



Dream vs. Reality: The Pain of Survival in Conflict Zones as seen in Siddhartha Gigoo's A Long Dream of Home and Temsula Ao's These Hills Called Home.

DR. SADIYA NAIR. S

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (SHSS)

DEPT. OF ENGLISH, JAIN UNIVERSITY, BANGALORE

Abstract

The paper explores the excruciatingly painful life and living conditions of the civilians who lived in Kashmir and Nagaland and how their desire to be independent remained a far-fetched dream. The migrants who wished for a territorial identity were marginalized, deprived of their basic amenities and they lived in shelter camps in a constant state of fear. They longed for a better future and they fantasized about the past days of bliss and glory. They liberated themselves from the pain and chaos of their miserable existence through their daydreams, hardly realizing the fact that these moments were only ephemeral, while they were stranded in a space that could accommodate neither their identity nor their culture. The paper explores the word '*dream*' and the concept of dream and how the concept could be connected to the condition of the Nagas and the Kashmiris. The paper focuses on the life of the migrants in Kashmir and Nagaland who were left as dependants and survivors within their own spaces.

Keywords

Conflict, Perspective, Migrants, Territorial, Identity, Space, Ephemeral, Stranded.

Humanity has witnessed scenes of exile and migration since the Biblical and Homeric times. Mankind resorted to migration either for better living conditions or in search of food or pastures for their animals. The ironic fact about migration is that it is witnessed even in the post-independent era. In the present age, exile, migration, and exodus happen during conflicts or due to political circumstances. Here the migrant has to evict himself from his homeland either due to a self-driven decision or due to some fear which threatens his family and community.

In Kashmir, which is one of the most militarized conflict zones in India, it could be understood that the exodus and migration happened as a forceful eviction process, where the migrants had to seek refuge and shelter from the bloodthirsty militants in the Kashmir valley. The Pandits, who had to leave the Kashmir valley overnight, were forcefully evicted from their homes, for *dreaming* of an independent life in their homeland. In the case of the Naga conflict, the Nagas *wished* for an autonomous and independent government. They wished to form an independent Union which bifurcated themselves from the rest of the Indian sub-continent. Though they were not evicted from their land, they had to face the trauma and the pain of an ongoing conflict. In the case of both the Nagas and Kashmiri Pandits, their desire in life was not to amass wealth or to become dictators. They rather dreamt to live in their homeland and to handover their culture and legacy to their posterity.

The paper explores the word '*dream*' and the concept of dream and how the concept could be connected to the condition of the Nagas and the Kashmiris.

Dream comprises an individual's conscious and unconscious desires. 'Dream' is a psychic phenomenon that like an unstable bridge connects the real and the imaginary worlds. It is an illusionary world that reminds one of the words of Edward Said 'the irresolvable tension' between the two forces- the familiar and the unfamiliar.

The migrants who were disconnected and estranged from their homeland lived with their share of traumatic experiences. For them, the past remained only a distant dream. The memories of their lost homeland and the relinquishing love to be in one's community remained as dreams or as unfulfilled desires within themselves. Their literature and their narratives were the only bridge that connected them to their homeland. Literature for them, became their mode to vent out their fears and their frustrations.

Gustavo Perez Firmat in his short poem '*Dedication*' writes on the writer's linguistic and cultural predicament in expressing his unfulfilled desires thus:

"The fact that I
am writing to you
in English
already falsifies what I
wanted to tell you
My subject:
how to explain to you
that I don't belong to the English
though I belong nowhere else".

Sigmund Freud stated that dreams were the inborn desires of the mind. Freud felt that dreams contained memories, which revealed one's inner desires and wishes that the individual craved and wished for throughout their lives. Dreams could also be the haunting memories of one's life, which one feared or which scared them the most. It could also be nostalgic recollections of a specific place or a location. Dreams were formed from parts of one's collective experiences- both good and bad. The dreams of the homeless revealed

their longings for shelter and territorial identity. Their dreams comprised memories of their painful past, their struggle for re-settlement, and their uncertainty about the future.

Dreams were the only way through which the migrants liberated themselves from their exile and from the alienation which they suffered within their inner selves. They dealt with the dynamics of the conflicts by probing into their internal selves. They felt that dreams were the only means of escape from their insecurities and frustrations- i.e. their desires, isolation, insecurities, pain, and trauma. They dreamt of a better place and improved prospects in life. Their literature and their texts prove beyond doubt that their dreams were rather replicas of their perceptions and their deep desire to be a part and parcel of their homelands.

The people in Kashmir and Nagaland lived with the mere desire to fit themselves into an 'ideal world'. They realized that there was no ideal place, other than one's homeland. They did not feel connected to the new place. They felt that a new place was always a strange space, which could not accommodate their identity or culture, hence the new migrant location was not the right place where they could stay forever. Though the migrants tried to improvise their lifestyles to suit their new identities, they found that they were isolated and alienated in their new land of exile, and their past remained only as painful and haunting memories.

Siddhartha Gigoo narrates the sufferings of the Kashmiri Pandits through his book '*A Long Dream of Home*'. The book contains narratives that were penned by the Pandits themselves. They expressed their pain and their sufferings which they had to face amidst their difficulties and hardships. The tales depicted their struggle for survival at the shelter camps in Jammu.

One of the narrators in the memoir sequence Neeru Kaul through the narrative titled '*My House of Stone*' laments the present predicament of their life as they struggled within the shabby confines of their shelter camp in Jammu. The narrator in his thought process meanders through the streets in Vyeth (Jhelum) and thinks of his ancestral home in Srinagar. He remembers that his family lived in all mirth and happiness and now what remains is only the dilapidated memories of those bygone days. He reminisces:

"Everything was buried under the vestiges of irretrievable past- grandeur, honor, and repute of the predecessors, their hopes and dreams for posterity, old neighborhood camaraderie, their stories of evolving together, their beliefs.

Nothing remained except memories". (95)

The migrants spend a long period of their life waiting, hoping, and longing to be a part of their homeland. They suppressed their inner dreams and desires when they tried to forcefully fit themselves into their new land and alien culture. Through their letters and literature, they tried to connect themselves to their homeland. This reassured them by giving them a feeling of being one among the native settlers themselves. Despite all this, the migrants still became captives in their minds and souls. Homeland was only a distant dream and a figment of their imagination. They felt like strangers and refugees who cherished the dream to be independent in their own land.

Varad Sharma in his narrative *The Inheritance of Memory* (in Siddhartha Gigoo's book '*A Long Dream of Home*') narrates how the pain of separation and the memories led to a sense of loss.

“Not being able to go back to Kashmir all these years, my connection with Kashmir is only through the inherited memories of my parents, grandparents, and relatives. After all, an exile possesses only memories; memories of a home, and the vibrant life in the homeland. The memories are the lifeline for an exile” (253)

The internally displaced and dislocated civilians felt like refugees within their own spaces. Through their dreams, they attained the liberty to move all around their homeland and to live a life of their choice and desire. Dreams empowered them by making them free and creative. Dreams helped them to re-discover themselves. They could cross their real and their imaginary spaces through their dreams. Dreams thereby not only provided a means for an escape; but also worked as a mental strategy for survival, where the real world merged with the imaginary worlds. Things that could never be attained in real life were fully attained and fulfilled through their dreams. Dreams subverted and reverted archetypal thinking, thereby making life very peaceful and prosperous. The migrants felt that they were willing to accept their lives through their dreams, whereas in real life, many situations were unacceptable. Thereby, dreams were very much a part of the migrant lives, as they liberated and empowered them. It provided them with moments of happiness and bliss giving them hope and comfort in their life, which was otherwise filled with despair and disillusionment.

In the case of the Nagas, they dreamt of free and independent life, a life that liberated them from all the colonial powers and invasions. They longed to attain freedom from the Japanese invasion as well as freedom from the Indian Government. Within the Nagas themselves, the Underground armies aimed for freedom from Government, as they demanded absolute autonomy for the Naga society. Each factionalist group demanded independent authority for their political autonomy, as they wanted to establish themselves within their political circles. The Naga women dreamt of freedom from the shrewd and cunning eyes of the army folk. Most of the Naga men dreamt of better life and employment opportunities, as conflict affected their traditional occupations such as agriculture, fishing, weaving, etc.

Temsula Ao in her book *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* narrates the pain and suffering in conflict zones when she says:

“The struggle of the Nagas for freedom remains in the backdrop, the thrust of the narratives is to probe how the events of that era have re-structured or even ‘revolutionized’ the Naga psyche. They are still struggling to settle for a legitimate identity...

Nagaland’s story of the struggle for self-determination started with high idealism and romantic notions of fervent nationalism, but it somehow got re-written into one of disappointment and disillusionment”. (Preface)

The Kashmiris also dreamt of freedom and autonomy. Kashmir for many years, remained in a state of conflict, as some wanted Kashmir to become part of Pakistan- a great deal of Kashmiris wanted to remain within the Indian sub-continent and others wanted Kashmir to be declared as an independent republic. The Kashmiri Pandits who were prosecuted and banished from their homeland dreamed of a future when they could return to their own homes and live a life without any fear or agony. But it only remained as a distant dream and never came true.

Sushant Dhar in his narrative '*Summers of Exile*' (from Gigoo's book '*A Long Dream of Home*') narrates the pain and the suffering faced by his community at large:

"... can you ever imagine what we went through? The pain of not being in your home, the pain of parting with your belongings, the pain of that one last glance at your home, the pain of not having a morsel of rice for your children, the pain of sleeping on the veranda of a government school for years, the pain of living in a tattered tent for years, the fear of losing your life to a snake bite, the fear of dying because of sunstroke, the pain of living under a killer dome in refugee quarters for sixteen years, the pain of losing your memory, the pain of listening to narratives that create more injustice and torment in our hearts, the pain of carrying a withered hope for twenty-five years.

I know you can't suffer what I have suffered.

But you can now try to comprehend the loss?

I still wait. There is no justice.

It has been twenty-five years.

I still don't have an address, a home to call my own" (86-97)

The Kashmiri Muslims dreamt of a life where they could live in harmony and perfect happiness. Though many Muslims were overridden by their own fanatic beliefs, they felt that peace was the only solution through which life could resume to back normalcy in the valley. The Muslim extremists in the Kashmir valley aimed to rejoin the majority country which they considered the ultimate happiness in their lives. They wanted to form an independent ruling party and claim absolute power through their acts of terrorism. The civilians in Kashmir dreamt to see the bygone days when the Hindus and Muslims lived in perfect harmony. They wanted to live a life of their choice and not the one imposed on them.

In the case of the Kashmiris as well as the Nagas, dreams took them to a state of fantasy and a momentary phase of wish fulfillment. Dreams helped them to create momentary bliss through the real act of living and through the act of imaginatively creating their own euphoric spaces. The displaced civilians always kept looking forward to a space in which they belonged and which they could freely call their 'own'. But after the dreamlike state, they understood that they belonged nowhere. They lived their lives in their visions, hallucinations, and through their memories. These fragmented memories could never help them in their current situations or help to soothe their traumatic experiences. Though they exhibited undue strength, courage, and determination to settle somewhere; they were mentally, physically, and emotionally uprooted from their places of origin. They felt that they were exiled throughout their lives and that no force could bring them back to their last days of glory.

Even the mindset to uproot and settle oneself in a migrant place gets going only when the individual or his community migrates from his homeland for better prospects, happiness, freedom, or achievement. In the case of the migrants from the Kashmir valley, they had to leave their homeland with the pain of loss lingering throughout their lives. They became haunted by their tormenting thoughts and fragmented memories, which had left them scarred throughout their lives. Migration thereby became a very painful process for the individual as well as for the community.

Minakshi Watts in her narrative 'The day I became a tourist in my own home' quotes the lines from Haruki Murakami's 'After Dark' (from Siddhartha Gigoo's book) which states:

"People's memories are maybe the fuel they burn to stay alive".

Dreams enabled them to act, to rise and strike hard at the perpetrators of injustice who troubled them and made them disheartened and disturbed throughout their lives. Dreams also enabled them to experience cathartic moments of bliss, where they remained happy amidst their chaotic and miserable conditions.

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