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Articulating the Unarticulated: Analysing the Trauma of Loss in Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon has Blood Clots*

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Abstract:

It is the voice of the majority that always finds space in the social, cultural, economical and political milieu. The weak, the poor and the minority always remain as an invisible and ignored community. Nowhere is their existence acknowledged. Literature is no exception in this regard. Though attempts have been taking place to represent the voice of the deprived, how far it is successful in hitting the target is really a matter of concern. In this context Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon has Blood Clots* is a worth mentioning book which brings to light the unseen wounds of an 'unseen' community. This book traces the extermination of a community due to mass genocide and conversion and also the traumatic existence of the remaining members who are forced to lead a life in exile. Rahul Pandita is talking about the plight of Kashmiri Pandits and he brings home the idea that losing home and roots are more traumatic than losing one's own life. Pandita tries to communicate the trauma the generations of pandits carry over as a result of the continual ethnic cleansing they have been subjected to.

Keywords: Kashmiri Pandits, trauma, ethnic cleansing, exile, loss.

Trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempts to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remain unknown in our very actions and our language. (Caruth 17)

This is how Cathy Caruth introduces her concepts of trauma in her key text *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Rather than a psychological disorder, trauma implies so many other things. Traumatic experiences are available to us through the narratives of the victim who attempts to articulate a violent event or events to which s/he has only partial access. The victim is trying to communicate a terrible event which he or she fails to comprehend fully. In *Our Moon has Blood Clots*, which unfurls the brutal episodes in the history of Kashmiri Pandits, Rahul Pandita dares to create a space where the anguish and agonies of the voiceless minorities in Kashmir could find a voice.

Our Moon has Blood Clots, a perturbing memoir by the eminent Indian war zone reporter Rahul Pandita brings to light a totally unknown face of Kashmir. Kashmir which once was celebrated as the paradise on earth is now turned to a land of contention, enmity, violence and death. Many writers through their poignant works tried to communicate the harrowing experiences of Kashmiri people to the world. But their very focus was only the brutality of the Indian security forces on Kashmiris, though it is not something to be enshrouded. Most of the writers fail to address the issues of the minorities living in Kashmir. In Kashmir there lives or better to say lived a sect who received maximum brutalities from the religious fundamentalist and the militants fighting for Azadi from India. This community was rather invisible and their voice never got reverberated anywhere in the world. They are the Kashmiri Pandits, the ethnic minorities in Kashmir. The words of K P S Gill, the former DGP of Punjab and consultant on counter terrorism, throw an authoritative light on the plight of this community:

Their relatively small numbers, coupled with a tradition of non-violent protest, has made the Pandits largely irrelevant in the political discourse – both within the country and internationally – on Kashmir. It should be clear, however, that the many ‘peace processes’ and ‘political solutions’ that are initiated in J&K from time to time have little meaning until these include some steps to correct the grave injustices done to this unfortunate community.

It is this hitherto unheard voice of the Pandits that we hear in the book *Our Moon has Blood Clots*. Rahul Pandita's powerful narration unleashes the unarticulated saga of suffering of the Pandits.

Satish Ganjoo, in his article entitled “A History of the Kashmiri Pandits Race” traces the roots of Kashmiri Pandits as follows:

The Saraswat river that flowed into eastern Punjab, Rajasthan, Sind and other parts of Indian subcontinent suddenly got dried up. The Aryan Saraswat Brahmins, who used to live on the banks of Saraswati river, migrated to the Kashmir valley to continue their austerities. With the passage of time the people came to be known as ‘Bhattas’ in Kashmir. Now they are called Kashmiri Pandits.

History says that in Kashmir the Pandits have a long tradition of more than 11000 years. Then Kashmir was a seat of culture, civilization, knowledge and spirituality. But by 14th century the prosperity and splendor of Kashmir life started declining on account the corrupted Lohara dynasty and Turkish invasion. Later many Afgan and Mugal rulers wrecked havoc in Kashmir. They tortured the non-Muslims there and most of them were forced to convert to Islam and the rest including Pandits migrated to other parts of India. As a result, says Gangoo, “Kashmir valley became a predominantly Muslim region”.

The life and sufferings of the Kashmiri Pandits have remained an untold episode in the history of Kashmir. It is in this context that *Our Moon has Blood Clots* gains relevance. This

memoir definitely helps to dig out the memories of a community which was once a part and parcel of Kashmir. Each page of the book is heavy with the horrors and atrocities borne silently by the Pandits. Though Rahul Pandita narrates his own story, nowhere in the book he is biased. Throughout the book he takes the role of an objective narrator. At the same time he is able to transfer to the readers the same trauma that he is experiencing since his people have been subjected to gruesome attacks at the hands of militants.

This paper is an attempt to analyse how various losses --- loss of home land, loss of dear ones, loss of identity, loss of roots etc. along with physical brutalities and mass genocide traumatise people. It also examines how the victims are left psychologically paralysed and how for them life becomes totally impossible. Throughout the book *Our Moon has Blood Clots* what one can see is the urge in each character to go back to their lost homeland. Losing their homeland becomes the greatest trauma for the Pandits, perhaps even more than the brutalities inflicted on their body by the militants.

A traumatic event always makes a rift between the self and others. This crack is represented vividly through the description of the place of trauma because:

The physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the characters' identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience. The primacy of place in the representation of trauma anchors the individual experience within a larger cultural context and in fact, organizes the memory and meaning of trauma. (Balaev).

In order to understand the trauma and agonies of the characters in *Our Moon has Blood Clots* they have to be placed in the cultural and historical context of Kashmir.

Kashmir was a land blessed with nature's bounty, remembers Rahul. In all sense it was a heaven on earth. Rahul believes it is the magnificent nature which made his ancestors pursue knowledge. Their pursuit of knowledge turned the valley to an abode of wisdom. The scholastic as well as the artistic excellence of the Pandits got transferred from generation to generation. They were the representatives of glorious heritage and legacy of Kashmir. Such a well rooted community, when ordered by the militants to flee from their homeland as a part of ethnic cleansing, is left traumatized:

I was one of the thousands of migrants who landed each day at the door step of India's capital from every crevice and corner of the country [...] But there was a difference between the other migrants and me. On the festivals and on family functions, or when they were dying they knew they could go back to where they had come from. I couldn't do that I knew I was in permanent exile. (Pandita 6)

Yes, 'permanent exile', that is what haunts Rahul throughout his life. Like any other Kashmiri Pandit, who is forced to leave their homeland, Rahul also finds this reality horrible. The easy luxurious metropolitan life in Delhi never offers him comfort. On the other hand Kashmir always

allures him as his final destination. The intensity of trauma that Rahul experiences is fully realized when he hopelessly and helplessly describes himself as a migrant in his own country.

“I don't know what shahar means to me personally. In so many ways we were protected in shahar from the trickery and the treachery of big cities like Delhi. In shahar, as I realized later speaking one's own language meant so much.” (Pandita 44). By the word 'shahar' Rahul means one's own home town. He tries to communicate with the readers how he feels for his shahar, his Kashmir. For him, Kashmir is something which he can never describe. It was a shell of protection for him. So later when Rahul is uprooted from Kashmir and destined to live in Delhi, he realizes that Delhi can never replace his shahar.

The attack against the Kashmiri Pandits is not something which has sprouted all of a sudden. The carnage of the Pandits is a repeating history since time immemorial. Each time when they become the target of horrible brutalities, most of them tried to stay back in the valley as long as possible because of the realisation that no heaven can offer the security of one's home. “Though we knew something was a foot, we refused to believe that our turn would come soon.” (Pandita 72)

But when the terrorists and the supporters of 'Azadi' movement started employing primitive methods of torturing and killing on thousands of innocent Pandits, these so called 'infidels' had no way before them except exile. Rahul Pandita's delineation of the episodes of blood curdling brutalities let loose on the Pandits really leaves the reader shocked and traumatised. He remembers the story of Naveen Sapru, a 33 year old telecom department employee. On 27 February 1990, he was caught hold by a group of men on his way to Habba Kadal and they shot him down mercilessly. They, in their insatiable blood thirst, started dancing around Naveen till he bled to death. Each of such violent incidents agonises the remaining pandits to such an extent that life ceases to exist for them.

Rahul's journey in exile begins when their house in Kashmir valley is taken control by a gang of boys from neighbourhood. Realising that they could no longer stay in their home, his father decides to leave Kashmir and they move to Jammu. Each day away from their home brings back to their mind the warmth and serenity of their lost home. For a family like Rahul's who lived with all amenities, the life in exile was a nightmare. “Once we were in Jammu, other worries took over. Where were we going to live? Where would the money come from? Was everyone else safe –our friends, relatives” (Pandita 100). Still they strongly believed, one day they could go back to their homeland. Years later Rahul realises that it is only a pipe dream.

“Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature ---the way it was precisely not known in the first instance return to haunt the survivor later on”. (Caruth 4). Though many Pandits who were forced to witness the excruciating terrors could overcome the particular moments of violence,

they could never escape from the trauma it caused. Rahul narrates a couple of such terrifying incidents which will disturb the consciousness of not only the witness but also the reader:

In the darkness of night father and son were led away by the armed men The police found their bodies hanging from a tree a day later. The men had hammered nails between their eye brows, where the tilak is applied. Their limbs were broken and their bodies ravaged with cigarette burns. They had been shot as well. (Pandita 117)

The story of Girija Tiku, a 28 year old lab assistant in a school is much more severe. One day she was abducted by a group of men who later gang raped her in a moving taxi. But the cruelty didn't end there. "In a final act of barbarism, they took her to a wood- processing unit and cut her alive on a mechanical saw". (Pandita 118)

Refugee camps in Jammu gave yet another tormenting picture. Rahul sees there people who are on the verge of death due to unknown diseases and adverse circumstances; he meets people who are affected by mental break downs as a result of witnessing the brutal murders of their dear ones. Once in one of the camps in Jammu Rahul meets a woman whose son was killed in Baramulla by his own friends. "They shot him dead, then pounced on him, gouged out his eyes and cut of his tongue". (Pandita). This violent murder devastates the mother completely that she fails to acknowledge the death of her son. She starts behaving as if her son was alive. The sight of this unfortunate mother preparing food for his dead son will make anybody wet their eyes.

"Survivors of trauma claim that they live in two worlds: the world of their traumatic memory and the real world. As a result the traumatic memory is preserved frozen and timeless and psychic movement becomes automatic aimless and senseless". (Amir). The older generation of Pandits already carries within them the trauma of a terrifying past; the mass genocide and attack on the Pandits during the late 1940's. As mentioned above this fearful memory is lying somewhere in the depths of their consciousness. So when history repeats in 1990, those blood chilling images of severe torture, enforced mass conversion to Islam, massacre, gang rapes and mass exodus pierce their psyche.

Our Moon has Blood Clots also recounts how even little children feel lost when they become homeless. It does cause psychological disorders in them. Rahul shares the experience of one of his friends' daughter whose family got shifted from Kashmir and now settled in Delhi. At school when her teacher asked her to tell a few words about her home, the girl replied that she had no home at all. The home they had was burnt down, she added. Though at present, she has a house in Delhi, the girl cannot comprehend this truth. She still feels that they are homeless and rootless. What the girl tries to tell the world is that a house does not simply mean a place to stay, it means more than that; it is a place of security, togetherness and above all it is a place where people can relate themselves to; it is the only place where a person is connected to the chain of tradition. Thus it can righteously be said that a house can never be a home.

The death of Ravi, Rahul's cousin, his childhood hero, was the incident which made Rahul totally disintegrate. Nothing seems to exist for Rahul after this tragic incident. Ravi's death devastated not only Rahul, but a few others also. "Ravi is dead. My brother is dead, my hero is dead [...]. Life is empty. Family is meaningless. Ma never recovers. I think it is from that moment onwards that she began to slip away. Ravi's father never recovered." (Pandita 149) Ravi was killed on his way to Gool. He was on a bus when the attackers spotted him. Along with two other Pandits Ravi was taken out of the bus and they shot him to death. Obviously Ravi's death was something from which his dears could never recover from. May be Ravi's mother's habit of watching television endlessly for hours and his father's restlessness are expressions of the trauma they undergo.

According to Cathy Caruth, to be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. For Rahul home becomes the image and forced exile becomes the event which cause trauma in him. Kashmir has been haunting him since the day he left there. Finally years later Rahul gets a chance to visit his home in the valley which is now occupied by a Muslim family. Rahul poignantly describes the pangs of a man who is destined to come back to his own house as a mere visitor. Each part of his house brings a flood of memories to him:

My house should be somewhere here. Yes it is. On my left. I turn. It is in front of me. The huge blue gate is still there. The name Aabshar—waterfall—is still painted on a small board. The apple tree used to be visible from the street. Wait...where is it? It is not there. Is this my house? (Pandita 214)

Rahul's question "do you realize what it means for me to be sitting in this house?" will echo in the mind of the reader forever. When he says his house is built with his father's provident fund savings and his mother's bridal jewellery and this is the house where his mother mopped every morning and this is the house they left forever to become refugees, one could sense the inner most conflict and agony experienced by Rahul due to the displacement. "For me, though exile is permanent. Homelessness is permanent. I am uprooted in my mind. ... my idea of home is too perfect". He believes that his idea of home is too perfect to be replicated elsewhere.

Rather than Rahul life in exile gave more psychological blow on his mother. When she is forced to live in the miserable refugee camps and the rented houses, she feels dishonoured. Once when she was offered food by some neighbours in Jammu considering her as a refugee, she began to sob. It was then she started resorting to the refrain "you know our home in Kashmir had twenty two rooms." (Pandita). This emotional breakdown gradually leads to her physical ailment. She started experiencing unexpected falls. Finally doctors diagnosed that she was suffering from a rare neurological disorder called motor neuron disease. She would lose her voice completely and soon she would be immobilized.

This is the story of Rahul Pandita; not his alone but each Kashmiri Pandit's story. They live with a psyche which is shattered by continuous violence and rootlessness. Losing home is not merely a material loss along with it people lose many other things: their way of life, peace of

mind, security, roots, relationship and finally their entire life too. For the Pandits each day in exile brings to mind a plethora of traumatic memories from which no escape is possible.

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