coexisted in a state of harmony. However, in the aftermath of these events, these groups became estranged, and mutual trust within the community was forfeited. Hindus specifically avoided engaging with Muslims due to the suspicion of potential insurgent activity, leading to a climate of heightened tension and apprehension. This environment served as a catalyst for widespread acts of rebellion and counter-rebellion, indiscriminately affecting all individuals across various spheres of life. The resultant impact was devastating, rendering no aspect or individual immune to the violence and unrest that ensued. The mere exposure to news regarding physical altercations, homicide, curfews, apprehensions, and police interventions could potentially contaminate the innocent psychological disposition of young learners.

There was a significant shift in subject matter amongst artists as they moved away from traditional depictions of natural imagery, such as flowers, animals, and fruit, towards a newfound predilection for more sinister motifs such as firearms, grenades, bullets, and masked individuals. This shift is alluded to as being quite pronounced, suggesting a marked upheaval in societal norms. The closure of the valley for a significant period has caused a considerable impact on local businesses, resulting in an interruption of the provision of essential commodities such as food and medication. According to female narratives of *Lost in Terror* (2016), the governor exhibits a lack of compassion towards his constituents, pushing them to their households (Mahjoor, 2016). Individuals residing in the conflict-ridden region of Kashmir are subjected to enslavement, resulting in a sense of helplessness

as they are confined within the confines of their homes due to the apprehension of being targeted for assassination, detention, or abduction if they venture out unaccompanied in their native land.

The economic sectors of trade and tourism are in a state of disarray, and various retail establishments have either been destroyed or ceased operations. This is attributable to the prevailing sentiment among the general populace, which is primarily focused on the attainment of Azaadi, as exemplified in the actions of the protagonist depicted in *Lost in Terror* (2016). In the pursuit of this objective, His preoccupation with Azaadi ultimately results in the disruption of his own commercial endeavors. For such reasons, there was a significant decline in the number of foreign tourists in the valley. Specifically, the record-breaking statistic of nearly 80,000 visitors in 1989 plummeted to a mere 9,000 in 1995 (Schofield, 1996, 2021, p. 186). The downturn in tourist influx has impacted the commercial enterprises of Kashmiri proprietors such as lessors, providers of crafts, cab operators, and lodging establishment owners, resulting in substantial losses. The varied strata of society faced a catastrophic collapse while the populace of Jammu and Kashmir suffered immense consequences.

The devastating aftermath of escalated unrest was characterized by conflict and brutality. The acts of brutality and suppression carried out by the Indian security forces within the region of Kashmir, the utilization of torture methods against individuals labeled as "militants and suspected militants" was a prevalent strategy during the 1990s as a means to suppress insurgency movements, gather information, and force confessions and penalties (Schofield, 1996, 2021, p. 169). The utilization of extreme torture methods, including sexual molestation, the application of electric trauma, and the forceful implementation of heavy rollers on leg muscles, serves as the primary causative agent for the significant and distressing number of fatalities that occur while individuals are in custody. The persistent and unwavering military deployment, surveillance operations, abductions, sexual assault, detentions, custodial executions, widespread acts of violence resulting in fatalities, and the utilization of a myriad of other forms of egregious punishment systematically induce a pervasive sense of apprehension, uncertainty, and estrangement among the vulnerable inhabitants of the annexed territories of Kashmir (Mahjoor, 2016).

Conclusion

The Kashmiri populace, specifically the Muslim population, who are the predominant group residing in occupied Kashmir, are the primary recipients of aggressive measures enacted by the Indian government due to their suspected inclination towards aligning with Pakistan. Muslims are subjected to similar, if not more pronounced, oppression and suffering by Indian authorities as they are brutalizing and slaughtering Kashmiris (Hakeem, 2014). The exacerbation of the hardships faced by Kashmiri Muslims is compounded by their lack of genuine representation of their emotions. In his work "Lost in Terror," published in 2016, Mahjoor highlights the existence of a Hindu male monopoly in media, rendering it challenging for Muslim individuals, particularly women, to effectively communicate their perspectives and experiences and have their voices heard. This lack of representation in media deprives them of the opportunity to convey their sentiments and convey their struggles to a broader audience. The Kashmiri Hindu community comprises the majority, specifically exceeding 80%, of the staff in the radio station. Their pervasive presence in the institution has led to an impression of an intrinsic association between Hindus and the Indian armed forces. Muslims in India have been subjected to extensive massacres since 1947. It has been widely documented that the propagation of discrimination and aggressive acts towards the Muslim community have been largely incited by the Indian State. *Lost in Terror* (2016) offers a nuanced perspective on Kashmiri suffering and describes its impact on social and artistic life. The story is deeply connected to the region and interprets the traumatic circumstances prevailing in Kashmir. In Indian-occupied Kashmir, the anguish and persecution of children, men, and women at the hands

of ruthless Indian forces have become a distressingly common occurrence. Kashmiris are burdened with the weight of these traumatic events, yet the broader world remains largely ignorant and indifferent to their suffering.

This study has focused on Kashmiri narratives that provide authentic portrayals of catastrophic events and explore themes of identity, justice, resistance, and oppression, which are not often highlighted in conventional narratives about Kashmir. Suffering and profound loss serve as recurrent motifs in these narratives. Contemporary Kashmiri authors have harnessed the power of the written word to share their myriad and previously unheard stories of anguish, loss, resilience, and vulnerability. They provide a poignant and unfiltered lens through which they view the harsh reality of life in Kashmir. Works like NitashaKaul's*Residue* (2009), MirzaWaheed's*The Collaborator* (2011), FerozRather's*The Night of Broken Glass* (2018), Mir Khalid's *Jaffna Street* (2017), and Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night* (2010), among many others, have garnered well-deserved recognition from scholars and critics alike. These authors and their literary contributions mark a significant effort in the development of Kashmiri English literature, which is gradually carving out its own space within the broader landscape of South Asian literature. They courageously challenge the distorted reality perpetuated by current power structures.

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