

Kashmir Conundrum: A Dichotomy of Narratives in Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* and Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator*

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Abstract:

Apart from being a Shangri-la, Kashmir has another horrible side of being a conflict zone. This side of Kashmir presents the armed struggle, military operations and cross border terrorism which also attracted writers, journalists and film makers particularly from the rest of India to set their stories on issues like these. Though many of these stories and movies presented Kashmir as a beautiful landscape, but in most cases it has been presented as a place full of horrors and bloodshed. Presenting these issues in a derogatory way has maligned the Kashmiri image in the eyes of people living outside Kashmir. In order to counter these narratives, many writers from valley are stepping forward to narrate the actual reality of Kashmir which has led to a contradiction in the view points. While the writers from rest of India present Kashmir from their own perspective, Kashmiri writers are also trying to speak against any constructed prejudices from a Kashmiri perspective. It is these differences and contradictions which this paper attempts to analyze. This paper attempts to show how these differences led to either representation or misrepresentation of a certain community. This paper also attempts to analyze how it is to be a victim rather than a spectator without the first-hand knowledge of the events. For the purpose this paper attempts to make a comparative study of the two novels titled *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* by Paro Anand and *The Collaborator* by Mirza Waheed. Besides that, this paper has also attempted to discuss the role played by National media, and Hindi cinema so far in covering the issue.

Keywords: Conflict, Kashmir, Representation, Struggle, Media, Cinema

In one of her famous TedTalks, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says, “the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story the only story” (Adichie). The single stories about people, communities and groups lead to certain kind of ‘othering’, especially when such stories are being narrated from a dominant class. The oppressed community itself becomes a voiceless class and fails to register their concerns. They become the subjects of a hegemonic power without expressing their grievances. They have “less access to the means by which they may control their own representation” (Ashcroft et al 198). However, a new consciousness has come into existence, especially after the concepts like ‘empire writes back’. The former European colonies, the marginalized and the oppressed communities began to express their thoughts and demanded for their basic rights especially through art and literature.

The acts of representation and misrepresentation have gained popularity in the recent discourses. In *Orientalism* Edward Said has used one of Marx’s famous quotes as epigraph wherein he says: “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented by others”. Marx contended that a voiceless class of people needed to be represented so that their anxieties and opinions could be properly channeled for their common good but what has been observed recently goes totally against it which has resulted in misrepresentation and stereotyping of such classes. Writing on behalf of the oppressed class is a dangerous task given that it involves a third-party perspective which in most cases results in certain kinds of prejudices and othering.

This paper is also intended to look into these differences where representation and misrepresentation encounters with each other. This paper analyzes narratives from two different perspectives and sees how these differences occur when there is a representator from within and a representator from outside the periphery. The paper attempts to make a comparative study of two novels on Kashmir conflict. The two different perspectives show how the act of representation and misrepresentation works and how it has tarnished the image of a certain community within their own country. The community that has witnessed an unending political turmoil resulting in death and destruction and also the rivalry of the two nuclear powers of India and Pakistan. Before analyzing these novels, this paper will discuss how Kashmir has been, or is being presented through different narratives.

After the withdrawal of British from the subcontinent, Kashmir became a bone of contention between India and Pakistan each claiming it to be a part of theirs. India and Pakistan have fought two wars on this dispute in 1965 and 1999 without caring for an opinion of Kashmiris.

Kashmir is a beautiful place of landscapes and meadows walled between the high snowy mountains. This beautiful valley has been attracting the people across the globe with its marvelous beauty. Its beauty has served as a background to a number of old Hindi movies like *Kashmir ki Kali*, *Aarzoo*, *Jab Jab Phool Khile*. During those days Kashmir was considered to be a beautiful and peaceful place with its people known for the hospitality. But after the armed struggle of 1989, which ran on puritan Islamic ideology and was sponsored from across the border, that the whole concept about Kashmir changed and the themes of Bollywood movies abruptly changed from beauty and hospitality to a place full of bloodshed, horror and terrorism and its people were depicted as “an ungrateful lot who wants to accede Pakistan” (Gadda 17). Such circumstances were created because of the movies on Kashmir like *Mission Kashmir*, *Roja*, *Dil Se* etc. The earlier movies set in Kashmir were used for the romantic songs of the movies while the post 90s films began to bring something else in the narratives. Mushtaq Ahmad writes:

Before 1989, Kashmiri was either a houseboat owner or a tourist guide, almost a neglected identity engulfed by the landscapes, but after 1989, Kashmiri was represented as either a militant/terrorist or a sympathizer of militants who conquered the picturesque view of mountain peaks. (n.p)

While on the other hand, National media left no stone unturned in defaming the image of common Kashmiris even if few people were responsible for the chaos but the whole population of Kashmiris was blamed for it. For their own vested interests the media houses used the Kashmiri term as negatively as they could. Capturing one thing and presenting something else became a daily routine. The half truths lead to a complete alienation of the Kashmiri people and this gap widened so much during the course of time that it is now very difficult to fill it or to make any reconciliation. Tavleen Singh in her book *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors* talks about the national media as one of the reasons for prolonging of the Kashmir conflict. She writes:

One of the reasons why these mistakes could be made with imputing is because the National press, out of misguided patriotism has always chosen to tell the National public less than the whole truth about Kashmir. (45)

The national media has lost all the ground in the valley due to its indifference towards the Kashmiri people. People hardly believe any media houses because of the fuel they add to the fire every time they get an opportunity. The common masses outside Kashmir have always been shown only the one side of the coin and that too fabricated and forged in such a way that people easily fall for it.

Films have carried out the same purpose like Vinod Chopra's *Mission Kashmir* in which Kashmir has been painted as a place full of horrors and bloodshed and its people as deceitful and thankless. Mushtaq Ahmad writes:

Such films brought acceptable outlets for anti-Kashmir impulses among the Indian masses. Such film narratives work as a propaganda to sell false information to those who cannot access reality. (n.p)

Some novels which used Kashmir as the setting on the other hand have also served the same purpose of selling half truths to the people living outside Kashmir. In this paper one such novel has been critically examined which also serves the same purpose of telling a mix-up tale about Kashmir, although few events have some relevance with some historical facts. Paro Anand makes an image of Kashmir through her own imagination and tries to present what she is not well aware of. The novel *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* is written for the same public who have been taking pleasure in listening to the stories mixed with the melodrama of miseries in a conflict ridden place. While on the other hand Mirza Waheed's novel, *The Collaborator* tries to be an eye opener for such people. A separate analysis of both the novels will help to understand it more clearly.

Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* is generally read as a piece of Young Adult fiction. It was nominated for the International Board on Books for Young People honor in 2006. The book was published in 2005 and was received very warmly by the readers especially from India. The book was later translated into Spanish and German. The reviews written for the book are almost written by the Indian readers who found it very interesting and a true depiction of Kashmir. A reviewer writes, "heart touching

story of misery and agony of common people. It brings tears to the reader's eyes" (amazon.in). When read from a common Indian perspective it undoubtedly makes a difference because the events narrated in the novel project the Kashmir as a place of horror where Islamic fundamentalism controls everything but when it is read from a Kashmiri perspective it presents a distorted and forged image of Kashmiri identity.

The story revolves around a young teenager Aftab who loves cricket and other daily activities in the daylight but takes part in discussions with the militant groups in the night where they plan their strategies for the future. After going through the novel, one finds that the novel is not actually about the Kashmir as most of the readers believe, but it is actually a novel for the readers who never knew the actual side of the story. There are many instances in the novel when one finds, especially a Kashmiri reader finds that the novel is not a true depiction of the events. The events where the militants plan to attack are presented in a way that could incite violence and dismay the religious harmony as she writes; "Imran was full of ideas, a wedding, an annual day celebration, a hit at a temple in Diwali or on Gurudwara on Guru Purab" (9).

This kind of statement openly circulates hate about a particular community and at the same time it would raise the rage of a common citizen. Akram the leader of this group and an outsider from Afghanistan has been presented as an evil minded and treacherous person who uses the innocence of young boys and "uses them while their dreams are bigger than their knowledge" (23). He can use his dearest one's to carry an attack even he doesn't spare his own beloved Shazia and her brother Aftab, whom Akram calls his younger brother. The striking feature of the novel is that it shows militants, especially the foreign militants parts of the Kashmiri society who have made Kashmiri girls their mistresses and also uses their families for their own vested interests. These militants are shown enjoying in the companies of local Kashmiris which is totally a false depiction because it is the common masses who were tortured and terrorized by these foreign militants and how could they enjoy their company.

The most striking thing in the novel is the use of language between the natives. The characters are shown using Urdu/Hindi whenever they talk to each other. The setting of the novel is some village in Baramullah very far from the main city of Srinagar. The question is why would they use Urdu/Hindi instead of Kashmiri, as the location is a countryside, even the urban areas speak Kashmiri. Kashmiri is the native language of the place and why should they speak in some other language. The only purpose it carries here is to make the novel more appealing for the target audience, unlike Vishal Baradhwaj's film *Haider* where the Kashmiri accent has deliberately been employed in the Urdu/Hindi and English words to make the work more Kashmiri-like.

By examining the novel critically it looks obvious that Paro Anand has written the novel for a reader who is definitely not a Kashmiri. While doing so, she hasn't missed any opportunity to malign the image of Kashmir much like the media and the films. While on the other hand Mirza Waheed's novel *The Collaborator* not only becomes a story of the place, but also tries to answer various questions raised in Paro Anand's novel.

The Collaborator is the debut novel of Mirza Waheed Published in 2011 by Penguin Classics. The setting of the novel is a village in Kupwara on the actual line of control. The novel revolves round an unnamed protagonist of 19 years old. This boy is the last one left in the village among his friends who have joined the guerilla war and went across the border for arms and training. The boy works for an army major, Major Kadian, who has assigned him the job of collecting the identity cards and weapons from the militants killed while crossing the border. Each time he goes for collecting the identity cards, he fears that he might turn the body of one of his friends; Hussain, Gul, Ashfaq and Mohammad.

The novel gives a gloomy picture of valley where common people are the sole sufferers of pain and agony unlike Paro Anand's novel which shows it the other way round. For Waheed the excessive use of force and torture compels these young lads to join the terror groups. Mirza waheed talks about the novel in one of his interviews by *Al Jazeera*. He says:

Young lives dramatically transformed by the unprecedented violence and State and Non- State power was something I had wanted to explore for a long time and growing up in Srinagar I had witnessed first-hand the brutalization of young lives. (Hafsa n.p)

Mirza Waheed as a Kashmiri writer has the first-hand information of the Kashmir issue so he tries to present it in that way. He has tried to present what he felt himself and also tries to show that how it feels to be born and growing up in a conflict ridden place. He has tried to make the people outside feel what he and other Kashmiris like him feel every day. Reviewing *The Collaborator* on *The Guardian*, Kamila Shamsie writes:

Waheed reveals with great sensitivity and an anger that arises from compassion, what it is to live in a part of the world that is regarded by the National Government as the enemy within, and by the government next door as a strategic puppet. (n.p)

Waheed has not only criticized Pakistan but he finds India equally responsible for the turmoil and unrest in Kashmir. The unnamed protagonist while narrating the horrible experiences at the sight of lying corpses says:

You know, sometimes I wonder because for Kashmir, there is always an Indian and a Pakistani version of everything - what if they have their own pasture of dead boys on the other side of the border? Treachery is a word everyone should learn. (28)

The other thing to notice here is that at what place do Kashmiris place themselves as they are the people who have suffered most. The unending hatred among the two countries is crushing the common Kashmiris in the middle.

One of the biggest differences between the two novels is the use of languages as earlier discussed in Paro Anand's novel. Here, Mirza Waheed has employed the language of common people, i.e, Kashmiri, to present it as a pure Kashmiri work. The words like 'Khraav' (wooden slippers) and 'Pheran' (traditional Kashmiri dress) are some of the traditional Kashmiri words presenting the age old culture of Kashmir. Waheed has consciously employed the Kashmiri language and used it as a tool for showing the difference between the language of locals and the language of non locals. In one of the incidents in the novel, the narrator says:

Someone not local - someone not from among us - was making an announcement in rather unpolished Hindi, Urdu, Hindustani, whatever the voice declared in an offhandish tone, that there was to be a cordon and search operation in the area. (217)

This shows that what language actually means while representing any community or place. Language differentiates between the people, it is the identity of people of a particular place. The statement shows how Waheed is making observation of a language difference between the outsiders and the Kashmiris, while Paro Anand has left this important part in her novel. She has used the Hindi/Urdu as the local language of people which serves only her personal purpose and doesn't make a true representation of the place.

The two novels stand on the opposite praxis wherein Mirza Waheed as a native has tried to give each detail about the sufferings of his people. Paro Anand on the other hand could be seen lagging in providing such details which has resulted in a total misrepresentation of Kashmiri identity.

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