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Post-Partition India: A Cataclysmic Post-Colonial Study of Contemporary Kashmir Condition with Reference to *Book of Gold Leaves*

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Abstract: In post partition India, the legacy of 1947 looms larger than ever before on the subcontinent. Partition has actually proved to be a trauma from which the subcontinent has never fully recovered. It has created multiple cultural identities which, at present, are at perpetual war with each other. This physical as well as psychological division was not just an incident or concurrence, but the darkest historical event of turning loose from shared social fabric and cultural ethos. Thus, no post-colonial denizen of the subcontinent possessing a sense of history and living in the post-independence era can ignore the pervasive influence and impact of partition on the contemporary life. Kashmir, a picturesque part of the globe, once used to foster communal harmony among different sects for which it received accolades from great leaders in the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, who in his maiden visit to the valley on August 1-4, 1947, saw “a ray of hope” in Kashmir despite communal frenzy elsewhere on the subcontinent. But Since then, situation changed drastically and Kashmir became the land of everyday displacements, nocturnal raids and forced migrations. Today, it reels under the siege of most brutal colonial laws. This paper, as such is an attempt to explore social, religious, political and literary contours of partition on Kashmir, in post-independence era, through the post-colonial lens, keeping in view, Mirza Waheed’s novel, *The Book of Gold Leaves*.

Keywords: Partition, post-independence India, contemporary Kashmir condition, displacement.



Introduction

The post-colonial theory lays great deal of emphasis on the concepts of centre-margin, savage-civilized, and orient-occident. Apart from raising these debates, it also tries to address the issues of economic in-equality, fundamentalism, and territorial disputes, the basic pattern of circulation of information, power structure and the social fabric of societies. These vital concepts help us to understand how articulation of political and cultural identity is often informed by the use of tactical tools to undermine the subjugated class. The flow of false information, particularly in today's post-truth era is organized in such a way that it becomes an essential organ or state apparatus to institutionalize what Edward Said calls "reigning culture at some human cost to its various components" (Said, qtd. in Habib). The recent case of such post-truth propaganda has been circulated about Donald Trump through social media. Similarly, in India, from Television prime news shows to social discourse, a majoritarian ideology is not only circulated but also enforced upon the people. It is these burning issues that post-colonial theory tries to address. As the post-colonial theory draws its material from the colonial yoke, its foundation and existence largely depends on the colonial discourse. Also, the unjust and brutal historical events form the core of the post-colonial debate, engaging readers to search in the historical debris multiple facets of history. M.A.R Habib, while giving historical record of events, traces the colonial invasion thus:

After the end of World War II in 1945 there occurred a large scale process of decolonization of the territories subjugated by most of the imperial powers (Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium), with the significant exception of the Soviet Union and United States, beginning with the independence of India in 1947. The collapse of the communist regimes in 1991 left America as the only major remaining colonial power (though America itself had of course held the status of colony). Indeed, colonial struggle is hardly dead: it has continued until very recently in East Timor, and still persists bitterly in Tibet, Taiwan, Kashmir, and the Middle East. (Habib, 738)

While, taking these historical facts in the broader perspective, post-colonial theory embraces various aims such as to re-examine the history of colonialism, to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and colonizing powers. Apart



from analysing this, it advocates for equal access to material resources and the contestation of forms of domination, extending over dominions of gender, race, ethnicity and class, by participating in the goals of political liberation.

Discussion

The partition fiction of the sub-continent takes these historical events as a starting point to deal with the larger issues associated with this physical as well as psychological division. It traces the roots of conflict, the forces behind it, the form and nature of separation, and more importantly social and psychological ramification of this division from different perspectives. As the partition of India was not just an incident, but the darkest event in the history of mankind. It changed the whole course and direction of the people, destroying social fabric and cultural ethos of the Indian society, which otherwise used to live in communal harmony. In fact, the Indian partition happened to be the historical turning point in South Asia's diplomacy, a disjuncture and turning loose from the prospect of progress and prosperity. Many Indian-Pakistani novels notably, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1989), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), have registered brutal events of partition on the pages of fiction. Each of these partition centred works depicts the theme of partition in distinctive and unique way. The concept of the line that divided nations and displaced millions reverberates in each of these novels. However, with the passage of time, the Indian partition novels have evolved from direct reportage of the brutal events to the subtle description of post-partition trauma and plight of the people from different viewpoints and insights. Rituparna Roy describes this shift as:

When one journeys from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s, one may discern in a number of the Partition novels of this period a palpable shift from something akin to direct reportage to a more distinct theoretical accent; a shift also from the representation of the immediate practical consequences of the Partition to the depiction of the more subtle nuances of its impact on public and private life. (Roy, 133)



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Since, the impact of the sub-continental partition did not ended with the separation of Pakistan or with the birth of new India, but in post-independence India; its far effects still bitterly persist in various regions of the country. The geographical division of India on religious lines not only displaced millions of lives, but also divided people through communal castigations who otherwise have lived peacefully together regardless of religious differences. Kashmir, remains as an unfinished agenda of the partition, a living example of split territory and broken identities. Kashmiri fiction writers notably, Mirza Waheed, one of the very few voices in literature to speak of Kashmiris, places his characters in the backdrop of long Kashmir conflict to explore the trauma and tragedy experienced by Kashmiri people in the post-independence India.

The novel, *the Book of Gold Leaves* (2014) is replete with multi-religious and multi-faith characters. It describes an intimate tale of love and romance in the turbulent times of Kashmir insurgency. The novelist takes the fundamental human emotion of love to deal with the larger aspects of human enterprise in the fast changing post-colonial world. The core of the novel rests on the issue of conflict- ideological, religious, political and the subsequent human sufferings. The setting of the novel is downtown area of Srinagar, a densely populated place filled with multi-faith residents. The novel begins with the description of papier Mache artist, Faiz and his secret romance with a Sunni girl Roohi. As the story unfolds, we find the rise of Kashmir insurgency and the large deployment of Indian Para military forces to manage the crisis. The narrative can be viewed from three perspectives- Militant uprising, Hindu-Muslim secret executions and the Army's counter acts. (Raina)

The political events of 1947 caused so much hostility, internecine violence and bloodshed among communities that had peacefully coexisted for almost half a millennium on a common landmass. The pains and pangs of those events still echo in the picturesque valley of Kashmir where peculiar Kashmiri identity is in a continuous flux and in constant process of formation and re-formation. The residents of this beautiful triangular prison express the sad tale of colonial projects of three nuclear giants- India, Pakistan and China. In the process of their anti-colonial resistance, they have lost everything, including common brotherhood and art of living in co-existence, as such the minority communities had to desert their homeland and scatter all over India and had to live in



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‘Nazi like concentration camps.’ Mirza Waheed, through the character of Mir Zafar and Master Dinanath talks about the secret killings and displacement as:

I don't have a choice anymore, Zafar. They killed professor Koul. He is-was seventy years old!’ ‘Yes. I was shocked too; I still am... please don't punish us for the sins of a few. You see, whoever kills an innocent will be punished, if not in this life certainly in the afterlife Allahta'ala watches everything, Dinanath, everything. Do you remember the kindergarten children massacred by the army near Fateh Kadal? Apart from their parents, no one remembers their names now. And do you know where those soldiers are now? Still on duty, at the same bunker. (Mirza, 263)

Similarly, the displacement of minority communities from Kashmir was not only due to isolated extremist threats and killings, but was primarily, a more synthesized and politically motivated dislocation. In India, all displaced minority groups serve as a shield for the incompetency of many selfish politicians who merely use them for pity politics, whereby playing communal rhetoric to make them hot bed for their own political mileage. This was one latent reason among many other reasons of their dislocation. The countries democratic institutions receive great setback through political bickering; hate speeches and yellow journalism, as all these try to communalize people by playing Hindu-Muslim card. The Kashmir insurgency or armed struggle was one such case of uprising- the direct repercussions of political nuances and broken promises rather than the innate or motivated plan for pandit exodus or any other vicious design for Non-Muslim exclusive state. As the war turns conventional morality upside down, so does Kashmir conflict, brining tragedy to all its inhabitants. The ongoing struggle of the people neither is and nor was directed against any religion, it was just an outcry against decades of suppression, brutalities and atrocities. If it had been so, then why, after three decades of Kashmiri pandit exodus, the mass resistance is still going on and the people still brave the bullets and sacrifice their lives every day. The artistic response to minority displacement from the valley is reflected in *the Book of Gold Leaves* as:

You see many have already left. And today the government will help us, take us somewhere.

Who knows if they do that tomorrow? Here, keep these.’ Master Dinanath takes out a bunch



of keys from his pocket and dangles it in the air, waiting for Mir Zafar to raise his hand. 'I am leaving my home, my life's work, in your care. I have left another set with the Sheiks. (263)

In post-partition India, Kashmiri people are stereotyped from every nook and corner by draconian laws, selfish politicians and sometimes even by the world's largest prevailing democracy in this Himalayan state. They gyre round the fixed axis and die a thousand deaths on the each passing day. The long curfewed nights, stagnate their future dreams and enforce them to exemplify the 'Myth of Sisyphus'. The onslaughts of that darkest hour, called by whatsoever name- partition, union, accession, merger and so on, still haunt each and every Kashmiri household. The imaginary lines drawn in the middle of dark night, the accession signed amidst the howling cry, created iron walls of hatred and separation, longing and pain. The Kashmiri people didn't know where their destinies have been shaped. Even the fresh October breeze didn't told them, the smiling tulips had vanished, the buds and blossoms had drunk the Autumn death, the fast falling Chinar leaves had laughed at their fate and ridiculed them for neither being part nor parcel of the world's greatest bargain. These outpourings in a nutshell, sum up the fate of Kashmiri people. The three besieged parts of Kashmir, tormented by the gods of war are akin to wasteland, where everything smells fake and foul and each part holds one another only in the artifice of memory. The history is witness to the fact how Kashmir is transformed into a beautiful prison, and how breathing fresh air is even forbidden to the people. In *the Book of Gold Leaves* Roohi's monologue sums up this as:

The city is a lightless prison now. No one can stir without the permission of the soldier. I sometimes imagine we are in a vast coop with thousand of them circling around it, and they hit out at my hand if I try to get some air. I can feel it, actually, the chocking inside me. (211)

In this conflict torn state, people centric policies can address the issues of anger and alienation. As long as the Indian state tries to curb the aspirations of the masses, it cannot win hearts and minds of the people. The daily nocturnal raids and imposing all sort of restrictions will breed more hatred and counter oppression. The Indian state has to play a vital role for bringing Kashmir back from its



numerous wounds, and for providing a healing touch to the people. This reminds me of the great philosopher, Spinoza, who in his Treatise, *The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1677), beautifully argues about the goals of a state as:

The last end of the state is not to dominate men, nor to restrain them by fear; rather it is so to free each man from fear that he may live and act with full security and without injury to himself or his neighbor. The end of the state, I repeat, is not to make rational beings into brute beasts and machines. It is to enable their bodies and their minds to function safely. It is to lead men to live by, and to exercise, a free reason; that they may not waste their strength in hatred, anger and guile, nor act unfairly toward one another. Thus the end of the state is really liberty. (Durant, 248)

But, unfortunately, since 1947, every Indian democratic institution promoted Machiavellian approach, to suppress the voice of common Kashmiris. This colonial approach is somewhat akin to what Michel Foucault calls “epistemic violence,” the imposition of a given set of beliefs over another. (Foucault, qtd. in Habib). This may be a weak comparison, but it somehow helps to understand, how disjointed state organs are being utilized to promote monolithic narratives. The structured operation from military to Minister in Kashmir is deemed to suppress the voices of anger and alienation. The barbaric treatment with the people most often referred as “own population” closely resembles the vicious design or colonial project of the west who orchestrated flow of information, with fanciful phrases and cunning designs to back up other organs of the state for using every means to retain many forms of hegemony in Asia. Mirza Waheed shows how people of Kashmir are denied to visit their own historical and worship places as:

The Palace of the Faeries and the Royal Spring, the Shankaracharya Temple and Takht-e-Sulaiman are all barred to us. Rumi says soldiers live their too, and only government officials, army officers, VIPs from Delhi and their families can visit. I want to go to the Badam-Wari like the old days and drink tea under the umbrellas of almond blossoms, but we cannot. Someday it will be open again, and you can't stop flowers blossoming. (213, 214)

In a free country like India, the military might is used in Kashmir with certain degree of impunity to



suppress the voices of anger and alienation. In this most militarized zone, the lives of the people have no value at all. Death and destruction reigns. A visible manifestation of so many forms of hegemony is imposed upon the people. The draconian laws like AFSPA (Armed forces special powers act), PSA (public safety act), CASO (cordon and search operation) and other similar colonial strategies pose a great threat to the people. The glimpse of this military might is captured by Mirza Waheed in the novel as:

At the mouth of each street and lane, there is or will be a bunker. At the other end of each street and lane, there is or will be bunker. Three sandbags and a line-drawn machine-gun mark the bunkers on Kumar's chart. In total, his grid will cover twenty-six localities, starting from the school to Nawhatta at one end, Raaze Kadal towards the north, Khanqah and the MP school area towards the south-east...fifty-two main bunkers and twenty-six small checkpoints in all. (59)

In post-independence India, the clouds of anger, alienation and dissent keep on loaming over Kashmir to Kanya Kumari, signaling the worst times to come. The main reason behind this deteriorating contemporary condition is mostly the spread of false nationalism, frequent mob lynching cases, human rights violations, women molestation and witch haunting. As per recent BBC research report, *Duty, Identity, Credibility: 'Fake News' and the Ordinary Citizens in India*:

Facts were less important to some than the emotional desire to bolster national identity" as per report, the fake news is fast spreading in India owing to a "rising tide of nationalism." The report further claims that "there was also an overlap of fake news sources on Twitter and support networks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the findings showed. (Chakrabarti)

In *the Book of Gold Leaves*, the protagonist, Faiz like every young and old Kashmiri ordinary living beings are compelled by circumstances to take arms and save innocence from being ruthlessly killed. To become savior of those who have none to protect. Therefore, one day he decides:

If everyone decides to remain in the own small worlds, how will it end? Who will end it? Then again, how will he make a difference? But what about Fatima? Who will stand for her? She has no one. People have already moved on; there's hardly a mention of her. With



this zaal thing prowling around, I may not last long here anyway. I might as well put myself to some use. I will be back soon and Roohi will surely wait for me. (Mirza, 108)

The heart sobbing historical details of Kashmir conflict also reveal numerous bitter facts to digest. After 1947 partition, the Kashmir conflict slowly emerged and with the passage of time, it spread its branches like Blake's "poison tree," engulfing, pure and white, rich and poor, young and old. While tracing the human toll due to the cycle of violence between 1989-2002, Sumatra Bose writes:

From 1989-2002, between 40000 (official Indian estimate) and 80000 (claimed by Hurriyat conference) civilians, guerrilla fighters and Indian security personnel died in the violence. According to Indian counterinsurgency sources, in this period, more than 4,600 security personnel were killed, along with about 13,500 civilians (the vast majority Muslims) and 15,937 "militants" (the term for guerrilla fighters) including approximately 3,000 from outside IJK, mostly Pakistanis and some Afghans. (Bose, 4)

The cycle of killing does not stop here. The succeeding years saw a more frequent bloodshed on the streets of Kashmir. The new cycle of protests and counter violence terrorized the mighty of the mightiest and then changed the state into an anarchist battle field. As per Greater Kashmir report:

The mass uprisings in the years 2008, 2010 and 2016 witnessed large scale destruction of life and property. As per the estimates, more than 50 civilians were killed in 2008 Amaranth land row. Then came the 2010 protests, which erupted after the killing a teen age boy resulting in 120 civilian killings and continuous protest and curfew for 6 months. Similarly, in 2016 mass agitation, 70 innocent civilians have been killed and another hundred blinded courtesy a non-lethal weapon (pellet Guns). (Makhmoor)

Mirza Waheed while reconstructing the history of Nineties death spray in Kashmir, pictures most terrifying events with bird's eye and records real facts in the pages of fiction as:

The soldiers ensure there is a blood soaked headline in the papers every day. Two weeks ago, they killed seventeen boys across Zaine` Kadal Bridge, shot them all dead after trapping them in a lane...the soldiers were so blind with rage that they wouldn't stop firing even after the boys were all dead, mown down next to filthy drains. They continued shooting until no one was left standing...Zaitun's little brother Uzair was shot in the



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face...Zaitun slept for three nights by his grave in the Martyr's Graveyard...it is so mad here.
(Mirza, 211-212)

Conclusion

The sociopolitical and historical facts in the post-partition India show how Kashmiri people are confined within their small spaces. The outside world is closed for them for voicing their resentment and anger. This reveals that in Post-independence India, millions of Kashmiri people still strive to breathe an air of freedom. These details present a very grim picture of the happenings in Kashmir. Since, the writers are very sensitive and keen to record the trauma, sufferings and plight of the people, this paper as such analysed Mirza Waheed's novel, *the Book of Gold Leaves* and tried to blend history and fiction together for bringing out catastrophic Kashmir condition to the forefront. In the process, the post-colonial re-examination of the status of knowledge; the post-colonial challenge to the fixity of centre-periphery relation was also reviewed. Apart from this, paper tried to show how in the post-truth era, facts are manipulated to frame grand narratives of nationhood. The main focus however, remained to show how the pages of history and fiction are filled with the details of death and destruction, loss and longing, trauma and tragedy of the people living in the valley of Kashmir.

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