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## EXPLORING ELEMENTS OF REMORSE, GUILT, LOSS AND HALLUCINATIONS IN MIRZA WAHEED'S TELL HER EVERYTHING

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**ABSTRACT:** The understanding about the literary context is an integral part of the study of any work of literature. The context in which the literature of a period is placed defines the contours of that work. It adds to the knowledge about the undercurrents which advertently or inadvertently influence the shaping up of different genres of literature. Similar is the scenario of literature from Kashmir, it is filled with moral perplexity, uncertainty, nostalgia, illusion and loss. A wave of different writers is competing to jump into the fray and make their voices heard. Including women and men alike, the ongoing conflict in the region has paved the way for questioning of accepted socio-political and traditional beliefs. The insurgency has changed the very dynamics of the region marked by general disillusionment, skepticism, cynicism and irony. Neurosis, displacement, psychological disorder and social gloom become the order of the day. This paper attempts to have a layered discussion of such a book titled, Tell Her Everything, written by Mirza Waheed.

Key Words: Disillusionment, Gloom, Neurosis, Nostalgia, Loss, Uncertainty etc.

### INTRODUCTION

The land that lies at the heart of India's consciousness and edges of the borders isn't just a piece of lush green topography or a territory occupied by mighty Pir Panjal. It has been but a cultural and historical mix of invasions, amalgamation of races and a nest of singing saints. The valley of Kashmir, eulogised as 'the paradise on Earth', is surrounded by lush green woods and mighty mountains. The people of Kashmir consider these mountains as their guardian and protector which allowed different religious faiths to come and settle therein, without much resistance. Kashmir has not a single past, however it is the melting pot of Buddhism, dwellings for teachings of Vedanta and a hub of mystic Islam. After the Buddhist and Hindu Rajas Kashmir was ruled by Afghans, Mughals, Sikhs and Dogras respectively. The peace-loving people accommodated the cultural and religious diversity without showing much resentment with dominant trend. The recent insurgency has become the dominant theme of literary production for writers from Kashmir.

Mirza Waheed therefore belongs to this group of writers along with Rahul Pandita, Sidharth Gigoo, Basharat Peer, Nayeema Mahjoor and Shahnaz Bashir. Waheed was born and brought up in Kashmir, he can be said to be a child of insurgency, obsessed with neurosis, pain, aghast and declining Kashmiri landscape. He started his career as a journalist and worked for BBC Urdu for quite a long time until recently he decided to devote his full time to writings. His major Works include, The Collaborator, The Book of Gold Leaves and Tell Her everything.

In his book under study, Waheed poignantly and powerfully unpacks a tale of guilt and betrayal. The story revolves around life of a doctor who is at odds with his inner self and outer reality, he becomes devoid of medical ethics and professional empathy, but realises his wrongdoings and soon turns pen into paper reckoning with those who have suffered at his hands, and eventually succeeds in winning his moral dissonance. The Chicago Review of Books, puts it as, "Tell Her Everything is a layered recital of intricately woven hauntings, decisions and confessions...[A] story that at once haunting, tender and gripping". Truly so, the novel is a tense, visceral and moving tale of a father's unconditional care and concern for his daughter, and about a medical professional grappling with remorse, shame and despair. The plot raises a number of pertinent moral questions about doctors' accountability, unwavering integrity, answerability towards his profession and his objectivity towards patients.

At the very outset of the book, Waheed writes a quote from Kafka's A Country Doctor, it reads, "To write prescriptions is easy, but to come to an understanding with people is hard." The book runs down on the sad gloom of professional superiority and its relapse into oblivion and its replacement by doping and professional tempering. The most important questions and perhaps most recurring ones throughout the leaves of the book, are, "it had to happen, I couldn't have prevented it, could I? It had to happen to someone, and it was me. These questions and confessions reflect the moral transparency and a universal transference as well as a fathers love and trust in his daughter. As Waheed writes:

If she asks, and ask she will, I'll tell her no, I do not feel shame. It's something more than, beyond shame. I can't tell you how I feel. You know how I feel. Sometimes I wonder if there are other people like me out there, having done or doing the kind of thing I have done. I have had to do. At other times, I think, what if I am the only one, one of a kind, you know. Either possibility instils in me the same feeling, and I don't know which is worse. I really don't (49).

These lines showcase feeling of extreme guilt and remorse that makes the protagonist uneasy with himself, to the extent that he was forced to 'do it' as he puts, "had to do it". He further goes to say, "I did it for money, I'll tell her. She may or may not understand, but I have decided to tell her everything, the whole truth, as straight as possible (3). The disillusionment, guilt and remorse are the only things he is left with. Sometimes it's the reenactment of past events that makes one relive the future. In another confession he says:

I believe she'll understand everything. I'm sure of it. She is my only child, after all. I want to tell her there came a time when I sensed I had crossed over into some other world and it was lonely there; I had no one to look at but myself. [when Sara comes, I'll at last have someone else to look at and to talk to in the darkness.] Yes, it was something like that. You cross a barrier between the usual, ordinary world and the unusual extraordinary one. I had a good, kind hand, they said. I wondered how they felt, those who saw my marker-bearing hand on theirs...Our elders used to say that quite contemplation is the most meaningful way to live life's later years (37).

The guilt stricken psychological state is reflection of declining values and ethical conducts in contemporary, and the most trusted confidante are seen in children, it makes the ball roll to an unending disintegration of formal institutions. It intensifies the inner disgust and brewing bitterness, so much so that he resorts to unleash his emotional piling up before his daughter. Through this doctor's confession Waheed tries to show a general decline in human values and a tragic spectacle of human existence. He goes on to write:

Once or twice a year, or every couple of years, it felt as if a small battle was going on somewhere nearby and I was on call to have the wounds fixed and dressed. I was there: closing the wounds, healing the wounds, then seeing those faces at night. There were of course the dreams. I'd wake up startled, having seen one of the faces in the dark. Sometimes they shook hands with me. Even in my dreams, I'd remind myself to shake hands properly (25).

The lines reflect a typical case of 'double telling' the haunting memories of hospital scene and a remorseful reenactment of events. This repetition in dreams is very central to causing hallucinations and past digging. Waheed is one of the seminal figures of Kashmiri writings, his book is marked with haunting nostalgia and memory along with trauma of floating existence. In another instance he presents the harrowing mental state of protagonist as:

There was one year when I had to attend to quite a few cases, and suddenly, it felt liberating. Yes, that's the word I was looking for. In that year, more people were in need of an amputation than needed paracetamol. I felt, well, this is so wide that I can hardly cope. But it also meant that there must be others working to meet the demand. Someone had to do it. If not me someone else. That was liberating, Sara. It wasn't in my hands...the fact is that they were already doing it long before I arrived (61).

Therefore, it is shown that, it was a culture of professional tempering, as the words indicate, 'it was not in my hands...in fact they were doing it long before...' Waheed has powerfully captured the general prevalent norm of malfunctioning and malpractices. He collectively rummages the recesses of his mind for the dying and distorting conventional values. The readers are left to gape at the audacity of these humbugs who try to hoodwink such professionals exploiting the trust and situation in their own ways. Money has such a sway for them and they deviate from morality. Through all the confessions and misdeeds, in the later part, the novel asserts a moral lesson:

You know, Sara, one of the few things I have learnt in life is that no one dies without regrets. Every person takes some, perhaps many regrets with him or her. There's no point fretting over settling scores, tying up loose threads, aiming for closure, getting back at someone, or apologising for every little thing. Yes as my mother used to say, a good human being shouldn't do anything that he regrets the next morning. I tried to live by this motto, even as it became abundantly clear that it's just not possible to live a regret-free life. To the grave it'll all go anyway, but one must try, one must try (201).

Therefore, through out the novel, guilt, hallucinations and remorse keep reverberating and making indomitable case for writer to portray prevalent social trends. The novel is a testimonial way of presentations that how small men become party to huge crimes. While reading the novel, Alex Preston remarks, 'A brilliant, unsettling and sometimes horrifying novel'. The genuine questions that its narrator poses are, how does abnormal become normal? Dr K. is hence a superb creation a narrator of unrelievable morality. To many readers the novel has same unremitting remembrance of Kafkaesque and Coetzeean undercurrents, but the insurmountable tapping in the repressed fears is parallels drawn with Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*.

## CONCLUSION

Waheed hence, uses idea of novels to question the notion of self, profession and morality. Self-estrangement of narrator is a recurrent theme in most of his writings in general and Kashmiri writings in particular. It occurs due to variety of factors which involve some sort of displacement and dislocation. In Waheed's case there is a move across countries, cultures and languages. Waheed's writings take their origin in the mind that is simultaneously Kashmiri and western-Kashmiri mode of experiencing an emotion and western mode of defining it. The novel opens up multitude of avenues for identity, nostalgia and loss, a displacement which makes deep inroads into writings. A valley whose beauty has unimaginably transformed, leaving behind a vast vacuum, which has immense scope for further scholarly explorations.

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