

**NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA: A STUDY OF BASHARAT PEER AND
MIRZA WAHEED'S SELECT WORKS****Dr. Tasleem Ahmad War,**

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It is an undeniable stark reality that the Kashmir has been associated with idyllic innocence and paradise since immemorial times. However, from 1989, things became worse in Kashmir with the onset of militancy. According to an estimate of some rights groups, since 1989, more than one lakh people have died in the conflict and it has also led to the migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley to the different parts of India, particularly Jammu. According to government estimate 219 Kashmiri Pandits were killed by militants since 1989, however, Kashmiri Pandit Sangarsh Samiti puts the number at 356 and 399. It has caused a mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley of Kashmir and thus ushered an era of untold miseries and sufferings for them. People from both the communities suffered immensely. On the other side, mass graves were also discovered which are believed to be of those who were first arrested and later killed in custodies and their number is believed to be from eight to ten thousand. Pertinent to mention here is the fact that Kashmir is one of the most militarised zones in the world and the people of Kashmir have borne the brunt of this age-old conflict for generations now. It won't be wrong to say that, Kashmiris have been sandwiched, brutalised and traumatised in this volatile region of the world. There is hardly any Kashmiri who does not have a story. The only thing is that some stories have been told and many have remained untold.

History bears witness to the fact that Kashmir was one of the princely states during the British rule and when India got independence in 1947, it was a Muslim majority state under the rule of a Dogra Hindu King, Hari Singh. As a princely state under the British Colonial rule over India, the king had an option whether to join with India or Pakistan or remain independent. The most prominent leader of Kashmir at that time was Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who enjoyed tremendous popularity among the people and was hence hero worshipped. In spite of the Muslim majority structure, Sheikh Abdullah went for an accession with India and this way the bond between Kashmir and India became stronger and inseparable for all times. The accession was immediately occasioned by the invasion of attack on Jammu and Kashmir by some tribes from northwest frontier Pakistan in October 1947. Due to the tribal invasion and subsequent accession of Kashmir with India, the valley was divided into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, also known as Azad Kashmir and Indian Kashmir.

As far as creative literature is concerned, Kashmir has a substantial history of literature in Sanskrit, Persian and Kashmiri languages. Literature of Kashmir can be divided into ancient, medieval and modern periods. The ancient period is represented by well-known poets like Patanjali, Vasugupta and Abhinavagupta who wrote in Sanskrit language. Poets like Lallesvari or Lal Ded and Nund Reshi, Rupa Bhavani, Arnimal, Mahmud Gami, Rasul Mir, Shamas Fakir, Wahab Khar, Soch Kral, Samad Mir, and Ahad Zargar wrote in the medieval period. And as far as modern poetry is concerned, we have poets like Ghulam Ahmad Mahjur, Abdul Ahad Azad and Zinda Kaul. However, all these poets from different periods wrote in Sanskrit, Persian and Kashmiri languages respectively. It is in the twentieth century that some writers started writing poetry and fiction in English also. And with the onset of

militancy in 1989 and subsequently what happened afterwards and continues to happen, there are many writers who have criticized the central government for their wrong policies. The credit for doing this goes to Salman Rushdie and Agha Shahid Ali who wrote about it for the first time. Rushdie's novel *Shalimar, the Clown* (2005), is the first major literary work which offers the story of Kashmir to the whole world. The novel, besides highlighting Kashmiri culture and its social ethos, also foregrounds the pangs, agonies and tragedies of this land for many generations. He was followed by Agha Shahid Ali, the Indian-American Kashmiri poet, who wrote *The Country Without a Post Office* which is a collection of poems in 1997. The title of the poem highlights the total breakdown of state machinery in the wake of militancy in early 1990s as a result of which even postal services were suspended for seven months. He was followed by a number of promising writers like Basharat Peer, Mirza Waheed, Shahnaz Bashir, Natasha Kaul and Feroz Rather. As the present paper argues that one of the dominant features of these writings is that they highlight the narratives about Kashmir which usually are unknown to the world. It is not therefore an exaggeration to say that if there is a single most characteristic feature which defines Kashmiri literature post 1990s, it is trauma. All these novelists have gone through the overwhelming and horrible experiences one can ever imagine and now the memory of those experiences causes trauma to them and writing acts as a powerful tool to give vent to their traumas that they suffer in silence. There are thousands of cases of rights violations allegedly committed by forces like custodial killings, fake encounters, massacres, gang rapes and harassment of Kashmiris for three decades but none of the cases has been addressed. However, the Indian state has branded these claims as fake and propaganda by people backed by Pakistan. This makes the trauma of Kashmiris different in that they are doubly traumatised and frustrated by the criminal silence of the authorities at the helm of affairs. They are simply pushed to the wall. They have suffered both at the hands of forces, militants and Pakistan backed outfits and local parties. The present study thus makes an attempt to revisit the select works in the light of various trauma theories like cultural trauma, social trauma, national trauma and collective trauma. Reciting accounts of trauma, and listening to these horrifying narratives, are the primary activities depicted by the novels in this study.

The term trauma is derived from the Greek word meaning "wound" and is a concept of great complexity. Generally, trauma is defined as an acute event or severe insult against a person's body or psyche. In the beginning, this word was used to define an external injury but over time the use shifted to include the kind of injuries that remain unseen: wounds that are sustained by psyche. Hence, psychological wounding became defined as trauma. Wounding of any type can be fatal, but internal wounding is rarely referred to or seen as clearly, and never as easily addressed and hence more damaging. This internal wounding is represented by trauma and is indeed exemplified as being the unspoken or 'unspeakable'. It is marked as a highly distinctive event that ranges outside the safe boundaries of most societies and social norms, challenging not just the troubled but the social constructs that surround them. The experience, analysis, treatment and representation of trauma are intertwined with its overarching social context. Trauma has an inherently ethical, social, political and historical dimension. Therefore, it can't be limited only to the psychological studies. It influences the different fields of the studies in order to show its interdisciplinary function and its impact that it has both within and beyond the field of studies.

Mostly, confusion and insecurity are the general causes of trauma; however, typical causes of trauma are sexual abuse, employment discrimination, police brutality, domestic violence, and particularly childhood experiences, catastrophic events, war, treachery, displacement, betrayal and familial disintegration. However, the people with different background will react differently to similar events and not all people who experience the same traumatic event will

become traumatised. Interdisciplinary trauma has a close relationship with the other fields such as psychology, sociology, history, war, politic, and significantly literature.

The social and cultural elements highly influence traumatic experience in varied ways as it forms the circumstances out of which trauma is evolved. Although, trauma damages the individual psyche, collective trauma proves even more destructive in that it breaks the social life and ruptures the sense of belonging. Traumatic experience causes the loss of trust on the social and cultural structures that are supposed to promote order and safety. The social environment, the brutality of the events and the individual's experience all determine how a victim will survive trauma. Therefore, social supports and cultural attitudes are essential to survivor's adjustment. However, when cultures fail to function as support system the individuals feel unprotected and alienated. As cultural attitudes affect the views on trauma, changing public opinion at large is a worthwhile endeavour. Trauma inevitably involves exploration about the self and identity. It involves a radical sense of disconnection and alienation as bonds are broken and relationships disintegrate. Trauma destroys individual's personal belief of safety and perception of meaningful world. A devalued self often originates from the socially marginal status where traumas from racism, violence, exploitation, colonialism and poverty evolve more likely.

Therefore, writing becomes one of the most powerful tools that have been used to communicate the trauma experience. Traumatic experience can produce an ineradicable mark on human psyche. Despite the capacity of human beings to survive and adapt traumatic experiences it can still change one's biological, social and psychological equilibrium. Fundamental to this experience is this that the past remains unresolved and not remembered entirely. Memories of trauma often appear in repetitive forms or as nightmares of trauma scene. These memories are often frozen in time and remain overwhelming experiences. As an acclaimed trauma theorist Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) remarks that, "in its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other uncontrolled phenomenon (2). According to her, "the pathology consists [. . .] solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (4-5).

Coming to the title of the paper which is trauma narratives, it is a form of narrative through which survivors of trauma make sense of their experiences, thereby serving as a mode of expression for their painful memories. In a trauma narrative the story of a traumatic experience is told repeatedly through verbal or artistic means. Sharing and expanding upon a trauma narrative allows the individual to organise their memories, making them more manageable, and diminishing the painful emotions they carry. Trauma survivors are of the strong belief that narrative is essential for them to represent their experiences. Another reason for this representation is that their lived experiences are necessary for both personal and public reasons. On a personal front, narrative is essential so as to work through the trauma by ordering the experiences and on a public level, these narratives are necessary to bear witness to the shocking events they experienced.

Analysing Kashmiri literature through the prism of trauma theories, the first acclaimed work of contemporary writer Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night* (2008) has shown that a number of real-life characters have suffered the most horrible experiences which have left them psychologically bruised and traumatised. In this work he is documenting many unheard stories of the valley which are informed by violence, pain, helplessness etc. The memoir also represents a shift from the pleasurable life of pre 1990s, when people enjoyed taking a cup of tea sitting on a stool in some shop freely, to post 1990s when only the clouds of war are hovering on them and affecting them both physically and psychologically. As one of the

characters in the book puts it that, “there are no good stories in Kashmir. There are only difficult, ambiguous and unresolved stories” (Qtd. in haloofbooks.com). Narrating an incident from this memoir, Peer is at a bus stop waiting for the bus to Kunan Poshpora, one of the villages in Kashmir where Indian soldiers allegedly raped many women. According to Indian narrative, no rapes were committed by forces but it was just propaganda by Pakistan backed terrorists. Wikipedia says that the Kunan Poshpora incident was a mass-rape that occurred on February 23, 1991, when Indian forces launched a search operation in the twin villages of Kunan and Poshpora, located in Kashmir’s remote Kupwara District. Apparently, the search operation was prompted by the firing of militants on army. The villagers claimed that many women were allegedly raped by soldiers that night. The first information report filed in the police station after a visit by the local magistrate reported the number of women alleging rape is 23. However, Human Rights Watch asserts that this number could be between 23 and 100. Although the mass rape took place in 1991 but for the victims it has not ended as they are haunted by this gruesome event and they continue to experience the impact of the event on their psyche in the form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In this connection, Jaelline Jaffe in an article titled “Emotional and Psychological Trauma: Causes, Symptoms, Effects, and Treatment” comments:

The word trauma brings to mind the effects of such major events as war, rape, kidnapping. The emotional aftermath of such events, recognized by the medical and psychological communities, and increasingly by the general public, is known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). (1)

In the memoir there are many such events and many characters who have been victims of the violence which eventually led to psychological trauma. One such incident that Peer mentions is an event of trauma experienced by his grandfather’s brother at the hands of militants when he was nearly killed by them. In another incident, a thirteen-year-old boy is seen smoking as his brother Shafi was killed by security forces and the mother of the deceased informs the author that his younger brother is in a state of trauma and thus he refuses to go to school. Peer has also highlighted the migration of Kashmiri Hindus/Pandits. There is a reference to the principal of a school who the author had met in Jammu migrant camp. The other factual issues that he has referred to in the memoir are the torture of youths in camps, women raped by the army, infamous massacres like Gowkadal’s massacre, Molvi Farooq’s funeral procession massacre and about disappeared persons. Named after the famous bridge in Srinagar the Gawkadal Bridge, the massacre happened on 21 January 1990. On the fateful day there was a massive pro freedom protest rally and when it reached the bridge the troops opened indiscriminate firing on the protestors killing at least 160 of them on the spot. It happened only a day after the Government of India appointed Jagmohan as the Governor of the state to contain and stop the valley wide protests by Kashmiris. Molvi Farooq’s funeral procession massacre is also known as the 1990 Hawal Massacre because it happened at Hawal area of Srinagar on 21 May 1990. The funeral procession was of Mirwaiz Moulana Muhammad Farooq who had been killed by militants on the same day at his Hazratbal residence. The protestors were coming from SKIMS with the dead boy of Mirwaiz and when it reached the Hawal area, the troops opened firing on the procession killing 62 and injuring more than 200 people. The official version of the firing is that some militants from the crowd hurled grenades at the security forces which led to the cross firing and the subsequent killing.

Basharat Peer in this memoir takes the readers back to the sixteenth century when Yousuf Shah Chak was the ruler of Kashmir who was betrayed by Mughal emperor Akbar who invited him to Delhi and then arrested him. Pertinently Akbar has attacked Kashmir

number of times but were always defeated by Kashmir. Thus, Peer refers to the first betrayal of Kashmir in 1586 and in this way, Kashmir lost its independence and identity. Ever since this incident the relation of Delhi and Srinagar has become symbolic of betrayal and Kashmiris inherit this feeling of betrayal and live with it. This is validated by Peer and he remarks that, “Yusuf Shah’s imprisonment and betrayal by Akbar has become a metaphor for the relationship between Delhi and Srinagar” (Peer 134). Further he comments:

Despite the rather sleepy existence of our village and my ignorance about the political history of Kashmir I had a sense of the alienation and resentment most Kashmiri Muslims felt and had against the Indian rule. We did not relate to the symbols of Indian nationalism – the flag, the national anthem, the cricket team (11)

This feeling of betrayal changes into animosity and the same is manifested in the following way, “We followed every cricket match India and Pakistan played but we never cheered for the Indian team. If India played Pakistan, we supported Pakistan; if India played the West Indies, we supported the West Indies; if India played England, we supported England” (11). To foreground the trauma of the generation of Kashmiris, Peer has highlighted the torturous treatment given to the arrested ones in Papa 2-interrogation centre, which damages their kidneys and their potency. He comments:

They beat us up with guns, staffs, hands. But that was nothing.... They took you out to the lawn outside the building. You were asked to remove all your clothes, even your under wear. They tied you to a long ladder and placed it near a ditch filled with kerosene oil and red chilli powder. They raised the ladder like a seesaw and pushed your head into the ditch...It was the beginning...They tied copper wire around your arms and gave high-voltage shocks.... But the worst was when they inserted the copper wire into the penis and gave electric shocks” (138).

All these episodes of trauma damage the sense of being of an individual and the memories of such traumatic events haunt the survivors throughout their lives. Cathy Caruth an acclaimed trauma theorist in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) remarks that, “The pathology consists (. . .) solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (4-5). Therefore, it is not only the experience itself that produces traumatic effect, but rather the remembrance of it. There is always a time lapse, a period of “latency” in which forgetting is characteristic, between an event and the experience of trauma. As reflective process, trauma links past to present through representations and imagination. Similarly, in this memoir the survivors are always haunted by the devastating past due to which they even question their identity.

The other famous novel *The Collaborator* (2011) is Mirza Waheed’s debut novel and is based on the long impending Kashmir conflict. The setting of the novel is 1990s when Kashmiri most of the young boys under the influence of Pakistan based mindset crossed the line of control and got arms training in Pakistan administered Kashmir. The novel highlights the acutely distressing accounts of the conflict between India and Pakistan on a border village Nowgam near the line of control. It foregrounds the suffering and predicament of the people of this village who flee from there for safety due to the war like situation. One of the prime attributes of the novel is a 19-year-old unnamed character/protagonist who is actually a collaborator for the Indian army captain Kaidan. One of the major jobs that he is assigned is to collect the identity cards, weapons and other belongings of the dead bodies of militants near the line of control. Addicted to this job he is psychologically so traumatised that he has

forgotten the outside world as if he is in a state of oblivion. He suffers psychic dilemmas and the same is manifested when he laments the loss of his friends and at the same time identifies himself with them. Samia and Hanif in their article “War Trauma, Collective Memory, and Cultural Productions in Conflict Zones: Kashmir in Focus” comment:

The collective psyche of Kashmiris is represented through the voice of this young Kashmiri boy. His way of survival lies in being a collaborator. Where people, out of fear and prosecution, fled the village, he does not abandon it and, in doing so, retains the memory of what is left behind as a residue. Through this individual trauma, the writer depicts the collective and cultural trauma of Kashmiris as a community using the past as a tool (5-6).

Another important article by Maarij Shakoor and Sadia Waheed titled “Trauma Narrative and Existential Dilemma in Mirza Waheed’s *The Collaborator: A Study of Traumatic Narratology and Desensitization*” (2016), highlights the effects of trauma as:

Waheed has divided the traumatic narration of the novel into three parts. The first part shows the incidents of past as well as present and weaving together the traumatic narration of unknown narrator whose family has to survive alone in the valley. All the villagers are left in the era of continuous skirmish and guerrilla wars. His four friends Mohammed, Gul, Ashfaq and Hussain left him alone in the haunted valley where only phantom traces are present. The second part is about the reverberation of friends’ insurgency and ferocious crackdowns in Kashmir. The last and final part of the novel explicates the relationship between Kadian, the captain and the unnamed narrator (8).

Although the whole novel can be called a trauma saga of Kashmiris, yet for the sake of analysis certain passages in it are more powerful testimonies of the account of trauma. For example, infamous “Catch and Kill” operation of Indian army from time to time-the impact of which is so traumatic for the unnamed narrator that he finds consolation in his pleasant past and friends, as he comments:

There are bare wounds, holes dark and visceral, and limbless, armless, even headless, torsos. A lone moan struggles, screeches inside...Bodies after bodies-some huddled together, others forlorn and lonesome - in various stages of decay. Wretched human remains lie like cracked toys. Teeth, shoes.....Macabre, horrid ghouls on either side of the brook watch me from their melancholic black hole eye sockets. Carcasses with indefinable expressions on what remains of their faces-I hope I don’t recognize anyone...The smell, the smell, the smell!...You just stop breathing. That is, it (p.8).

The way Waheed describes the carcasses of militants is both horrendous and traumatic to say the least and it sends the shiver down the spine of the protagonist. The least that he can do is to sob on seeing the dismembered pieces of bodies. Initially he struggles to do this job as he says himself, “It’s not easy, picking stuff off dead people” (p. 8), but with the passage of time he is desensitized as he has got used to it. This desensitization is one of the key symptoms of PTSD and the protagonist has already become a patient of it. This is what he feels when he beholds the dismembered body parts:

These are erstwhile legs and arms and backbones and ribcages surrounded by sparkling swathes of yellow created by the thousands and thousands of flowers all across the valley... and decaying... it makes me cry, it makes me want to run away, to disappear (p. 14).

Further he comments:

All the boys...are gone, gone, no one left in the village, it's empty now, all empty! It's all happening, dear, happening everywhere....the story of the sixteen boys (some said twenty, some thirty) who had apparently disappeared together...soon after all the women there had been raped in a night-long raid by Indian soldiers (p. 24)

Further, Maarij Shakoor and Sadia Waheed comment:

This is pathetic, frightful condition which is prevailing in the wretched Kashmir where continuous skirmish war has demolished their personal and public life. The people are leaving and become refugees to take breath freely. All the women of Kashmir are raped, molested and maltreated more than men. The mental condition and psychology of people of Kashmir enforce to leave or desensitize the unfortunate happenings. The authority has never accepted any illegal and unfortunate happenings and they let people know through media that these are just spiced up rumors (p.9).

This is validated by Waheed in his novel as he remarks:

Hundreds of us fall to the bullets of the oppressor, to the guns of the *kafir* every day. We die in hundreds, no, thousands...the cruel infidel us, tortures us, insults us and treats us like dirt...you are dragged out of your houses at night by stinking drunken soldiers...while your women, your mothers, your ready-to-wed daughters and sisters are still in bed! Crackdown after crackdown, from dawn to dusk, for days sometimes.... (p. 33).

Again, Maarij and Sadia remark:

It is common in Kashmir to vandalize, to debase the religious places by racy Indian forces. They enjoy urinating in the graveyards and on the walls of mosques. They enter into the holy places of Muslims with their unclean shoes to irritate and mentally torture the pitiful Kashmiris. They feel proud to hurt and traumatize the poor people in Kashmir (9)

What Basharat Peer has shown in his memoir is testified by Waheed in his novel as far as the treatment and interrogation of Kashmiris at the hands of soldiers is concerned. Waheed describes the condition of one of the prisoners:

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 chilli powder and thrust it up 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." (p. 186).

These episodes of terror, violence and trauma are not only individually experienced but collectively shared by the whole community in the form of cultural trauma. According to Jeffrey Alexander et al:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (p 1)

One of the great advantages of this new theoretical concept is that it partakes deeply of everyday life. Throughout the history people have spoken continually in one way or the other about being traumatized by an experience, by an event, by an act of violence or harassment, by dictatorial laws, by colonialism or even, simply, by an abrupt and unexpected, and sometimes by experience of social transformation and change. They also have continually employed the language of trauma to explain what happens, not only to themselves, but to the collectivities to which they belong as well. Trauma is not only something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society, social groups and colonial powers. Similarly, in this novel Waheed shows through different episodes of torture and violence on Kashmiris that whole valley collectively experience trauma in the form of cultural trauma. Every now and then the extreme subjugation and draconian laws passed by the perpetrators have left an indelible mark on both individual and collective consciousness of destitute people of Kashmir. Hence all suffer trauma in one way or the other. Also, cultural trauma is a contentious discursive process that shows a division between perpetrator and the victim. In *The Collaborator* this division or dichotomy is shown in the form of Kadian who acts as a perpetrator and innocent Kashmiris who are victims as Waheed comments that, “there was talk of dead bodies in the ditches and *nallahas*, the Army has started capturing and killing hundreds of boys attempting to cross over Pakistan Administered Kashmir. They saw, they shot, they saw more, they shot more” (p.117). The unheard innocent voices of Kashmiris demanding freedom are totally denied by the perpetrators.

Waheed’s second novel, *The Book of Gold Leaves* (2014) is a love story that is affected by the violent movement of 1990s. Having already given the immediate background and the causes which led to this violent militant movement, the setting of the novel is again 1990s. The novel is a love story of Faiz, a Shia paper-machie artist and Roohi, a Sunni girl who is very headstrong and believes in her dreams. The two lovers live in the neighbourhood of Khanqah-e-Moula, which is actually a Sufi shrine in Srinagar, popularly known as Shah-e-Hamadan Masjid and is situated on the right bank of the river Jhelum between the Fateh Kadal and Zaina Kadal bridges. The mosque was commissioned by Sultan Sikandar Butshikan in 1395 in the memory of Islamic preacher Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani who had come from the city of Hamadan in Persia and was responsible for the widespread conversion to Islam in Kashmir. It is in this Sufi Shrine that the two lovers often meet. Waheed, in this novel, is trying to highlight the transition of Faiz from an artist to a militant who goes across the border for arms training. What acts as a driving force or catalyst for Faiz to take up arms against Indian forces is his personal tragedy, that is, the killing of his grandmother who is blown up by an Indian soldier. The impact of this incident is so heavy that he is overtaken by emotional trauma which eventually leads to his journey across the border. The actual scene is that there is a rocket attack on the bunker which however misses the target. In response to it the machine gunner starts firing indiscriminately and arbitrarily as Waheed remarks:

The machine-gunner knows what he has to do. He is always ready. He lets the tripod go into a free swing and pulls the trigger. First into the lane from where the rocket came, or seemed to have come, then right and left, then everywhere. He doesn’t stop on seeing the minibus. He does not even spare the sky (85).

As a result of this indiscriminate firing many children and Fatima- grandmother of Faiz are killed. This incident shakes one and all and leaves an indelible imprint on the psyche of Faiz which eventually goads him to join militant ranks. It is not only Faiz who suffers at the hands of soldiers, Waheed has aptly described the suffering of common people too. The symbol of state brutality is a gigantic truck which is named as *Zaal* which strikes thunder in the hearts

of Kashmiris who are, “Hunted like cattle. Snared like chickens. Caged as if they were mad dogs” (186).

In this connection, Inam and Azhar in their article titled, “The Fetishization of Forbidden Land in Mirza Waheed’s *The Book of Gold Leaves*”, highlight the impact of these gruesome incidents on some of the major characters of the novel and comment:

As the intruding forces kick off massacring people, tragic events catalyse trauma. Traumatic events happen with a tragic regularity on daily basis, and these tragedies are the direct and far-reaching spin offs emanating from the maniac desire to have ascendancy on the valley of Kashmir. The brutal killing of Fatima, Faiz’s godmother, leaves him traumatized and lost in his deprivation, but misfortune rides a fast horse in Kashmir. Soon, his brother becomes a victim of the *Zaal* and his hand is impaired permanently. The motivation of Faiz is not derived from any external exhortations but stems from his hopelessness and traumatic conditions vis-à-vis the mighty army....However, Faiz is not the only traumatized character in the novel, mothers of the disappeared youngsters pray on daily basis for the recovery of their sons. Prof. Madan Koul’s daughter, Shanta Koul also suffers from trauma as her father and her Muslim lover Syed Afaq Bukhari were shot dead during the conflict. Upsetting flashbacks of memory come haunting her, and she remains distressingly melancholic in remembrance of her beloved. Further, as a principal of girls’ school she is in constant angst, avoiding the gaze of soldiers. Her efforts to evacuate the school do not bear fruit because of the growing obsession of the Indian army for the land. (10)

What Faiz witnesses is a highly gruesome incident which led to his personal loss in the form of his grandmother. Kali Tal in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996) remarks that “bearing witness to a traumatic event is an aggressive act that threatens the status quo; therefore, the trauma survivor comes to represent the shattering of our national myths, without being able to shatter the reader’s individual personal myths ... (12). Faiz a humble artist suffers trauma due to the atrocities that he sees around more often. Death, torture and brutality that he is a victim of in a collective sense is too much for him to sustain. His wounded soul and traumatised psyche revolts against these shattering incidents. For many years these memories kept him haunting time to time as Cathy Caruth believes that trauma is known only in the way it returns to haunt the individual, often many years after the original event. It is the psychological reaction experienced by an individual due to an overwhelming situation causing long lasting or sometimes permanent damage and leaving them vulnerable to both psychological and physical reactions. However, he gives vent to his trauma by joining militant outfit and aims to revenge his grandmothers’ murderer.

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